

Political and Socio-Economic Milieu of Jainism and the Process of Assimilation

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The political and socio-economic conditions always influence the development of religion and art. As regards Jainism, it received patronage and support from the rulers of North as well as South India.¹ The main rulers of North India who either embraced or at least supported Jainism were Chandragupta Maurya (c. 4th - 3rd century B.C.E. - at least towards the last years of his life he became Jaina recluse), Samprati (3rd century B.C.E. - Mauryan ruler), Khāravela of Kaliṅga (Orissa - known through Hāthīgumphā inscription of about 1st century B.C.E. The Hāthīgumphā inscription says that Khāravela professed Jainism and got excavated Jaina caves and set up Jaina images and memorials to monks. The earliest reference of Jina image as "Kaliṅga Jina" is found in Hāthīgumphā inscription, which was brought back by Khāravela from Nandarāja), Nāgabhaṭa IInd of the Pratihāra dynasty (9th century C.E., patronized Jaina *Ācārya* Bappabhaṭṭi Sūri. The Mahāvīra temple at Osiāñ is supposed to have been built during the early period of Nāgabhaṭa IInd) and Kumārapāla Caulukya (12th century C.E. - he patronized great Śvetāmbara *Jainācārya* Hemacandra. Numerous Jaina temples were built during the time of Kumārapāla, the most exquisitely carved of all such temples are at Jalor and Tāraṅgā respectively in Rajasthan and Gujarat). Besides, there are ample references to the ministers and army commanders of some dynasties who accepted Jainism and extended whole hearted support to Jainism. The best and magnificent result of such support could be seen in the form of world famous Delvāḍā Jaina temples (Mt. Ābū, Vimala-vasahī-Ādinātha temple - 11th - 12th century C.E. and Lūṅa-vasahī - Neminātha temple - 13th century C.E. - Śvetāmbara), which were built by the ministers and army commanders of Caulukya rulers Bhīmadeva 1st, Kumārapāla and Vīradhavalā. Their names were Vimala, Prithvipāla, Dhanapāla and Tejapāla. Though in Jainism stern following of non-violence was observed yet it did not prevent the Jainas to take up such important military and administrative responsibilities as *Daṇḍanāyaka*, *Senānāyaka* and ministers, which required involvement in war and hence violence. The Jainas were not only participating in trade

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and commerce but also in governance and military activities with Brahmanical rulers which resulted into the interactions with and borrowings from Brahmanical faith.

As compared to North India, more vigorous support was accorded to Jainism in South India by the rulers of the Gaṅga, Kadamba, Calukaya, Rāṣṭrakūṭa and Hoyasala dynasties. Amoghavarsha of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty (9th century C.E.) and Cāmuṇḍarāya, the general of the Gaṅga king Mārasimha (10 century C.E.), made outstanding contributions to Jainism including Jaina art. The Jaina caves of Ellorā and vestiges at Śravaṇabelgola bear testimony to their enormous support. During the time of Amoghavarsha five Jaina caves (nos. 30 - 34) were excavated in Ellorā (Maharashtra) having colossal Jaina images of the Tīrthaṅkaras, *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* and other divinities, specially those of Pārśvanātha and Bāhubalī. Jinasena and Guṇabhadra composed the great Jaina epic *Mahāpurāṇa* (comprising *Ādīpurāṇa* and *Uttarapurāṇa*) at the time of Amoghavarsha. During the time of Amoghavarsha many Jaina texts were written like - *Praśnottaramālikā* and *Kavirājamārga* (by Amoghavarsha himself), *Gaṇitasāra - saṁgraha* (by Mahāvīrāchārya), *Amoghavṛitti* (by Shāktāyana), *Yaśastilaka* and *Nitivākyāmṛtam* (by Somadeva), *Dhavalā* (by Vīrasena), *Jyadhavalā* (by Jinasena), *Tattvārthasāra* and *Purushārthasidhyupāya* (by Amritchandra) etc. The Hoyasala king Viṣṇuvaradhana (12th century C.E.), originally a disciple of Jaina Ācārya Prabhāchandra, subsequently embraced Vaiṣṇavism, though his queen Shāntalā Devī, continued to be a Jaina. The Vijayanagara rulers and their queens in several cases either accepted or supported Jainism.

As compared to Brahmanical and Buddhist religions and also art, Jainism did enjoy less support of ruling dynasties, but its popularity in the masses and the business community fostered the popularity of Jainism and promoted vigorously its artistic activities in excavating caves, construction of temples and carving of images. The Śvetāmbara and Digambara texts like *Samarāiccakahā*, *Kuvalayamālā*, and several other works refer to vigorous activities of trade and commerce among the follower of Jainism and their extensive travelling from one place to other for this purpose. The affluent Jainas spent their accumulated wealth on the construction of temples and carving of innumerable sculptures of Jaina divinities on the temples. The most prolific Jaina sites of art activity for more than 200 years without any direct royal support are Mathura (U.P. - 150 B.C.E. to 1032 C.E.), Deogarh (Lalitpur, U.P. - 6th to 16th century C.E.), Khajurāho (M.P. - 900 to 12th century C.E.), Osiāñ (Rajasthan - 8th - 9th to 12th century C.E.), Khaṇḍagiri caves (Orissa - 11th - 12th century C.E.), Kumbhāriyā (Gujarat

- 11th - 12th century C.E.) and Delvādā (Rajasthan - 11th to 15th century C.E.).

The inscriptional evidences from Mathura (Kaṅkālī Tīlā), Osiāñ, Delvādā, Khajurāho, Jālor and several other places frequently refer to the *shreṣṭhin*, *sārthavāha*, *gandhika*, *suvarṇakāra*, *vardhakin*, *lauhakarmak*, *nāvika*, *nartaka*, *veśyās* and different *goṣṭhis* of traders who were making significant contributions towards the development of Jainism and thereby Jaina art. The Jaina images from Mathura, belonging of Kuṣāṇa period, bear several inscriptions on pedestal showing that all classes of Kuṣāṇa society was contributing to the carving of Jaina images. From the Kuṣāṇa inscriptions² from Mathura it also appears that foreign population including women enthusiastically took part in Jaina art activity. Another peculiarity of Mathura Jaina inscriptions is that majority of donors have been female worshippers. Even in subsequent centuries we find that women as queens, wives of traders and merchants as lay devotees contributed more to the development of Jainism and Jaina art because the principles of Jainism (*satya*, *ahimsā*, *asteya*, *aparigraha*) suit more to the temperament of women.

Apparently the liberal Jaina social concept of equality without disparity of cast or class encouraged the business class and foreign people to embrace Jainism and contribute to the development of Jainism by different means. This remained the socio-economic feature of subsequent period also. The inscriptions inscribed on pedestals of independent and four-fold (*Pratimā-Sarvatobhadrikā*) Tīrthaṅkara images of Kuṣāṇa period from Mathura reveal the universal concept of the welfare and happiness for all the creatures. The inscriptions record the setting up of the Jaina images for the welfare and happiness of all (सर्वसत्त्वानं हितसुखय)³. This broad concept of universal welfare was inspired by the *Vaidik-Purāṇic* concept, which finds best expression in the following verse :

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु,
मा कश्चित् दुःख भाग्भवेत्॥

This concept also prompted Jainas for liberal assimilation from different cultural streams.

Some of the Jaina sites like - Delvādā (Vimala - vasahī and Lūṇa-vasahī - 11th to 13th century C.E., Mt. Ābū, Rajasthan), Bādāmī and Aihole caves (Karnataka, Cālukya period), Śravaṇabelgoḷa (10th century C.E., by Cāmuṇḍarāya, general of

Rācamalla, Karnataka), Halebiḍ and Lakkundi (Hoyasala period, Karnataka) developed either with the support of the rulers or their officials or queens. Kumārapāla Caulukya, a staunch follower of Jainism caused the construction of several Jaina temples at Tāraṅgā (Ajitnātha temple, Mahesana, Gujarat, 12th century C.E.) and Jālor (Pārśvanātha temple, Rajasthan -12th century C.E.). He was greatly influenced by Jaina Ācārya Hemacandra who wrote several Jaina works (most important of them being - *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, *Dvayāṣrayakāvya* - 12th century C.E.). It is interesting to find in *Kumārapāla-carita* (14th century C.E.) that on the advice of Hemacandra, Kumārapāla visited Śiva temple of Somanātha with Hemacandra and also offered their worship. It is further mentioned that Śiva appeared before Hemacandra and praised the Jaina religion. It is also interesting to note that Hemacandra wrote a text on *Śiva-stutī*. Here comes socio-religious milieu for mutuality which encouraged the process of borrowings of Brahmanical gods and goddesses in Jaina pantheon right from Kuṣāṅga period (1st - 2nd century C.E.). The two Jaina epical works namely *Mahāpurāṇa* and *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* are of enduring importance from this standpoint. These works have several references to the worship of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva and other Brahmanical deities, besides the episodes of Nala-Damayanti, Ahilyā, Bhagīratha and descend of Gaṅgā.

In many other respects too Jainism was strongly influenced by the faiths and practices of Brahmanical religion. Jinas came to be looked upon as gods, and many hymns to Jinas were sung as devotedly and fervently as the Brahmanical ones, often using similar words. Further, Jina is described as the universal spirit who is Śiva, Dhātri, Sugata and Viṣṇu, possibly to accommodate Jainism to the spirit of the age.⁴

The cordial relationship of Jainism and Brahmanical faiths is supported even by some of important texts like *Paūmacariyam* of Vimala Suri (3rd century C.E., Śvetāmbara) and *Ādipurāṇa* of Jinasena (9th century C.E., Digambara), which refer to the worship of first Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhanātha with 1008 appellations. These names distinctly illustrate how liberally different Brahmanical deities were borrowed in this process. Ṛṣabhanātha is euologized by names such as - Svayambhū, Śambhu, Śaṅkara, Trinetra, Tripurāri, Śiva, Iṣāna, Bhūtanātha, Mr̥tyuñjaya, Maheśvara, Mahādeva, Kāmāri, Jagannātha, Lakṣmīpati, Dhātā, Brahmā, Hiranyagarbha, Viśvamūrti, Vidhātā, Pitāmaha, Caturānana, Indra, Mahendra, Sūrya, Āditya, Kubera, Vāmanadeva, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. These names are the best examples of mutual interactions.

Likewise - *Ambikā-Devī-Stutī* and *Ambikā-Tāṭanka* of 12th century C.E. invoke

Jaina *yakṣī* Ambikā with several such names which are related to Brahmanical goddesses. The Jaina texts give such appellations as - Śivā, Śaṅkarī, Mantrarūpā, Gaurī, Gāndhārī, Yakṣeśvari, Kālī, Mahākālī, Aghorā, Bhīmanādā, Caṇḍikā, Caṇḍarūpā, Jayantā-Kumārī, Tripurāṅgī, Mahādevī, Amogha-Vāgīśvarī, Moninī, Dipaṇī, Śoṣaṇī, Trāsini.

The amicable relationship of the Jainas with other faiths could be witnessed not only in terms of assimilation of deities and according them adequately honourable position but also in terms of erection of Brahmanical and Jaina caves and temples side by side at different sites like Mathura, Deogarh, Osiāñ, Aihole, Bādāmī, Ellorā, Halebid, Khajurāho, Gurgi, Bilhari, Gyāraspur and Kumbhāriyā. The iconic-data at these sites bear testimony to the multidimensional mutual influences, which has been the outcome of the socio-religious friendly milieu. The Pārśvanātha Jaina temple (basically dedicated to Jinanātha, the first Tīrthaṅkara Rṣabhanātha) at Khajurāho (c. 950-70 C.E.) containing all around its facade, the figures of *Vaidika-Purāṇic* deities like - Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Rāma, Balarāma, Kāma, Agni, and Kubera alongwith their respective *śaktīs* in *ālīṅgana*-pose, is just one such remarkable example of coherence and mutuality between the two religions. On the otherhand, the Jinas also find representation on some of Brahmanical temples at Khajurāho (Devi Jagadambī and Viśvanātha - 11th century C.E. and also recently excavated Śiva temple of 11th century C.E.), Osiāñ (Sūrya temple -9th century C.E.) and Sriṅgeri (Vidyāshaṅkara temple - 14th century C.E., Karnataka). An inscription of 9th century C.E. in Kannada from Lokapur⁵ (Belgaon, Mysore, Karnataka) makes an interesting reference about Lokṭe (brother-inlaw of Rashtrakūṭa ruler Kṛṣṇa). The inscription refers to the construction of the temple of Hari (Viṣṇu), Hara (Śiva), Jina and Buddha by Lokṭe (a feudal ruler - *Sāmanta*) in the city of Lokapur, established by himself. The name of the city - Lokapur (People's city) and construction of temples dedicated to four deities (Viṣṇu, Śiva, Jina and Buddha) of varying cults therein are very meaningful in the context of socio-religious harmony.

The three main surviving Jaina temples - Ghaṇṭaī (only *ardhamaṇḍapa* surviving, 10th century C.E.), Pārśvanātha (c. 950-70 C.E.) and Ādinātha temples (c. 1050-75 C.E.) at Khajurāho were built mainly with the support of Jaina traders and merchants, the names of whom are mentioned in several inscriptions of Khajurāho, they are - Pāhil, Dedū, Sālhe, Bibanshāh, Pāṇidhara. Of all, the most important inscription is of Pāhil in Pārśvanātha Jaina temple of Khajurāho, which is one of the

best temples of Khajurāho in terms of architecture, sculptural excellence and images of the deities. The temple can be compared with Lakṣamaṇa and Viśvanātha temples (10th and early 11th century C.E.) of Khajurāho built by Chandella rulers Yaśovarmana and Dhaṅga. In the context of the images of Brahmanical deities like - Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Rāma, Balarāma, Kāma, Agni and Kubera on the Pārśvanātha Jaina temple, the mutual and cordial relationship of Brahmanical and Jaina communities can distinctly be underlined. This was actually the adoption of the Brahmanical gods popular in earlier tradition to enhance the popularity of Jainism.

The inscription of the Pārśvanātha temple says that the Jaina trader Pāhil was honoured by Chandella ruler Dhaṅga for the construction of this great Jaina temple. Pāhil, according to inscription, made the donation of seven gardens (*vāṭikās*) for the maintenance of Jaina temple of Pārśvanātha. The names of *Vāṭikās* (gardens) are - *Dhaṅga, Pāhil, Śaṅkara, Candra, Āmra, Laghucandra* and *Pañcāyatana*. The names of gardens reveal the interactive and cordial relationship of the Jainas with Brahmanical faith. Another important point is that Jaina *Ācārya* Vāsavachandra was the *Mahārājguru* of Chandella ruler Dhaṅga.⁶

Likewise several other inscriptions also refer to the constructions of temples by the Jaina traders showing their economic potential in society. The inscription from Mahāvīra temple and other Jaina remains at Osiāñ refer to Jaina *goṣṭhis* of merchants and a trader Jinadatta by name who contributed to Jaina constructions. We also know that Oswālas of Rajasthan and their rich community, have faith in Jainism even today. The Jaina *Ācāryas, Upādhyāyas* and *Sādhus* enjoyed respectable position in the society and their desire and religious command were final for the Jaina community. They promoted the construction of Jaina temples and carving of images by the Jaina affluent society, best examples of which are at the two great and prolific sites namely Deogarh and Kumbhāriyā. It is a general principle that business community does not invite any dispute or problem, and they maintain friendly relationship with all sections of society.

As compared to Buddhists, the Jainas were certainly more liberal in assimilating Brahmanical gods and goddesses in Jaina pantheon and giving them respectable position, only next to the Jinas. We have already examined the socio-economic and political reasons for this in previous pages. It was something special in Jainism that from 3rd - 4th century C.E. independent texts were written on lives of epical characters of Brahmanical tradition such as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. These texts are *Paūmacariyam* (by Vimāla Sūri, *Nāyādhammakahāo* (4th century C.E.), *Padmapurāṇa* (by Raviṣeṇa - 676

C.E.), *Harivaṁśapurāṇa* (by Jinasena - 783 C.E.), *Ādīpurāṇa* (by Jinasena - 9th century C.E.) and *Triṣaṣṭīśalākāpuruṣacaritra* (by Hemacandra - latter half of 12th century C.E.). Such cordial and interactive socio-religious conditions encouraged the visual representations of Brahmanical deities at Jaina sites right from the Kuṣāṇa period at Mathura. The relationship of 22nd Jina Neminātha with Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa as his cousin brothers is endorsed by some texts (*Nāyādhammakahāo*, *Antagaḍḍasāo*, *Harivaṁśapurāṇa*, *Triṣaṣṭīśalākāpuruṣacaritra*), which resulted into the renderings of the figures of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa on two sides of Neminātha images to be found at Mathura and Deogarh.

On close examination of Brahmanical impact on Jainism, it is found that the Vaiṣṇava impact was more forceful, which could be seen even today, when we find Vaiṣṇava priests in most of the Jaina temples. One reason could have been special stress on the tolerance and non-violence in both Vaishṇavism and Jainism, besides socio-religious interactive milieu. The names of the deities like - Padma, Sudarsana, Rāma, Balarāma, Purushottama, Puṇḍarika, Nārāyaṇa or Lakṣmaṇa and Kṛṣṇa in the list of 63 *Śalākāpuruṣas* are related to Vaiṣṇava faith. The Pārśvanātha Jaina temple at Khajurāho (950-70 C.E.) also depicts Viṣṇu, Rāma, Balarāma figures and *Rāmāyaṇa* and Kṛṣṇa-*līlā* scenes to suggest Vaiṣṇava impact. Likewise the Delvāḍā Jaina temples (Vimala-vasahī and Lūṇa-vasahī) contain in ceilings, the depictions of water-sport of Kṛṣṇa and Neminātha, Kṛṣṇa subduing *Kāliya-nāga*, *Sthauṇa-Narasimha* image (killing the demon *Hiraṇyakaśipu*) and Kṛṣṇa playing *Holi* with *gopa-gopikās*, birth and *Bāla-līlās* of Kṛṣṇa and *Samudra-manthana* etc.⁷

In tune with the main Indian socio-cultural stream, the Jainism also adopted some of the elements of folk-culture and art, which could be seen in the form of assimilation of *nāga* (snakes), tree and *yakṣa* and *yakṣī* worship. All the Jinas were associated with some tree under which they attained the omniscience. The snake was associated with Supārśvanātha and Pārśvanātha Jinas as well as their *yakṣas* and *yakṣis*. Most of *yakṣas* and *yakṣis* associated with the Tīrthaṅkaras, represent either the Brahmanical gods and goddesses or their transformation or folk-deities.

Like the Brahmanical temples the Jainas also decorated their temples (Khajurāho, Delvāḍā, Kumbhāriyā) with the figures of beautiful and bewitching *Apsaras* (damsels) figures in conventional postures as *Darpaṇā*, *Vivastrajaghanā*, *Patralekhanā*, *Nūpur-pādikā*, *Putra-vallabhā* etc. The aesthetic appreciation of beauty in Jainism is projected through the depiction of beautiful damsel figures. The erotic

figures so common on Brahmanical temples were also accepted in Jaina art. This happened in the backdrop of socio-cultural milieu of special emphasis on *Śṛṅgāra* (ornamentation), exposure of physical beauty and sensuousness of early medieval and medieval period. The Jaina texts also prescribed the renderings of the figures of Kāma and Rati on Jina temples to attract the masses. The Jaina *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* (29.2, 783 C.E.) provides an interesting reference in this respect. It refers to the construction of a Jina temple by *śreṣṭhi* Kāmadatta, who, for the sake of attracting masses, also caused the installation of the figures of Kāmadeva and Rati in the temple. It also alludes to the worship of Rati and Kāma alongwith the Jina images. As a consequence the erotic figures, datable between 10th and 12th century C.E., were carved at Deogarh (doorway, temple no. 18), Khajurāho (Pārśvanātha temple), Naraś (Śātinātha temple, Pāli, Rajasthan), Tāraṅgā (Ajitanātha temple Mahesaṇa, Gujarat) and Kumbhāriyā (Nemināth temple Banaskaṅthā, Gujarat).

Jaina pontiffs like Jinasena (770-850 C.E.) deviated from the orthodox path in adopting many rules and practices enjoyed by the Brahmanical *Dharmaśāstra* and in prescribing them for the Jainas as well. Wide and sympathetic toleration was the characteristic of the age. It seemed as if the people had realized that there was no cultural differences between the different prevailing religions and that an individual might follow any one of them or make a combination of the acceptable elements of any one or more of them as suited to his temperament, somewhat in the manner of a modern man of culture who does not realize any inconsistency in simultaneously becoming a member of different social-cultural and political societies.⁸

Notes and References

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