

CC-5: HISTORY OF INDIA (CE 750-1206)

V. RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS:

A. JAINISM

Sixth century BCE was a period of great religious upheaval. Great teachers Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Iran, and Parmenides in Greece questioned the established socio-religious norms and focused more on ethical and moral values. In India the scenario was no different. India witnessed the growth of two great alternative religions: **Buddhism** and **Jainism**. These religions emphasised that true happiness does not lie in material prosperity or performance of rituals, but in non-violence, charity, frugality, and good social conduct.

The Jainas believe that their religious system is the outcome of the teachings of the twenty-four tirthankaras, all Kshatriyas, coming one after the other. The first twenty-two tirthankaras are so legendary in character that it is difficult to say anything about them. The twenty-third tirthankara, named Parsvanatha, who lived 250 years before Vardhamana Mahavira seems to have been a real historical personage. He was the son of the king Asvasena of Banaras. Parsvanatha seems to have left a well-formed organisation behind him. The next and the last tirthankara was Vardhamana Mahavira.

Tirthankara (ford-finder) is the title of Jain patriarchs of the highest order. They are called so because they show men through their teachings the passage through the dark waters of life. They are also known as Jina, 'conqueror'.

Jaina teachings were first preserved as an oral tradition, but later they were collated and recorded. The sacred books of the Jainas are known as Siddhanta or Agama and these earliest texts are in an eastern dialect of Prakrit known as Ardh-Magadhi.

Lord Mahavira's immediate disciples were known as Ganadharas. All Ganadharas possessed perfect knowledge (keval-gyan). They orally compiled the direct preaching of Mahavira into twelve main text (sutras). These texts are known as Angas and are the oldest religious scriptures and the backbone of the Jaina literature.

THE LIFE OF VARDHAMANA MAHAVIRA

Vardhamana is considered the 24th and the last Tirthankara or Jina. He came to be known as Mahavira and was born in 599 BCE, in a village name Kundagrama near Vaishali. His father Siddhartha was the chief of the Jnatjriya clan and his mother Trishala was the sister of the Lichchavi king Chetaka. Vardhamana married Yashoda and they had a daughter named Priyadarshana. But, Vardhamana Mahavira at the age of 30 years renounced the world in search of truth and became an ascetic. For twelve years he wandered practicing severe austerities, fasting and meditation and at the age of 42 years, it is believed that on the banks of Rijupalika river, outside the town of Jhimrikagrama, he attained Kevalajnana (omniscience or infinite knowledge). Mahavira passed away at the age of 72 years in 527 BCE and became a siddha (fully liberated). This incidence took place at Pavapuri near Patna. Mahavira founded Jain Samgha at Pavapuri to propagate his faith.

The Jaina doctrine is much older than the Buddhist one, but it is difficult to say precisely how old it is. The Buddha and Mahavira were contemporaries and there are some similarities between their teachings, for instance in their rejection of the authority of the Veda, their non-theistic doctrine, emphasis on renunciation and human effort as a means of attaining salvation, and establishment of a monastic order for men and women. However, there are also several marked differences in their philosophical ideas.

THE JAINA DISCIPLINE

Jainas claim that Rishabhadev was the founder of the faith notwithstanding, it is the teachings of Mahavira that are popularly known as Jainism. The main teachings of Mahavira include that he believed in dualistic philosophy and held that matter and soul are the only two existing elements. The former is perishable, while the latter eternal and evolutionary. According to him, on account of karma, the soul is in a state of bondage created by passions and desires collected through several previous births. It is by means of continued efforts through several lives that the karmic forces binding the soul can be counteracted and the soul itself is rendered passionless. The disintegration of the karmic forces constitutes the final liberation of the soul. Side by side with this decay of the karmas the intrinsic qualities of the soul shines in full luminosity which represents final liberation and then the soul becomes paramatman.

According to Mahavira, Nirvana or Salvation is getting rid of the bondage of worldly desires. To renounce the world and become an ascetic is a step in that

direction. It must be followed by observance of 'Tri-Ratnas'. The Triratna (three gems) of Jainism consists of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. There are five great vows (panch-mahavrata) for monks and nuns- not to injure any living being (ahimsa); not to utter any falsehood (satya/sunrita); not to take what is not given, i.e., not to steal (asteya); to lead a celibate life (brahmacharya); and non-possession, to call nothing one's own (aparigraha). The aim of these vows is to bring about inner purification. Ahimsa is central to Jainism, and it is the first vow for renunciants as well as for the laity.

THE JAINA COUNCILS

The first Jaina council was held at Pataliputra under the chairmanship of Sthulabahu in the beginning of the 3rd century BCE and resulted in the compilation of the twelve Angas to replace the lost fourteen Purvas. The second council was held at Valabhi in the fifth century CE under the leadership of Devardhi Kshamasramana.

At some point in its early history, perhaps by 300 CE the Jain Sangha came to be divided into two sects-the Digambara (sky-clad) and the Shvetambara (white-clad) sects.

THE SPREAD AND DEVELOPMENT OF JAINISM

Jainism gradually spread to western India where Brahmanical religion was weak. The early Jainas adopted Prakrit language of the common people to preach their doctrines. This greatly helped in widening the follower base of Jainism. With the support of kings who greatly patronised Jainism like Chandragupta Maurya who himself became a Jain ascetic and spent his last years in Karnataka, it became popular in south India too. During the 2nd century BCE king Kharavela of Kalinga professed Jainism, and became its illustrious and renowned patron by setting up Jaina images himself.

In the Kushana period, Jainism flourished well at Mathura and was dominant in eastern India during the time of Harsha. During the early centuries CE, Mathura in the north and Sravana Belgola in the south were great centres of Jaina activities as is evident by large number of inscriptions, images and monuments discovered at both the places.

In the fifth century CE many royal dynasties of the south, such as the Gangas, Kadambas, the Chalukyas and the Rastrakutas patronised Jainism. Some of the

Rashtrakuta kings of Manyakheta showed a special leaning towards Jainism. They gave a great encouragement towards Jaina art and literature.

About the year 1100 CE Jainism gained great ascendancy in Gujarat. There the Chalukya king Jayasimha, the popular hero of the Gujarat legend and the ruler of Anhilwada and his successor Kumarapala were great patrons of Jainism. They openly professed Jainism and encouraged literary and temple-building activities of the Jainas in Gujarat.

JAINISM DURING THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The early medieval period was the time of Digambara Jainism's greatest flowering. The Digambaras gained the patronage of prominent monarchs of three major dynasties in the early medieval period—the Gangas in Karnataka (3rd–11th century); the Rashtrakutas, whose kingdom was just north of the Ganga realm (8th–12th century); and the Hoysalas in Karnataka (11th–14th century). Digambara monks are reputed to have engineered the succession of the Ganga and the Hoysala dynasties, thus stabilizing uncertain political situations and guaranteeing Jain political protection and support. In the 10th century the Ganga general Chamundaraya oversaw the creation of a colossal statue of Bahubali (locally called Gommateshvara; son of Rishabhanatha, the first Tirthankara) at Sravana Belogola.

The Shvetambaras were no less productive than their Digambara contemporaries in the amount and variety of literature they produced during this period. But the Shvetambaras in the north were less prominently embroiled in dynastic politics than their southern counterparts.

Jainism held its sway over western India and Karnataka for a very long period of time. Jainism was also popular in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh. Xuan Zang's account suggest that the Digambara sect was more widespread than the Swetambara sect. Jaina establishments received royal patronage from the Chapas of Gujarat and the Paramara kings. A large number of Jaina works were written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabrahmsa, Kannada and Tamil during this period. The great Jaina philosophers of the time included Akalanka, Haribhadra, and Vidyananda.

Jaina shrines of the early medieval period were located at various places in modern Uttar Pradesh including Deogarh and Mathura. The Digambaras were active in Samatata and Pundravardhana in Bengal. Several places of Jaina

pilgrimages were located in Rajasthan including at Chittor. The Dilwara temples of Mount Abu are among the most spectacular temples of this period. The Jaina centres in Gujarat included Bhriukachchha, Girnar, and Valabhi, which was famous for its temple of Chandraprabha and a temple dedicated to Mahavira. In central India, Jaina establishments existed at a Sonagiri and Khajuraho. In western India there were well-established Jaina centres at Nasik and Pratihana. There are Jaina caves at Ellora. In Orissa, the Jaina establishments at Udayagin and Khandagiri continued to flourish in the early medieval period.

Jainism had a strong presence in the Karnataka area. The Aihole inscription of Pulakeshin II begins with an invocation to Jinendra (lord of the jinas) and tells us that the poet Ravikirti was responsible for the building of the temple in whose wall the inscription is embedded. Jaina temples are located at Shravana Belagola, Koppana, and Halebid. Jaina inscriptions have also been found in various parts of Andhra Pradesh. Donative inscriptions belonging to the reigns of Pallava, Chola, and Pandya kings have been found in various parts of Tamil Nadu, and they contain the names of various Jaina saints. One who is mentioned frequently is Ajjanandi, who seems to have lived in Madurai in the 9th century. Other saints, who were probably his contemporaries or near contemporaries include Indusena and Mallisena. Jaina inscriptions at places such as Shravana Belagola give long lists of pontifical succession stretching over many centuries. By the end of the early medieval period, Jainism retained a significant presence in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Karnataka.

REFERENCE

Singh Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*. Delhi, 2008