

Brāhmaṇic and Śramaṇic Cultures : A Comparative Study

We cannot appreciate Indian culture completely without understanding its different constituents. i.e. Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. So, one thing must be clear in our mind that studies and researches in the field of Indology are not possible in isolation. In fact, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism are so intermingled and mutually influenced that to have a proper comprehension of one, the understanding of the others is essential.

However, two distinct trends have been pre dominating in Indian culture from its earliest days, known as Brāhmaṇic and Śramaṇic. No doubt, these two trends are distinguishable but at the same time we must be aware of the fact they are not separable. Though on the basis of some peculiarities in theory, we can distinguish them yet in practice, it is very difficult to divaricate them because neither of the two remained uninfluenced by the other. The earlier Śramaṇic trends and its later phases, Jainism and Buddhism, were influenced by the Vedic tradition and vice a versa. The concept of tapas or austerity, asceticism, liberation, meditation, equanimity and non-violence, earlier absent in the Vedas, came into existence in Hinduism through Śramaṇic influence. The Upaniṣadas and the *Gītā* evolved some new spiritual definitions of Vedic rituals. Both are the representatives of the dialogue taken place in Śramaṇic and Vedic traditions.

The Upaniṣadic trend of Hinduism is not a pure form of Vedic religion. It incorporated in itself various Śramaṇic tenets which gave a new dimension to Vedic religion. Thus, we can say that our Hinduism is an intermingling of Vedic and Śramaṇic traditions. The voice raised by our ancient Upaniṣadic Ṛsis, Munis and Śramanas against the ritualistic and worldly outlook of caste-ridden Brāhmaṇism, became more strong in the form of Jainism and Buddhism along with other minor Śramaṇic sects. Infact, the Upaniṣadic trend as well as Jainism and Buddhism provided refuge to those fed up with Vedic ritualism and the worldly outlook on life. Not only Jainism and Buddhism but some other sects and schools of Indian thought such as Ājīvakas and Sāṃkhyas also adopted more or less the same course towards Vedic ritualism. However, Jainism and Buddhism were more candid and vehement in their opposition towards Vedic ritualism. They outrightly rejected animal sacrifices in *yajñas*, the birth-based caste-system and the infallibility

of the Vedas. In Mahāvira and Buddha, the most prominent preachers (exponents), we find the real crusaders; whose tirade, against caste-ridden and ritualistic Brāhmaṇism, touching a low water-mark and crumbling under its inner inadequacies, gave a severe jolt to it. Jainism and Buddhism came forward to sweep away the long accumulated excrescence, grown on Indian culture in the form of rituals, casteism, and superstitions.

But we shall be mistaken if we presume that in their attempt to clear away the dirt of Vedic ritualism, Jainism and Buddhism remained untouched. They were also considerably influenced by Vedic rituals. Ritualism, in the new form of Tāntric practices, crept into Jainism and Buddhism and became part and parcel of their religious practices and mode of worship. With the impact of Hindu Tāntricism, Jainas adopted various Hindu deities and their mode of worship with some changes, which were suited to their religious temperament but were alien to Jainism in its original form. The Jaina concept of *Śāśana Devatā* or *Yakṣa-Yakṣis* is nothing but a Jaina version of Hindu deities. As I have pointed out earlier, the influence has been reciprocal. This can be demonstrated by the fact that on one side Hinduism accepted Ṛṣabha and Buddha as incarnation of God while on the other Jainism included Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in its list of *Śalākā Puruṣas*. A number of Hindu Gods and Goddesses were accepted as consorts of *Tīrthaṅkaras* such as Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, Kālī, Mahākālī, Cakreśvari, Ambikā, Padmāvatī and Siddhikā.

The moot point I intend to make is that different religious traditions of our great Indian culture have borrowed various concepts from one another and that it is the duty to study and highlight this mutual impact, which is the need of the hour, and thus bridge the gulf existing between different religious systems.

Though it is true that the Śramaṇic tradition, in general and Jainism and Buddhism, in particular have some distinct features discriminating them from the Vedic or Brāhmaṇic tradition, yet they are not foreigners. They are the children of the same soil who came forward with a spirit of reform. It is sometimes mistakenly thought that Jainism and Buddhism were a revolt against Brāhmaṇism. Western scholars in particular maintain this notion. But here I would like to say that it was not revolt but reform. In fact, Vedic

and Śramanic traditions are not rival traditions as some Western and Indian scholars think. There seems to have been a deliberate effort to create a gulf between Jainism and Buddhism on the one hand and Hinduism on the other, by Western scholars. Unfortunately some Indian scholars, even Jaina scholars, also supported their views but in my humble opinion this was a step in the wrong direction. It is true that Śramanic and Vedic traditions have divergent views on certain religious and philosophical issues; their ideals of living also differ considerably. But this does not mean that they are rivals or enemies of each other. As passions and reason, *śreya* and *preya*, in spite of being different in their very nature, are the components of human personality, so is the case with Śramanic and Vedic traditions. Though inheriting distinct features, they are the components of one whole Indian culture. Jainism and Buddhism were not rivals to Hinduism, but what they preached to the Indian society was an advance stage in the field of spirituality compared to Vedic ritualism.

If the Upaniṣadic trend, in spite of taking a divergent stand from Vedic ritualism, is considered part and parcel of Hinduism, what is the difficulty in measuring Jainism and Buddhism with the same yardstick? Again if Sāṃkhya and Mīmāṃsakas, Advaitists and Dvaitists, in spite of having different philosophies and pathways, belong to the Hinduism, why not Jainism and Buddhism? If the Upaniṣadic tradition is considered an advance from Vedic ritualism to spirituality, then we have to admit that Buddhism and Jainism have also followed the same path with a more enthusiastic spirit. They worked for the betterment of weaker sections of Indian society and redemption from priesthood and ritualism. They preached the religion of common men, founded on the firm footing of moral virtues rather than on some external rituals.

Today, researchers in the field of Jainology need a new approach to reinterpret the relationship between Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism -- particularly the Upaniṣadic trend -- in the light of ancient Jaina texts such

as *Ācārāṅga*, *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, and *Īśibhāṣiyāṁ*. I am confident that an impartial and careful study of these texts will remove the misconception that Jainism and Hinduism are rival religions. In *Ācārāṅga* we find a number of passages similar to those of the Upaniṣada in word, style as well as in essence. *Ācārāṅga* mentions Śramaṇa and Brāhmaṇa simultaneously. This proves that for the preacher of *Ācārāṅga*, Śramaṇa and Brāhmaṇa are not rival traditions as they were considered later on. In *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* we find mention of some Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis such as Videhanami, Bāhuk, Asitadevala, Dvaipāyana, and Pārāśara. They were accepted as the Ṛṣis of their own traditions though they followed a different code of conduct. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* addresses them as great ascetics and great men (*mahā-puruṣa*) who attained the ultimate goal of life, i.e. liberation.

Ṛṣibhāṣita, considered as the part of a Jaina canon, also mentions the teachings of Nārada, Asitadevala, Angiras, Pārāśara, Aruna, Nārāyaṇa, Yājñavalkya, Uddālaka, Vidura, and others. They have been called *Arhat* Ṛṣis. Its writing in the Jaina tradition is sign of the tolerance and openness of Jainism on the one hand. On the other hand it shows that the stream of Indian spirituality is one at its source, irrespective of their division later into the Upaniṣadic, Buddhist, Jaina, Ājīvika and other rivulets. This work is a clear proof of the assimilative and tolerant nature of Indian thought. Today, when we are deeply bogged down in communal separatism and strife, this great work could be an enlightening guide.

Thus, the position, these Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis held in early books of Jainism, is clear evidence that the stream of Indian spirituality is one at its source. We cannot have a proper understanding of these trends if we treat them in isolation. *Ācārāṅga*, *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* and *Ṛṣibhāṣita* may be understood in a better way only in the light of the Upaniṣad as and vice versa. Similarly, the *Sūttanipāṭa*, *Dhammapada*, *Therīgāthā*, and other works of the Pāli canon may be properly studied only in the light of the Prākṛta Jaina canons and the Upaniṣadas.

