

Glimpses Of Jainism Through Archaeology In Uttar Pradesh

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THE historicity of Jainism in the modern State of Uttar Pradesh is shrouded in a long mysterious past. Pārśvanātha, an immediate predecessor of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra and a real historical personage, appeared in Banaras, two and a half centuries earlier than his (last) successor. Although born as a prince of King Aśvasena of Banaras, Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Tirthaṅkara, preferred a life of complete renunciation and purity. He sponsored non-injury (*Ahimsā*), non-lying (*Satya*), non-stealing (*Asteya*) and non-possession (*Aparigraha*) as four vows to which Mahāvīra, the great Jina, made an addition by putting forward non-adultery (*Brahmacarya*) as the fifth one to be strictly observed by every householder in the society. The date of Pārśvanātha, who seems to have left a well-formed organization as a legacy to Mahāvīra, may roughly be assigned somewhere in the eighth century B.C.

Several archaeological discoveries at Mathura and its vicinity have shown that Jainism was highly venerated there in the early centuries of Christian era, and even earlier. The facts revealed by the architectural and sculptural remains have further been confirmed by epigraphic evidences. The flourishing state of Jainism, as gathered from the inscriptional data, may very well be imagined by studying the various sections known as *gaṇa*, *kula* and *śākhā* which

were offshoots of one and the same cult. At Mathura, Jainism commanded equal respect from both men and women, rulers and the ruled, nomads and the civilized and the foreigners as well as local inhabitants.

Mathura, one of the ancient image-preparing centres of India, seems to have been subjugated by the Śakas, a nomadic tribe from Central Asia, somewhere during the early years of the Christian era. At that time, Mathura was a seat of religious learning. King Khāravela of Orissa, who went to Mathura in order to release his captured army generals during the eighth year of his reign made charitable endowments to the Brāhmaṇas and the Ārhatas.¹ The above inscriptional statement leaves no doubt that Jainism was at its helm at Mathura in the last quarter of the first Century B.C. The earliest figures of the Yakṣas (fig. 1 of a Yakṣī) and Nāgas from Mathura and its vicinity which represent folk-art of the country probably belonged to the Brāhmaṇical creed. Needless to say, Jainism must have formed a nucleus to attract the intelligentsia and the royal patronage at Mathura. The Śakas proved no exception to that. A dated inscription of the year 72 during the reign of Mahākṣatrapa Śoḍāsa from the Kaṅkāli mound, Mathura, specifically suggests that the practice of offering sacred stone slabs (*Āyāgapāṭas*), to pay homage to the Ārhatas, had already come in vogue. The other epigraphic documents of Śoḍāsa are dated in the Vikrama Saṁvat, thus the date assignable to the present inscription would fall in 15 A.D.² The rule of the Kuṣāṇas, after the Śakas, gave an unprecedented impetus to Jaina art. Many Tirthaṅkara images in spotted red sandstone belonging to the Kuṣāṇa age are preserved in the Archaeological Museum, Mathura, and the State Museum, Lucknow. After the Kuṣāṇas, the other imperial power which arose in North India is that of the Guptas who were staunch followers of Vaiṣṇava cult. Consequently, the growth of Jainism had to meet a long setback in the domain of art and culture of Uttar Pradesh. However, the activities of Jaina patrons who hailed mainly from the business community did not remain at standstill. We find a few but excellent pieces of the Jaina art from different places in U. P. which belong to the Gupta period. But the revival of Jainism, which started in the post-Gupta age, is marked during the rule of the Chandelas who gave a zealous support to the cause of Jainism.

1 *Ind. Ant.* 1926, p. 145.

2 *Ep. Ind.* Vol. XIV, pp. 139-141.

Architecture :

The earliest architectural remains pertaining to Jainism have been brought to light from various sites around Mathura. The architectural fragments such as the *Toraṇas* (gateways), pillars and railings, which were unearthed by Dr. Fuhrer, certainly belonged to an ancient Jaina *stūpa* which existed at Mathura prior to the Christian era. The existence of such a *stūpa* is further evidenced by an epigraphic record dated in the year 79 (A.D. 157) which is inscribed on the base of an image once supposed to be of the Arhat Nandyāvarta, but now shown as that of Munisuvrata by K. D. Bajpai who corrected the old reading (Fig. 2). The *stūpa* mentioned therein is recorded as a work of gods which itself is a great proof of its hoary antiquity. V. A. Smith aptly remarks, "Considering the significance of the phrase in the inscription, 'built by the gods', as indicating that the building at about the beginning of the Christian era was believed to date from a period of mythical antiquity, the date B.C. 600 for its first erection is not too early."³ The other types of Jaina architecture in Uttar Pradesh are the monastic establishments and temples which mostly belong to the early medieval period of Indian history. The earliest Jaina temples belonging to this group have been found in the Lalitpur Tahsil of the Jhansi district, in U. P. There are numerous Jaina architectural remains scattered around at several places such as Deogarh, Dudhai, Madanpur etc. The Jaina temples at Deogarh belong to different dates. The main shrine consists of an open pillared hall with six rows of six pillars each. There is a huge collection of images of naked Jaina Tirthaṅkaras carved on a wall in the centre. In front of the hall there is a detached portico supported on four massive pillars which contain important inscriptions. On one of the pillars we find an important epigraph of King Bhoja Deva, the Gurjara-Pratihāra ruler. There are many other Jaina shrines, belonging to later period. We also find an inscription in one of these temples, stating that it was built in Samvat 1493 (A.D. 1436), which clearly shows that Jainism continued to flourish in this region at least upto the 15th cent. A.D.

At Dudhai, another historical centre in the Lalitpur Tahsil of Jhansi District, we find a group of Jaina temples lying half a mile to the south-west and collectively known as the Bania Ka Barat. The

3 Smith, V. A., "The Jaina Stūpa and other Antiquities of Mathura", see introduction.

ruinous condition of the temples shows that they must have been magnificent specimens of Jaina architecture at the time of their original construction. Again at the site of Bari Dudhai, we still find a Jaina temple standing along the side of a place called Akhārā. The latter is a circular structure of low and flat roofed cells, which appear to have been originally some forty in number but of which now about seventeen exist.

Madanpur, a village lying 39 miles south-west of Lalitpur, also contains numerous Jaina structures belonging to the Chandela period. On one side of the village is a Jaina temple with an inscription dated in Samvat 1206 or A.D. 1149 which gives the name of the place, Madanpur. At Marphā, a small fort on the steep hill in Banda district, we find the remains of a great monastic establishment (Mūlasaṅghavihāra) of the Jainas. The long surrounding area and the existing remains clearly exhibit the flourishing state of Jainism around this region in the 14th century A.D. The fragmentary inscriptions, so far unpublished, do mention the existence of a Mūlasaṅghavihāra there at the time of the Baghel dynasty.

Besides the above architectural remains, there are many other solitary examples of the Jaina architecture scattered all over the Uttar Pradesh, which manifest the popularity of this religion in the area.

Sculpture :

Many excellent images of the Jaina Tirthaṅkaras and other subsidiary deities have been brought to light from all over U.P. which range from the first century A.D. to the present era. This richness of the material, both in quality and quantity, is a great proof that Jainism commanded untiring respect amongst the people of this region from remote antiquity. The sculptural remains of Jainism from Mathura, Jhansi, Hamirpur, Sitapur, Allahabad, Varanasi and many other districts of Uttar Pradesh lend support to the above conclusion.

Evolution of Jaina Statuary :

The earliest archaeological evidence regarding the construction of images of Jaina Tirthaṅkaras is the Hathigumpha inscription of the last quarter of the first century B.C. of King Khāravela of Kalinga,

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- 4 Nigam, M. L. "Impact of Jainism on Mathura Art", J. U. P. H. S., Vol. IX, Part I, plates VI and VII.



*Fig. 1. Yakṣiṇī
from Mathura
2nd Century A.D.*



Fig. 2. Pedestal of the image of Munisuvrata

(See p. 214.)



Fig. 3. Image of a Tirthankara from Sitapur, Gupta period

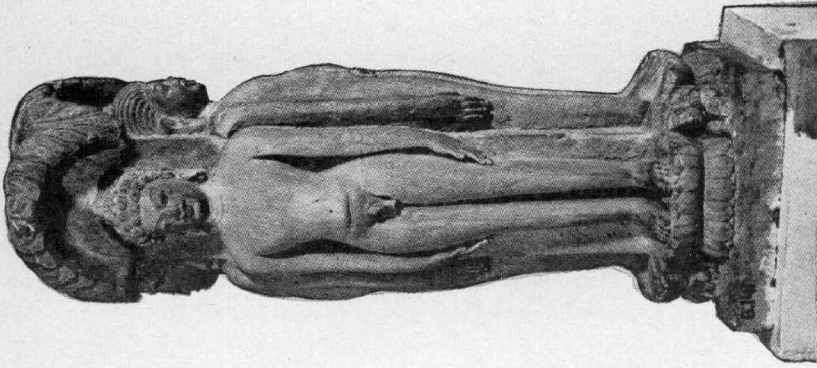


Fig. 4. Sarvatobhadra (two-faced) Image of Tirthankara 9th Century A.D. Sarai Aghat (Etah)

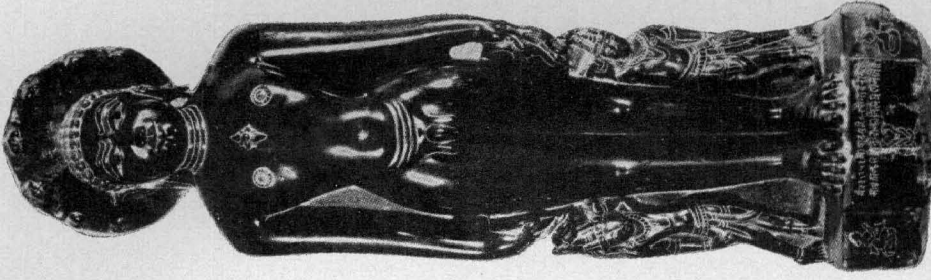


Fig. 5. Pārsvanātha from Mahoba (12th Century A.D.)

wherein he is stated to have brought back the statue of a Jaina Tirthaṅkara, probably Mahāvīra, originally belonging to Kalinga but forcibly taken away from there to Magadha by some Nanda monarch.

The excavations by Dr. Fuhrer at Kaṅkāli mound, Mathura have brought to light several inscribed stone slabs known as *Āyāgapāṭas*. As their inscriptions read, they were dedicated for the worship of the Arhats. These early symbolic representations of the Jaina pantheon are profusely ornamented with various auspicious marks such as the svastika, a pair of fish, *maṅgala-ghaṭa* and *tri-ratna*, etc. The earliest *Āyāgapāṭas* bear a replica of the Jaina *stūpa* along with the aforesaid symbols but are devoid of any Tirthaṅkara image. In the later specimens, the effigy of the Jina is also shown seated in the attitude of deep meditation in the centre of an *Āyāgapāṭa*. The carvings of the former specimens are more flat and archaic in character while the latter ones exhibit a sense of artistic supremacy. It will not be, therefore, unreasonable to believe that the Jainas too, alike the Buddhists, had developed symbolic worship prior to the date when the anthropomorphic representation of the Jainas had come in vogue. Smith is perfectly right when he observes, "Among the Jainas they (*Āyāgapāṭas*) probably went out of fashion at an early period as the inscriptions on them invariably show archaic characters". This is why the earliest images of the Jaina Tirthaṅkaras which we find in round, are datable to the early centuries of the Christian era. And if the evidence of the Hathigumpha inscription regarding the evidence of an image of a Tirthaṅkara is to be believed it must have been an effigy of a Jina carved on *Āyāgapāṭa*.

Kuṣāṇa Age :

The earliest images of the Jaina Tirthaṅkaras which belong to the Kuṣāṇa age have been unearthed both at Mathura and Kauśāmbī in Allahabad district of Uttar Pradesh. The beautiful specimens from Mathura are housed in the Lucknow and Mathura museums whereas the Jaina sculptures from Kauśāmbī are exhibited in the University Museum, Allahabad, U.P. The images are both in sitting as well as standing postures. Standing images are invariably in the Kāyotsarga Mudrā while the seated ones are carved in meditation poses. The body of a Jina must be adorned with several auspicious marks prescribed for the Mahāpuruṣas. It must possess Uṣṇīṣa (Protuberance over the head), Urṇā (a raised point between the eye-brows), Śrīvatsa, elongated

ears, long arms stretching upto the knees, wheel on palms and soles etc. Aesthetically the early Jaina images of the Kuṣāṇa age are primitive and bear a flattish look. Profuse ornamentation and varied iconographic features had not yet been introduced. The figure is seated on an ordinary pedestal with a conventional wheel placed on a pilaster in centre and devotees on both the sides. The folds of drapery are heavier and based on the Indo-Scythian style. Around the head of the main deity there is a simple halo with scalloped border.

Gupta Age :

Coming to the Gupta age, the artistic supremacy is well achieved and the images are beset with inner and outer qualities of perfection. The physical flatness and crudeness of line are replaced by a balanced body and controlled modelling. The serene and divine radiating influence of the faces is indicative of high spiritual attainments of Tirthaṅkaras. The half-open eye-lids directed to the tip of the nose exhibit a sense of deep contemplation. The simple halo is further ornamented by the undercut foliage in bold relief. The ordinary pedestal of the Kuṣāṇa age has also undergone a change. Supported by a lion on each side, it sometimes represents a *Simhāsana* and sometimes a lotus-seat (*Utthita-Padmāsana*).

Iconography of Jainism in the Gupta period is much varied and complicated. Various gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are adopted and occur as subsidiary deities of the Jinas. For instance, the figures of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Kubera, Hārīti, Sarasvatī, Yakṣas, Gandharvas and *navagrahas* are shown attending the presiding image, i.e., a Tirthaṅkara. Originally, it started in the form of a sectarian rivalry but later all these gods and semi-gods formed a part of the adopting religion.

Most of the Tirthaṅkara-images belonging to the Gupta age have come from Mathura but few solitary instances in the same red sand-stone of Mathura have also been acquired from various other districts such as Banaras and Sitapur (see fig. 3), of Uttar Pradesh. These figures must have originally been imported from Mathura.

Mediaeval Period :

With the advent of the medieval period Jainism seems to have regained eminence in Uttar Pradesh, particularly in the region of Bundelkhand. It is an era of Jaina revivalism. Numerous sculptures

from Mahoba, the capital of the Chandelas, in the Hamirpur district, and certain other areas of Jhansi district in Bundelkhand, are dedicated to this cult.

Although the aesthetic excellence acquired during the Gupta Age seems to degenerate, yet the iconography of these images is much more advanced. The art is no more creative and the sculptor simply tries to carry on the canonical injunctions abiding with the set artistic patterns of the past. Stress is laid more on the ornamentation and multiplication of the forms whereas the creative genius of the Gupta-art fails to occupy the same position. Due to lack of balanced modelling, the facial features and contours of the body become sharp and prominent but the supreme serenity and poise to exhibit the inner strength of a divine conqueror (Jina) are conspicuous by their absence. Thus the communicating power of the art has altogether gone and images behave like puppets of a mute-show.

The stone used for the Mahoba Jaina Sculptures is black basalt which the artists commonly employed as a material to produce images. The pedestal has undergone a further change. It is supported by two dwarf pillars and a pair of lions with lavish ornamentation. Donors, both male and female, of the statue, stand half concealed behind these pilasters. An ornamental cloth hangs down between the two lions beneath where the particular symbol of the Tīrthaṅkara is placed. To the right and left of the principal statue, may stand its respective Yakṣa and yakṣī and the Chauri-bearers. On the upper part on both sides, figures of Gandharvas, Nāgas and Gaṇas carrying garlands or drums are seen flying to pay homage to the Jina. Each of these two groups is surmounted by an elephant standing on lotus flowers and offering garland with its lifted trunk. All the twentyfour Tīrthaṅkaras may also be carved on one panel showing Mahāvīra in the centre surrounded by the remaining pontiffs. Another familiar device was to carve out a stele exhibiting four standing nude figures of the Jina on all the four sides of the stone (Sarvatobhadra-pratimā) (see fig. 4). A statue of Pārśvanātha in black stone from Mahoba, now preserved in the State Museum, Lucknow, and dated in Saṃvat 1253 = 1196 A.D. is illustrated here in fig. 5.

Miniature-Paintings :

Signs of degeneration and deterioration of plastic art became universal in the domain of Indian art, the wealthy patronage of the Jainas could not remain contented with this dying media of visual

communication. The Jainas had also diverted their opulence towards the pictorial art. The focus of art appears to have shifted from stone to palm-leaves and paper and from chisel to brush and colour. Bands of illustrated manuscripts depicting scenes from Jaina mythology were painted and produced. The artist of Uttar Pradesh had his own part to play in this fresh religious activity of Jainas. An illustrated Jaina-manuscript from Jaunpur in east U. P., although the only surviving example, is significant proof to manifest the healthy traditions of Jaina pictorial art in Uttar Pradesh during the mediaeval period.

