DIGAMBARA Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras FROM MAHESHWAR AND NEVĀṢĀ

DR. H. D. SANKALIA, M.A., Ph.D. (LONDON)

Maheshwar is a well-known town situated on the northern bank of the Narmadā in the present State of Madhya Bhārat. It is about 50 miles south of Indore. Here, just overlooking the river, and adjoining the temple of Viṣṭhala, is a place called the “Gufā (Cave of Bhartṛhari)”. There is no rock in the vicinity, and I wondered how a cave could exist in the area. On examining the ‘so-called “Gufā”, it was noticed that it was a submerged temple, situated on an old mound, going back to the 3rd century B.C. and even earlier. Further study showed that the temple might have been built during the Paramāra period, about 1100 A.D. This is particularly suggested by the prabhāvali, (Fig. 1) which is carved in the form of a torāṇa. Similar torāṇa is seen in the torāṇas at Sidhpur, Vadnagar and Kapadvanj in Gujarat which were erected in the time of Siddhārāja Jayasimha and his successor.¹

In one of the niches of this temple there is a huge, large, nude, standing male figure (Fig. 2), with arms thrown on its sides, now partly broken. The head and the face were broken anciently and are now replaced by a different one. The figure is worshipped as Rājā Bhartṛhari, but in fact it is a Jaina Tirthaṅkara standing in Kāyotsarga pose. Since the laṅchana and the vāhana as well as the attendant Jaina Yakṣas and Yakṣīs are no longer present, it is not possible to identify the image as of a particular Tirthaṅkara. But its presence indicates that once a large Jaina temple stood on the bank of the Narmadā, probably in the 12th century.

Nevāṣā is also a holy town, and equally old as Maheshwar, though its recorded antiquity does not go beyond the time of Śrī Jñānesvara, that is A.D. 1290. It lies on both the banks of the Pravarā river; the older town on the northern side is called Nevāṣā Budruk, and that on the southern side is known as Nevāṣā Khūrd. It is also a taluka town, and situated at a distance of about 36 miles north of Ahmadnagar.

Pillars, capitals, door-frames, and images of the mediaeval period are found scattered about, completely uncared for, on both the sides of the town. Among these we found, lying right on the river bank, on the

northern side, that is Nevāsā Budruk, two stone images of Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras (Fig. 3). The lower parts of both the images are broken, but since the upper part of one, with a canopy of seven cobra hoods survives, it is possible to identify it as the figure of the 23rd Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha. Both stood in Kāyotsarga pose.

It is interesting to note that the Maheshwar as well as the Nevāsā images are Digambara. It is well known that Digambara Jainism was patronized by the Western Chālukyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the Hoysalas and the Yādavas. Since no structural monuments of the first two dynasties are hitherto known from the Deccan, it is likely that the images in question belong to the mediaeval period, that is after 1,000 A.D. From the existence of the Jaina caves belonging to the Digambara School at Triṅgalvādi² and at Chāndor² in the Nasik district of the early (?) Yādava period, it is possible to say that Digambara Jainism was in a flourishing state at this period in the Deccan. And the Nevāsā figures should belong to this period.