

## Tīrtha: An Epigraphical Analysis of Tīrthayātrā In Early Medieval Central Himalayas

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### ABSTRACT

The central Himalayan region is demarcated by two major rivers namely Tons (Tamas) a tributary of Yamuna on the western side and Kali river in the eastern side. It is surrounded by Nepal in east, Himachal Pradesh in west, Tibet in north and Uttar Pradesh in south. This region had contacts with adjoining areas and far flung areas of the subcontinent thorough the means of pilgrimage. Central Himalayas house some of the major and remotest *tīrthas* which developed in the early medieval period. However the written history of the region started in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE with the Kalsi rock edict of Emperor Aśoka. The presence of edict suggests that this region was the periphery of Mauryan Empire which practiced Buddhism. However in the coming centuries this region came under the subordination of various dynasties including Guptas. It was by the time of Gupta's that brahmanism was promoted in the region. After the fall of Gupta Empire, Katyūri rulers who were feudatories of Guptas rose to power. These indigenous rulers ruled from Kartikeyapura in the Kumaon region from approximately 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century CE and promoted brahmanical religion in the region with full vigour. Thus the period from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 13<sup>th</sup> century CE saw crystallisation of this region as the cradle for intermixing of various cults and traditions as well as emergence of this place as a *tīrthacentre*. Though preference and royal support was always extended to brahmanical cults and the period from c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE to 13<sup>th</sup> century CE saw influx of sages as well as lay people who worshipped the Puranic deities.

**KEYWORDS:** *Tīrtha*, *Tīrthayātrā*, Pilgrims, Pāśupataascetics, Lakulīśaascetics, VīraŚaiva ascetics, Pilgrim record, inscriptions, *Mahābhārata*, *Purāṇas*, Katyūri rulers.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The central Himalaya known as *Himavat*, *Himādri*, and *Himālaya* in the epic-puranic texts is often seen as an isolated entity which was not easily accessible. However, the Puranic texts and epigraphical records mention various *tīrthas* spread across the region. The Puranic texts connected the natural features of this region like rivers, hill tops, caves, forests and natural springs with deities and religious cults. Deities like Śiva and Pārvatī with the help of myths were associated with hills, forests and ponds like Kedārnātha, Dārukavana, Gaurīparvata,

Gaurīkuṇḍa and so on. Thus, by creation of hierophany by individual or community places like Kedārnātha, Badrīnātha, Jāgeśvara, Devprayāga etc. were provided with cosmic attributes and symbolic meaning. Through repetition of the myths at various sites, construction of temples and performance of rituals this region was deemed as salvation giving sacred centre i.e. *tīrtha* where anyone could attain *mokṣa* (liberation). These *tīrtha* thus attracted many pilgrims who undertook *tīrthayātrā* and reached there. These pilgrims left behind some epigraphical records of their visit which provides an insight into the contacts of central Himalayas with other parts of the subcontinent by the means of *tīrthayātrā* (pilgrimage). Therefore it is important to point out at the outset that a *tīrtha* is the sacred centre and *tīrthayātrā* is pilgrimage i.e. a journey undertaken by a devotee to the sacred place.

The present paper will examine the *tīrthayātrā* taken up by individual or group of pilgrims to the *tīrtha* in this region. For this task inscriptional evidences will be used. An attempt will be made to show that this region saw influx of pilgrims from the length and breadth of the subcontinent. In the beginning of the paper it should be pointed out that inscriptions from this region are not detailed and consists of few lines and at times only names of the pilgrims. Thus with such sources the range of study becomes restricted and cannot include the political or economic motivation behind such extensive travel. The following section will define *tīrthas* typology and then elaborate on the pilgrim records.

## 2. DEFINITION OF TĪRTHA

The meaning of the term *tīrtha* has been described by various scholars. On the basis of Ṛgveda S. G Kantawala describes the word *tīrtha*, as coming from the root *tr* which means 'a locality or spot or expanse of water which gives rise to the accumulation of merit (righteousness)'.<sup>1</sup> Diana L. Eck describes *tīrthas* as 'fords' or 'crossings'.<sup>2</sup> It is maintained that one who visits a *Tīrtha* is purified of his sins and the merit of pilgrimage is better than the merit obtained by performing sacrifice. The act of pilgrimage is like circumambulation or *Pradakṣiṇā* of the 'sacred landscape' and this circumambulation is permanent part of pilgrimage which is done in clockwise direction.<sup>3</sup>

Agehananda Bharti while looking back to the tradition of pilgrimage traces that the connotation of the word *tīrthayātrā* which changed from Vedic to post Vedic period (Puranic period). He states that the word *Yātrā* in Vedic times did not indicate pilgrimage. However, this word *Yātrā* was used in the texts like Yāska's *Nirukta* (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE text) but its meaning was in the sense of travelling and not specifically as pilgrimage. He observes that the merit of travelling was also illustrated in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* in the dialogue between Indra and Hariścandra. Indra says to the king that, "There is no happiness for the person who does not travel; living amongst men, even the best man frequently becomes a sinner; for Indra is the traveler's friend. Hence, travel!"<sup>4</sup> Bharti opines that it is during Puranic period *Yātrā* became synonymous with *tīrthayātrā* i.e. pilgrimage and in the hierarchy of ritual

observance *tīrthayātrā* was fourth in importance. The first three were *Tapasyā* (austerities which include fasting), *dānam* (charity) and last being *śuddhi* (physical and mental purity).<sup>5</sup> In Puranic period the term pilgrimage was also used in metaphorical sense for describing the movement of the soul between two worlds.<sup>6</sup>

Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj postulates that English expression 'pilgrimage' used to describe *tīrthayātrā* do not justify the philosophical concept attached with the term. Thus by keeping in mind the limitation of the English term, 'pilgrimage' it is used as there is no other term which could possibly imply the sense of *tīrthayātrā*. Bhardwaj states that *tīrth* not only means the physical journey to the holy place but it also implies mental and moral discipline.<sup>7</sup> David L. Carmichael also suggests that the word 'sacred' when used in context of a place or thing it instantly defines the restrictions and prohibitions on human behavior. He further states that any sacred object is placed away from everyday life hence, a distinction is maintained between sacred and profane.<sup>8</sup>

Bhardwaj and Vijay Nath also attest that the practice of pilgrimage gained popularity in post-Vedic period and this practice was glorified in the *Purāṇas*. Vijay Nath elaborates that there was a noticeable shift from 'Brahmanism' to Puranic 'Hinduism' but this shift was not sudden and the stages were consecutive to each other retaining the essence of the past traditions. She postulates that 'Brahmanism' represented the single religious outlook mainly drawing from the Vedas but the Puranic 'Hinduism' is a 'multiplex-belief system' that grew and absorbed the 'polaristic religious ideas and cultic traditions'. This transition was a gradual process of growth which was an outcome of changing social, political and economic conditions.<sup>9</sup>

This change was reflected in the 'ritual formations where making *dāna*, observing *vrata* and *japa*, visiting *tīrthas*, performing *pūja* and listening to recitation of religious texts such as *Purāṇas*' was favoured and recommended for all members of the *varṇa* system including the *śūdras* and women.<sup>10</sup> Thus Vijay Nath describes *Purāṇas* as "scriptures for the common people" whose composition started from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE onwards. The *Purāṇas* have references and instructions related to pilgrimage, they also refer to various pilgrimage centres which are followed by *phalaśrutī*. i.e. the account of the merit which is accumulated by visiting the sacred places.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. TYPES OF TĪRTHAS

The Puranic literature classifies *tīrthas* into four categories: i) *devatīrthas* which were created by god, ii) *āsura* associated with demon; it is a place where the deity killed the demon, iii) *ārṣa* associated with sages, and iv) *mānuṣatīrthas* were created by or associated with the kings.<sup>12</sup> This division according to Bhardwaj was to define the hierarchy among various sacred places. The *Daivatīrthas* were considered to be "the most sacred" and the *Mānuṣatīrthas* being the last in sanctity.<sup>13</sup> In the central Himalayan region all four categories of *tīrthas* exist but it is difficult to clearly demarcate them into one category.

## 3.1 BADRINATHA

Badrinatha is one of the site that falls in both *deva* and *ārṣa* category. The *Mahābhārata* in the *Tīrthayātrā Parva* while describing the journey of Pāṇḍavas with Draupadīto *Badrikāśrama* mentions this place as a hermitage which is inhabited by great sages like Nara and Nārāyaṇa.<sup>14</sup> Similar to these sages other ascetics are said to have inhabited the place who survived on fruits and roots and practiced *Vānaprasth* way of life.<sup>15</sup>

The *Skand Purāṇa* refers to *Badrikāśrama* as an ‘excellent *tīrtha*’ and states that this region was known by different names in different *Yugas* and in *Kaliyuga* it is known by the name *Badrikāśrama*. In this site the deity manifested himself in ‘the nature of the place’ hence assigning symbolic meaning to everything associated with this site, be it *taptakunda* (the hot water spring) or *tapovana* (the penance grove). It is furthered that *Mahāpātakas* (great sins) and *Atipātakas* (incest) becomes pure in this site.<sup>16</sup>

This site became the focal point of pilgrimage not only because it was repeatedly mentioned in the narratives and texts but because it enjoyed royal patronage extended by the three Katyūrī rulers i.e. Lalitaśuradeva, Padmaṭadeva and Subhikṣarājadeva. *Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paramēśvara Lalitaśuradeva* has been dated 9<sup>th</sup> century CE and credited for making donation of three villages one in the district of Gorunnaśārī and two in the district of *Palibhūtika*, to the Nārāyaṇa temple.<sup>17</sup> Another king *Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paramēśvara Padmaṭadeva* dated around first half of 10<sup>th</sup> century CE granted four *pallikās* (habitations), fifteen *bhāgas* (allotments of land), *Togalā-vṛtti* (a piece of land which might have been maintained by *Togalā*), *Karmānta-sthalikā* (barn) and a piece of land that measured one *Droṇavāpa*, to *Badrikāśramabhaṭṭāraka*.<sup>18</sup> The land grants ordered by Padmaṭadeva were situated in *Drumatī*.<sup>19</sup> In the second quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> century CE third Katyūrī ruler *Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paramēśvara Subhikṣarājadeva* made grants of many pieces of land which were part of the district of *Ṭaṅgaṇāpura* and *Antaraṅga* in favour of *Nārāyaṇa*, *Durgā* and *Brahmeśvarabhaṭṭāraka*.<sup>20</sup> These grants were issued by the rulers for the purpose of attaining personal salvation as well as to gain legitimacy for their rule.

Their donative inscriptions mentioned that they not only granted land but made provisions for regular maintenance of the temple, by providing for flowers, incense, lights, repair of the broken parts, maintenance of servants and attendants attached to the temple.<sup>21</sup> They made provisions for the repair and maintenance of the temples. These plates were held by the donee as the deeds. The land donated to these temples was rent and tax free and the concluding lines of the inscription stated that the grant should not be disturbed.<sup>22</sup> Therefore it can be suggested that grants in favour of *Badrikāśrama* were not a one-time event.

## 3.2 BAGESHWAR

Apart from the above mentioned inscriptions which were found at Pandukeshwar another inscription which can be dated around the end of 7<sup>th</sup> century CE mentioned earlier Katyūrī rulers and it was found at PothiKatiyurin Bageshvar. This Bageshvar inscription mentions eight kings who belong to two different *vamśa*(family) of BasantanaDeva and Nimbara Deva respectively. However, each lineage called themselves as Katyūrī.<sup>23</sup>This stone inscription mentions three grants made by three rulers namely BasantanaDeva, Tribhuvanarājadeva and Adhidhaja. These rulers used the title *ParamabhaṭṭārakaMahārājādhirājaParamēśvara* and made donation to the deity Vyāghreśvara Deva (the lord of tiger) which is one of the local epithets for Śiva.<sup>24</sup>The Bageshvar temple which lies in the proximity of Saryu river derives its name from its presiding deity i.e. Vyāghreśvara Deva whose corrupt name is Bageśvara Deva. The myth associated with the place mentions Bageshvar as the place where Śiva and Pārvatī resided after their marriage. Śiva attained the form of Vyāghra (tiger) at this place in order to pay a visit to R̥ṣiMārkaṇḍeya.<sup>25</sup>

The last king of Bageshvar inscription is Bhūdeva who issued this inscription and included the genealogy of kings who ruled prior to him. Bhūdeva is dated third or fourth quarter of ninth century CE.<sup>26</sup> He is eulogised as the *paramBuddha śravaṇaripu* which can be translated as greatest enemy of Buddha/Buddhist *śravaṇa*.<sup>27</sup>It can be noticed that the word *śravaṇa* is the misspelling of *śramaṇa* where the consonant *vai* is used for *ma*. Maheshwar P Joshi notes the local linguistic influences on the Pali and Sanskrit inscriptions and postulates that this practice of using or replacing one consonant with other in the central Himalayan region was common and had continued throughout centuries. He uses Kalsi rock edict situated at Dehradun as one of the source for his study of local elements in the earliest written evidence from the region. The Kalsi rock edict is a set of 14 rock edicts of Aśoka issued in the second or third quarters of the third century BCE. Joshi notes that *s* is frequently used to substitute *shor ś* and the alternative consonant of the same *varga*(group)of letters can also be noticed in the edict. In this edict various consonants were excluded, the consonant *r* is absent and it is replaced with *l* for instance *rājā* is written as *lājā*. The consonant *ṇ* is also absent and words such as *prāṇa* and *bramaṇa* are written as *pāna* and *bambhana*. The 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Kuṇḍa coins of Amoghabhūti type continued the practice of interchanging and excluding one consonant with other which fell in the same *varga* for instance in this type of coin *Rājñā* was written as *Rāñā* thus excluding *j* for *ñ*; *g* was used for *gh* in the legend of Almora type coin which read *m-g-bh-t-sa*. The corrupt Sanskrit of Katyūrī inscriptions also suggest that by 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century CE the *Pahārī* local dialect started appearing in the official records of the rulers and by 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century CE it started taking the shape of prototype of *Pahārī* language. This language was noticed by Joshi in inscriptions from Gopeshwar stone slab inscription in Garhwal and DwarhatŚeshasāyīViṣṇu image inscription from Kumaon (written in Nagar characters). Joshi notes that these linguistic uses can still be noticed in the *Garhwali* and *Kumaoni* dialects where *rākshasais* called *rāgasa*, *khālaas khāva* and so on.<sup>28</sup>

Now coming back to the title attained by Bhūdeva as the *param Buddha śravaṇaripuīt* can be pointed out with certainty that he promulgated the brahmanical cult in the region and was not tolerant of the Buddhist monks who had their monasteries in the region. Chinese pilgrim like XuanZang who visited India in 7<sup>th</sup> century CE in his work mentioned the presence of Buddhist monasteries in central Himalayan region. He noted that 5 Buddhist monasteries were situated in the region of *P'o-lo-ki-moor* Brahmapura and two Hinayanist Buddhist monasteries with above 100 monks in the as *Ku-p'i-sang-naor* Govisana region were present.<sup>29</sup> Thus the Katyūrī rulers who made donation to brahmanical temples and promoted Puranic religion slowly and steadily ousted the presence of heterodox cult and its followers from the region.

### 3.3 KEDARNATHA

Kedāranāthabecame popular due to its close proximity with *Badrikāśrama* it's eulogies in the Puranic texts and influx of pilgrim in that region. The temple of Kedāranātha became the centre of of pilgrimage in local as well as pan-Indian context. This temple falls in the *choṭācārdhām* group which is local pilgrimage circuit and is the remotest *tīrtha* of the region. Since the temple of Kedāranātha is connected to the local circuit of pilgrimage it is not limited to a single temple but covers the larger geographical area which consists of other sacred sites as well. *SkandaPurāṇa* states that at a distance of *Badrikāśrama* the *Liṅga* of Kedāra is present. The *Liṅga* at this site is self-manifested or *svayambhūliṅga*. *SkandaPurāṇa* (600- 900 AD, Hazra dates it to 700 AD) notes that Kedāra-*liṅga* is a rough mound with line in the middle.<sup>30</sup> It is pyramidal in shape and resembles the peak of a mountain. *SkandaPurāṇa* suggests that by performing physical or mental visit to the site a pilgrim gets rid of his sin and preferred time of pilgrimage is between *Grīṣma* (summer) and *Vasanta* (spring).<sup>31</sup>

Hence the presence of self-manifested *liṅga* of Śiva increased the sacredness of Kedāranātha. The *LiṅgaPurāṇa* suggests that the area within the radius of half a *krośa* (mile) from the Śivaliṅga becomes Śivakṣetra.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Kedāranātha is a Śivakṣetra where *svayambhūliṅga* is manifested. Since Kedāra is not easily accessible the virtue of mental pilgrimage is also proposed as a form of *tīrtha* and its virtue is equal to the penance performed in other *tīrthas*. The *LiṅgaPurāṇa* mentions that anyone who casts his life in Kedāra attains emancipation or absorption into Śiva.<sup>33</sup> Thus at the temple of Kedāra is a cliff called *Bhairab-Jhāmp* where some devotees committed and still commit suicide.<sup>34</sup> The *KūrmaPurāṇa* in the list of *śrāddha* stated that ceremony of *śrāddha* at Kedāra gave infinite merit.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that to around 550-800 CE which is the time period of *KūrmaPurāṇa* the site of Kedāra was becoming organised as a *tīrtha*.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the Puranic records from 6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> century onwards mentioned that the Kedāra as a *tīrtha* and it is praised in *Purāṇas* like *KūrmaPurāṇa*, *LiṅgaPurāṇa*, *MatsyaPurāṇa*, *ŚivaPurāṇa* and *SkandaPurāṇa*. The *SkandaPurāṇa* expounds the story of Pāśupata saint Vaśiṣṭha who made 61 pilgrimages to Kedāra and on his 62<sup>nd</sup> visit he asked Kedāra to station himself in Kāśī.<sup>37</sup> Śiva granted him this boon and the sub-*tīrtha* in Kāśī was

established. 11<sup>th</sup> century CE Kedāra secured its ground as a major Śaivatīrtha. Apart from these literary evidences the inscriptional records also mention Kedāra as the tīrtha. The epigraphic evidence of the visit of Pāśupata saint comes from the 13<sup>th</sup> century CintraInscription belonging to the reign of Sarangadeva (Somnath). This inscription records that Tripurāntaka the third teacher of Gārygya branch of the Lakulīśa-Pāśupatas from Kārohana in central Gujarat started his pilgrimage by visiting the Kedāra and ‘worshipped Śiva and then visited places like Prayāga, Tryambaka i.e. Trimbak near Nasik, Rāmeśvara and Prabhāsa regions.<sup>38</sup> Thus the visit of a Pāśupata saint to Kedāra suggests that Pāśupata cult had its hold in the region during 13<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Kedāra finds mention in the list of merit giving tīrthain the inscriptions of Cālukya king Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paramēśvara Someśvara I (Trailokyamalla) dated 1055 CE and his son Vikramāditya VI (Tribhuvanamalla) dated 1097 CE. These inscriptions come from Karnataka which pay homage to Kedāra.<sup>39</sup> Further K. A. N. Shastri observes that during 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. Vīraśaivism developed in Karnataka and 5 monastic centres were established by the Vīraśaiva saints who claimed to their origins from five heads of Śiva. These centres were located in Kedāranātha, Śrīsaila, Bālehalli, Ujjaini and Benaras.<sup>40</sup> B.N. Datar also notes that the head priest of Kedāra was pinched from the Vīraśaiva or Liṅgāyata community.<sup>41</sup> Thus Kedāranātha being an important Vīraśaiva monastery gained popularity among the Vīraśaivas. Hence it was mentioned in the inscriptions of the rulers of Karnataka.

The 1163CE epigraph of Amareśvara temple at Māndhātā in Madhya Pradesh records the Halāyudhastotra which records Kedāra as a Guhyaliṅga (place of liberation) and as one of the 5 jyotirlingas. These 5 jyotirlingas are located at Avimukta (Benaras), Kedāra, Omkāra, Amara and Mahākāla (Ujjaini).<sup>42</sup> The Koṭirudrasaṁhita of Śiva Purāṇa describes the origin myth of Kedārajyotirlinga. It states that the two sages named Nara and Nārāyaṇa performed penance in the mountains where modern Badrinātha is situated. Śiva upon seeing their penance was pleased with them and asked them to choose a boon. The sages asked the deity to stay at Kedāra forever in the form of ajyotirlinga. Thus Śiva agreed to their wish and stationed himself at Kedāra thus being called Kedāreśvara.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the jyotirlinga of Kedāra, Śiva Purāṇa lists twelve jyotirlingas, namely Somanāth in Saurāṣṭra, Mallikārijuna in Śrīsaila, Mahākāla in Ujjainī, Amareśvara in Omkāra Māndhātā, Bhīmaśaṅkara in Dākinī, Viśveśvara in Vārāṇasī, Tryambaka on Gautamī river bank, Vaidyanātha funeral ground, Nāgeśa in the forest of Dārūkā and Rāmeśvara in the Setubandha Ghuśmeśvara temple.<sup>44</sup> Thus it can be inferred that myths around jyotirlinga and stationing of Śiva at certain place/s were developed to unify and absorb the new regional sites which gained prominence in early medieval period after they were exposed to Puranic religion which in turn increased the inflow of pilgrims to this region.

#### 4. PURPOSE OF TĪRTHAYĀTRĀ

Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century CE Kedārakhaṇḍa (central Himalaya or modern Uttarakhand) has remained a place which attracted pilgrims.<sup>45</sup> The records of the pilgrims who visited the region are sparse as the inscriptions are not in continuous fashion and the *pothis* and *bahis* are not 'freely available'. B.N Goswamy uses the English term 'pilgrim's registers' for *pothis* and *bahis*.<sup>46</sup> However one can still glimpse in the influx of pilgrims with the limited sources. The pilgrimage to this region was taken up by individuals or by groups. There were broadly two motives behind the pilgrimage; first was to fulfill a *sukhnā* (vow) committed to a deity and second, to earn religious merit.<sup>47</sup> The other reasons were spiritual purification, *darśana* (seeing) of the sacred place and for being in the presence of hermits and sages.<sup>48</sup> Pilgrimage to Himalayan region was often carried out in order to regulate one's senses (*indriyadaman*) in the lap of nature. This type of pilgrimage demanded severe austerity long bare footed journeys, fasts etc. with such measures the spiritual *sādhanā* progressed. Thus pilgrimage to Himalayas had psychophysical aspect attached to it. In addition to this pilgrimage was prescribed not only for sages and renunciators but also for householders, women and *śūdras*.<sup>49</sup>

The *Mahābhārata* in *Mahaprasthanika Parva* (17<sup>th</sup> book) refers to Himavat in connection with the *yātrā* undertaken by Pāṇḍavas along with Draupadi and a dog. It is stated that Pāṇḍavas retired to Himalayas for the purpose of earning merit after installing Prakshita as the king of Hastinapur.<sup>50</sup> Kanti Prasad Nautiyal observes that such references in *Mahābhārata* prove that the Himalayan region attained sanctity as a sacred place and it was frequented by people for the purpose of *yātrā*.<sup>51</sup> The *Mahābhārata* further describes the virtue of *tīrthas* and states that one who visits the sacred hermitage and *tīrthas* in the mountains achieves the merit of *Aśvamedha* and *Vājpayas* sacrifice and all his sins are destroyed there.<sup>52</sup>

## 4.1 PILGRIM RECORD

The pilgrim records are the recorded or inscribed names of the pilgrims who visited the *tīrthas*. The pilgrims on their visit engraved their names and sometimes purpose of visit on the rocks or temple walls. These inscriptions were not long; they consisted of one line or some had 3 to 4 lines. The title *Śrī* was attached to the name of any person who might have presided a ritual or made *dāna*.<sup>53</sup> Such inscriptions have been reported from three sites namely Devaprayāga, Kasārdevī and Jageshwar. These inscriptions will be discussed in the following sections:

**Devaprayāga-** The inscription from Devaprayāga dated between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century CE contains 40 inscriptions out of which only nineteen short inscriptions are discussed by B. Ch. Chhabra. He notes that most of the names mentioned are of the Gupta period and a closer look at the names reflects on the religious inclination of their bearers.<sup>54</sup> Names such as '*Śrī-Rudravarm[m]aṇaḥ*'<sup>55</sup> and '*Rudravṛddhiḥ*'<sup>56</sup> suggest that persons with such names were followers of Śaivism. Hence it can be concluded that Śaivism had its impact in the region since early centuries of Christian era.

**Kasārdevī** - The Kasārdevī(Almora)inscription on a boulder is dated around the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE and mentions that a hermit named Rudraka came from Telugu-Kannada speaking region.<sup>57</sup> A closer look at the inscription suggests that probably a temple was established by Rudraka for *Rudreśvara*.<sup>58</sup> Sircar postulates that he might have belonged to the earlier branch of Vīrāśaivasaints who travelled to Himalaya and probably lived there in hermitage.<sup>59</sup> The ‘*desire to live in pure and holy cosmos*’ attracted many such hermits to the region.<sup>60</sup>

**Jageshwar**-The inscriptions at Jageshwar from the *Mṛityuñjaya* temple dated between 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. describe *Pakṣapāta* or Proxy pilgrimage. The word *pakṣapāta*, which means ‘one who works on behalf of someone else,’ was used in inscription numbers 1, 2 and 3.<sup>61</sup> It highlights that the people who were unable to visit a holy place sent others on pilgrimage at their expense. They believed that the merit of pilgrimage would be shared. Inscription number 1 from the *Mṛityuñjaya* temple states that Balavarman who came from *Pūrvadeśa* which Sircar identifies with Bengal was authorised to represent four other people namely Sadārṇava, Gandhahastin, Vasantalila and Harshvardhana. In inscription number 2 also from *Mṛityuñjaya* temple mentions Vaṭeśvara who also hailed from *Pūrvadeśa* and performed pilgrimage on behalf of 8 people namely Pēṭṭa, Anartha, Lava, Kracha, Bhaṇṇa, Vidyādhara, Churga and Vajrāha. The third inscription mentions Jejjāta also from *Pūrvadeśa* and performed pilgrimage for 5 people namely Prakāṭa-Bhaṇṇa, Abhimāna-Chaṅga, Khaḍga, Anartha and Arjjana/ Arjuna. The inclination to document their visits to Jageshwar might have been raised as they traveled a long distance and were representing other people. Thus by writing the names they ascertained that merit of *dāna* and their presence was recorded for perpetuity. DC Sircar thus makes an assumption that Balavarman, Vaṭeśvara and Jejjāta since coming from same region would have visited Jageshwar together.<sup>62</sup>

Name of Śaiva ascetic like, Śrī Vijendri mahāyogi, has also been mentioned in the inscription from *Mṛityuñjaya* temple (number 16) and from minor shrine number 9 at Jageshwar. The title of respect, i.e. *bhaṭṭāraka* is attached with the name of the ascetic, which suggests that the person was venerable.<sup>63</sup> Nachiket Chanchani postulates that the presence of title like *bhaṭṭāraka* for ascetics like Vijendri suggest that he belonged to the Pāsupatasampradāya (cult or ascetic order).<sup>64</sup> However this argument of Chanchani needs further evidences as the Katyūrī inscriptions from Pandukeshwar also mention *Badarikāśrama* as *bhaṭṭāraka* and the site of *Badarikāśrama* has Vaiṣṇava inclination.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Therefore from the above discussion it can be surmised that the central Himalayan region was frequented by individuals and groups from as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century CE who travelled from distant lands like Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Telugu-Kannad region. One of the inscriptions from Himachal Pradesh dated to 16<sup>th</sup> century CE records the visit of Pratāpasimha and donations made by him. This epigraph was issued in the reign of King

Gaṇeśavarmanand described the *tīrtha* taken up by his son Pratāpasimha to the temple of Badrinath and Kedarnath. Pratāpasimha made donations to the temple of Badrinath and at Kedarnath and gifted a village to Gaṇeśācharya. The land grant was made on the occasion of Kumbha festival.<sup>65</sup> Thus the pilgrims continued to visit the sacred sites of central Himalayas from different regions and in considerable amount by early medieval as well as medieval period. As a result of this sites like Badrinath and Kedarnath emerged as major pilgrim centers which were eulogised in *Puāṇas*. The pain and effort that the pilgrim went through to reach the site and the distance which they travelled also indicated the popularity of the sacredness of the *tīrtha* which can be seen from the sites like Devaprayāga, Kasārdevī and Jageshwar.

Therefore with the help of epigraphical sources one can see the diversity in the social background of the pilgrims who visited the central Himalayan *tīrthas*. The pilgrims who came to this region were laymen, ascetics and princes who came from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, this region attracted and saw major influx of Pāśupata, Lakulīśa, and VīraŚaiva ascetics which indicates that there was a growing base of Śaivism in the region. This tradition of *tīrthayātrā* in this region also suggests the level of interaction which central Himalaya had with adjoining and distant areas. This interaction added to the tradition and technological knowledge of the region. These interactions and intermingling can be seen from the temple architecture at the sites like Dwarahat, Badrinath and Jageshwar.

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