

# HISTORICAL POSITION OF JAINISM

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Jainism as a sect is supposed to have its historical existence in the time of Mahāvīra, the twentyfourth Tirthaṅkara of Jainas. Some scholars take it as far back as Pārśvanātha, the twentythird Tirthaṅkara, who is generally placed in the 8th Century B.C.

In the history of Indian culture Jainas and Buddhists are known as Śramaṇas. A story of antagonism between Śramaṇas and Brāhmaṇas appears to have become a part of the old tradition. The compound श्रमण-ब्राह्मणम् according to Pāṇini's rule<sup>1</sup> येषां च विरोधः शाश्वतिकः is a clear indication of the same.

This item of our tradition requires some close consideration. For this purpose it would be interesting to note the rise of Śramaṇa sect in their early relation to Brāhmaṇical schools as well as historical developments of their churches. I shall of course limit myself to Jainas though the general problem of the rise of Śramaṇas pertains to all the Śramaṇa sects.

The *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*<sup>2</sup> of Jainas and *Brahmajāla-Sūtra*<sup>3</sup> of Buddhists refer to a great number of sects other than their own. Some of these may be Vedic while the others are non-vedic and Śramaṇa. Of these sects the historicity of the three Śramaṇa sects, viz. those of Jainas, Buddhists and Ajivakas is generally accepted by the scholars.

There is, however, a controversy about the origin of these Śramaṇa sects. The older view is that these Śramaṇa sects were more or less so

1. *Pātañjala Mahābhāṣya*, p. 539.
2. Sūt. refers to the creeds prevalent in the time of Mahāvīra, the 24th Tirthaṅkara of Jainas. They are (१) क्रियावाद, (२) अक्रियावाद, (३) अज्ञानवाद and (४) विनयवाद. The same Sūt. states that these four great creeds comprise 363 schools. Vide Sūt. I.xii.1; also cf. Sth. 4.4.35, Bhag. 30.1.825, Uttar. 18-23 and Nandi 47.
3. BJS. in DN enumerates 62 schools under the chief eight heads: viz., (१) सस्सतवादिन्, (२) एकच्चसस्सतिक, (३) अन्तानन्तिक, (४) अमरविकल्पक, (५) अधिच्चसमुप्पन्निक, (६) उद्धमावातिक, (७) उच्छेदवादिन्, (८) पिदिट्ठधम्मनित्वानवादिन् DN 1.12.39, also cf. Svt. 1-2. It enumerates (१) कालवाद, (२) स्वभाववाद, (३) नियतिवाद, (४) यदृच्छावाद, (५) भूतवाद, (६) पुरुषवाद and (७) ईश्वरवाद. It should be noted that according to the works referred to of Jaina canons all the five Vādas excepting यदृच्छावाद and भूतवाद come under the head of क्रियावाद whilst except भूतवाद all the six come under the head of अक्रियावाद also. For the detailed study vide SSJL by A. C. Sen.

many protests against the orthodox Vedic cult. The strongest argument in favour of this view is that our oldest extant literature comprises of *Vedas* including *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*. The canonical works of Jains and Bauddhas are much later and presuppose the existence of *Vedas* and Vedism. Naturally, therefore, one becomes inclined to regard these sects represented by later literature as in some way related to the older Vedism.

However, a more critical and thorough examination of the Vedic as well as of Śramaṇa sacred texts has given birth to the hypothesis of the independent origin of these Śramaṇa sects. Not only that but this study has also suggested the possibility of some of the Vedic sects like Śaivism, schools like Sāṅkhya-Yoga and some of the Bhakti cults being non-Vedic in origin. The bases of this hypothesis are the latest archeological researches, philological findings and also the literary evidences. Let us briefly review these different sources of the history.

The archaeological researches have now definitely proved the existence of a highly developed culture beside which the one reflected in the *Vedas* and *Brāhmaṇas* looks rural if not primitive. Here I refer, of course, to the City culture of the Indus Valley.<sup>1</sup> The existence of the images of Proto-Siva and Śakti in the monuments at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa points in the direction of the image-worship which was later on accepted by all Indian sects. It should be noted here that in the *Vedas* there is very little evidence of the cult of image-worship.

Similarly philologists have now shown that the Sanskrit language that was codified by Pāṇini was not the pure Aryan Vedic language. Many non-Vedic words current in the languages of the different regions of this country were absorbed in the Sanskrit language with the assimilation of the different non-Vedic cults into Vedic cult. Here we are concerned with the word 'Pūjana'<sup>2</sup> used in the sense of worship. The Vedic Aryans used the word 'Yajana' in the sense of their daily worship. They had no concern with image-worship. The word 'Pūjana' indicates quite a different mode of worship, which was then prevalent among the people of non-Vedic civilisation. It must have involved some sort of image-worship. With the assimilation of this image-worship, the word 'Pūjana', also must have been assimilated in the language of the Aryans. In later times not only

1. "Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Valley Civilisation" by John Marshall. Vide description of plate No. XII-17.
2. "Indo-Aryan and Hindi", p. 64.

did 'Pūjana' become popular and the prevalent form of worship among all the classes of people but even in pure 'Yajana' of sacrifices image-worship was brought in, in one form or another. For example, the 'Pūjana' of Gaṇapati has got its priority in every type of 'Yajana'.

D. R. Bhandarkar<sup>1</sup> deals with the problem of non-Vedic sects in some details in his "Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture". In this work, he draws upon archaeological researches as well as literary works like Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Sūtras, Piṭakas and Āgamas. There he shows the origin of Śaivism to lie in non-Vedic Vrātya cult. Similarly according to him Jainism and Buddhism have their origin in a Vṛṣala tribe. This tribe had its own independent civilization and gave stubborn resistance to the imposition of Brāhmaṇic culture by the Aryans. This tribe chiefly resided in the north-east part of the country which is now known as Bihar and which is the birthplace of Jainism and Buddhism. In fact he has ably discussed the relation of the non-Vedic cultures with that of Vedic ones and has shown how some of the non-Vedic cults like Yoga and others were assimilated in Vedic cult.

The findings of D. R. Bhandarkar strengthen the older hypothesis of Winternitz pertaining to the independent origin of the Śramaṇa sects. Winternitz has discussed the problem in some detail in his lectures on 'Ascetic Literature in Ancient India'.<sup>2</sup> He has paid tributes to the scholars like Rhys David, E. Lenmann and Richard Garbe who combated the older view of Vedic origin of the Śramaṇa sects. His chief grounds are the constant occurrence of the term Śramaṇa-Brāhmaṇa in Buddhist Piṭakas and in Aśoka's inscriptions; legends, poetic maxims and parables found in the *Mahābhārata* as well as in *Purāṇas*. He closely examines the Pitā-Putra Saṁvāda, Tulādhāra-Jājali Saṁvāda, Madhubindu parable and such other Saṁvādas and compares them with their different versions found in Jaina Āgamas and Buddhist *Jātakas*. Thus examining thoroughly the different passages referring to asceticism and showing their contrast with those referring to ritualism, he concludes, "The origin of such ascetic poetry found in the *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* may have been either Buddhist or Jaina or the parable passages may all go back to the same source of an ascetic literature that probably arose in connection with Yoga and Sāṅkhya teaching."<sup>3</sup> The Sāṅkhya and Yoga schools, as we have

1. "Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture", pp. 40-52.

2. "Some Problems of Indian Literature", p. 21.

3. *Ibid.*, page 40.

seen above, may have been non-Vedic in origin. When some of the Vedic Brāhmaṇas were convinced of the Nivṛttipara path or asceticism and left ritualism, the schools which accepted the authority of Vedas and also the superiority of Brāhmaṇas by birth got slowly assimilated to the Vedic cult. Probably amongst Śramaṇa sects, Sāṅkhyas were the first to accept the authority of the Vedas and the superiority of Brāhmaṇas by birth; and perhaps this may be the reason why we find Sāṅkhya teachings reflected in the early Upaniṣads.

Whatever may be the case, this brief survey points out to one fact and that is that by the time of Mahāvīra and Buddha the Śramaṇas were a powerful influence affecting the spiritual and ethical ideas of the people. Even though by process of assimilation the Nivṛtti outlook became a common ideal both among the thinkers of the earlier Upaniṣads as well as among the Śramaṇa thinkers, the fact of the Śramaṇa thinkers (that is, Jainas and Bauddhas) rejecting the authority of Vedas, the superiority of Brāhmaṇas by birth and their repugnance to animal-sacrifice as a form of worship, made them socially distinct and an antagonistic force with which the powerful and well-established Vedic sects had to contest. Here it may be noted that references in the earlier Buddhist *Piṭakas* and Jaina *Āgamas* as well as in Aśoka's inscriptions to Śramaṇa-Brāhmaṇa do not indicate any enmity but imply that both are regarded as respectable. It is only in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* which is later than Aśoka, that we find the compound Śramaṇa-Brāhmaṇam suggesting enmity. This may be the result of a contest of centuries between Śramaṇas and Brāhmaṇas.

Whether we accept this protestant-theory of the origin and rise of the Śramaṇa or the theory of their independent pre-Vedic origin, one thing is clear that there was a great ferment of Śramaṇa thought in or about the period of the earliest Upaniṣads and Āraṇyakas, i.e., about 800 B.C. As we have said above, the history of Jaina church also does not start with Mahāvīra but it goes as far back as Pārśva, i.e., 800 B.C.

The Jaina Āgamas which are the earliest source for life and teachings of Mahāvīra point to one fact very clearly and that is that the Jñātaputra Vardhamāna had to make his way through a crowd of Śramaṇa and Vedic "Titthiyas" or "Tirthikas". Another point which becomes clear from Āgamas is that Vardhamāna's method was to harmonise and assimilate as much of different contending sects as was consistent with his main ideal of Mokṣa. This peculiar trait of Mahāvīra's method seems to be

responsible for giving his school the name and character of Anekāntavāda and Syādvāda. The essence of these Vādas lies in harmonising the different ways of thought by regarding them as so many different points of viewing reality and grasping truth. This character of Jainism explains why throughout its history it has always studied carefully the religio-philosophical ideas of other schools and developed the Anekānta doctrine in relation to the growth of various Darśanas.

