INTRODUCTION

An attempt is made in this thesis to study the history of the Śaiva and Vīrāsaiva mathas in Karnataka. The author of this study himself is a head of a Vīrāsaiva matha. He is conversant with the various rites and customs followed in his and other Vīrāsaiva mathas. But being a student of history, it was his desire to find out how these mathas came to occupy their present position. Exigencies of time and space led him to confine his attention to the mathas in Karnataka and in particular to Vīrāsaiva mathas. But the origin of the Vīrāsaiva mathas cannot be understood except in relation to the other Śaiva mathas like the Kālāmukha mathas which were their precursors. The matha movement in Karnataka started with Śankara in Śringeri and the Śringeri matha is one of the few mathas whose history can be traced over the ages with a fullness which is not possible with regard to other mathas. Further, various developments which took place in the Śringeri matha, also took place in the other mathas in later times. For these reasons special attention had to...
be bestowed on this Sringeri matha, inspite of the fact that it is an Advaita matha i.e., one belonging to both the Saiva and Vaishnava orders. The arrangement of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter I deals with the development of the monastic organisation from the earliest period. Herein, an attempt is made to study how the Jaina and Buddhist monasteries followed the early Hindu institutions and in turn became models for later Hindu monasteries.

Chapter II deals with the history of Saivism and its branches with special reference to the Kālāmukhas. How those Saiva schools influenced later Saiva sects in general and Vīra saivism in particular is also shown. A comparative study of the Golaki matha and the Kōdiya matha is made. The influence of these on the mathas in the subsequent periods is discussed.

Chapter III gives a comprehensive account of the Sringeri matha. It begins with a brief sketch of the source material. Then the origin of the Sringeri matha and the life and works of its founder Sankara are
described. Then follows its further history, under Vijayanagara, Keladi, Mysore and other rulers of Karnataka. Lastly, an assessment of its contribution to culture is made.

Chapter IV deals with the history of the Virasaiva mathas. After a brief survey of the sources, the various types of the Virasaiva mathas are described. Then follows an account of their functions and administrative arrangements. An assessment of their contribution to culture is also made. Lastly, the present position of the Virasaiva mathas is dealt with.

Chapter V deals with various topics concerning the mathas through the ages. These include the purpose of instituting the mathas and locating them in particular places, the qualifications of the pontiffs, sources of income, property rights, gradation and administration of the mathas, corporate life in the mathas and religious rites and customs.