

THE ISI HĀSIYĀI AND PĀLI BHDDHIST TEXTS—A STUDY

C. S. Upasak

The *Isibhāsiyāi* (*Rṣibhāsitāni* :¹ c. 2nd-1st cent B. C.) is the only Prākṛta Jaina text which incorporates the sayings of some 44 (or 45) seers most of whom, from the later Jaina standpoint, are definitely heretics, or at best are those that belonged to contemporary non-Jaina religious folds. These saints are designated as 'Isi' (Rṣi, though not in the same connotation as given in the Brahmanical texts), in this ancient Jaina work. They, moreover, and invariably, are called 'Arahā' (Arhat), the two honorific terms are used there as synonyms. 'Isi' is a person gifted with special spiritual powers of insight and intuition, a holy man, an anchorite. In Pāli Buddhist texts, 'Isi' occurs as a synonym of "Pacceka-buddha," and probably was used in the same sense as implied in the Jaina texts. Pacceka-buddha attains 'enlightenment' by himself, without any guidance or help of a teacher like the Buddha, but does not indulge in proclaiming and propagating the 'Truth' and so does not found his 'Saṅgha' or sect and hence had no following.² It appears that, in the Buddhist texts, the Buddha, the Pacceka-buddha and the Arhat as terms were somewhat more frequently employed than in the Jaina texts where the term *muni* became popular for a saint, although all these terms were known to both the branches of the Śramaṇic culture. Undoubtedly, the term Pacceka-buddha has been exclusively used by the Buddhists in early times, the Jainas seemingly adopted it later. In the Buddhist tradition the Pacceka-buddha was held in very high esteem and is mentioned along with the Buddha and the Arhat. During the Kuṣāṇa period, in the early centuries of the Christian era, when the worship of the Buddha became more popular by his thorough deification, the worship of Pacceka-buddha also became popular. In the Taxila Scroll Inscription of a Kuṣāṇa king (year 136 / A. D. 79), exhumed from Dharmarājika stūpa along with the relics of the Buddha, the worship of Pacceka-buddha is recorded together with the Buddha and the Arhat³.

The *Isibhāsiyāi* is a text in which, as the later Jaina commentaries explain (pointed out also by Walther Schubring), the term 'Isi' is used in the sense of Pratyeka-buddha, although in the text the term Pratyeka-buddha never figures; instead, we largely find Arahata, and sometimes not even 'Isi' for a saint.

For instance, Sātiputta (No. 38) is designated as Buddha (*Sātiputtena Buddhena Arahataṁ bhuṭam*). At most of the places in the *Isibhāsiyāi*, the assertions of the saints are described as....*arahataṁ isinā bhuṭam*, thus specifically calling them both 'Isi' and Arahata (not Pratyeka-buddha). The text also refers to an Arahata and 'Isi' (No. 21) who is described as *taruṇa* (young) in age and who was the son of a middle

class householder (*gāhāpatiputta*) suggesting that usually the *isis* were of advanced age and hailed from the upper class of the society, mostly Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas. Four Brāhmaṇa *parivrājakas* (non-śramanic wanderer-ascetic), namely Piṅgala (No. 32), Isigiri (Rṣigiri) (No. 34), Sirigiri (Śrīgiri) (No. 37) and Divāyaṇa (Dvipāyaṇa) (No. 40) are mentioned in the text; while three of them are designated as *Arahat* and *Isi*, Isigiri (No. 34) is called only *Arahata*.

Buddhist Influence

As we earlier have seen, the *Isibhāsiyāi* includes the assertions of a number of sages which definitely are either of Buddhist or Brahmanic folds. A number of its verses are parallel to early Pāli Buddhist texts, some of them being almost exactly the same, both in general form and content. This feature of the text points to its being very ancient, probably soon after some of the more ancient texts of the Pāli Tipiṭaka. The inclusion of the sages not belonging to the Jaina, leaves no doubt that the 'sages' or 'seers' in true sense were equally revered and honoured by other religionists also, notwithstanding their philosophical differences or ecclesiastical and religious practices. The *Isibhāsiyāi* in this respect is an illustrious text, indeed very important for the cultural study of ancient India, revealing as it does the cultural commonality shared by all the religionists of that period. Sainly personages in ancient India were held in the highest esteem by the society and they commanded the utmost respect. This fact is known from several sources, but mainly from literature.

The account of these *Isis* in the text is called *Ajjhayaṇa* (Skt. *Adhyayana*) or 'study' of the philosophical views of the sages. However, neither chronological order nor sect-wise grouping can be noticed in the text. It contains rather an arbitrary selection and equally arbitrary ordering of the *Isis*.

The very first *Ajjhayaṇa* is about Nārada. Nārada is a popular "Devarṣi" in the Brahmanical mythology; in the Pāli text also, the personages bearing the name Nārada are equally popular. Pāli texts mention as many as 18 persons with this appellation.⁴ It is difficult to ascertain the identity of the Nārada of the *Isibhāsiyāi* with any found in the Pāli texts. There is one Thera Nārada in the *Samyutta-Nikāya* (II, 115) who declares himself as being aware of the nature of Nibbāna, but he is not an *Arahanta*. The ninth out of the twenty-four Buddhas was also called by this name (but not Paccekabuddha). Two sages called 'Nārada' are mentioned in the *Jātakas*. One is described as a 'sage', brother of Kāladevala and pupil of Jotipāla in the *Indriya Jātaka* (No. 433) and the other is an ascetic, son of sage Kassapa who finds mention in the *Cullanārada Jātaka* (No. 220). Obviously, the *Isibhāsiyāi* text may have referred to any of these sages having this name, but probably not that of the Brahmanical mythology, as we do not find any hint toward him in the *Isibhāsiyāi*.

The second saint of the text is Vajjiputta, who is both Arahāt and Isi. He is said to have advocated the law of *kamma* (*karma*). It is *kamma* which determines the future birth on the basis of the deeds done in the past. Of the *kammas*, *moha* (delusion) is the cause of all the sufferings. As the name suggests, he belonged to the Vajji (Vātsi) clan of Vesālī (Vaiśālī), and probably a person of some standing. In the Pāli Buddhist texts, two Vajjiputta Theras figure, who probably represent one and the same person (Cf. *DPPN* Vol. II, p. 810, 811). He is called there an *Arahāt*. In the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakkathā* (III, 406ff.) he is called 'Rājā'; probably, then, he belonged to the princely family of Vesālī. The *Isibhāsiyāi* perhaps refers to this very Vajjiputta Thera of the Buddhist text. He may be regarded as the one who was the head of the Vajjiputras, as Schubring chooses to describe (p. 4). But Vajjiputra school of thinking flourished somewhat later, probably later than our text.

The name of another sage, Devila (No. 4) of the text figures in the Pāli text as Devala and also as Asita Devala (*DPPN* vol. I, p. 70). And if we take Devila as Devala, we are reminded of a sage who visited the court of Suddhodana, the father of Gautama Buddha, and who prophesied that the child Siddhārtha will become a 'Cakravrtti' if he chose to be the ruler, and, if a recluse, would become a Buddha. He is said to have attained various miraculous powers, *iddhis* (*riddhis*). Because of his dark complexion and probably to distinguish him from other sage of the same name, he is known as Asita Devala or Kāladevala (*DPPN*. Vol. I, p. 208). Another sage by the same name is known from the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (I. 32). He lived in the Himālayas and once, while he was staying with another ascetic named Nārada under the same roof, the latter was trodded over in the night : (Cf. *DPPN*. II, p. 1116). A Paccekabuddha with this name is mentioned in the *Theragāthā Aṭṭhakathā* (I. 368), At least five persons of this name are found in different Pāli texts (Cf. *DPPN*. Vol. I, p. 1116), and it appears that the *Isibhāsiyāi* refers to any of them, very probably to Asita Devala.

One other saintly personage referred to in the *Isibhāsiyāi* is Aṅgīrasa Bhārad-daya (Aṅgīrasa Bhāradvāja) (No. 4) who is mentioned several times in the Pāli texts as one of the ancient Vedic seers. (*DPPN*. Vol. I, p. 20). A Paccekabuddha bearing that name is also mentioned in the *Majjhimanikāya* (III, 70) for instance. Even the Buddha is called Aṅgīrasa several times in the Pāli texts (Cf. *DPPN*. Vol. I, p. 20). Another ascetic by this name occurs also in the *Jātaka* (IV. 99) in a list of eleven ascetics who were born in the heaven Brahmāloka. (Cf. *DPPN*. I, p. 20). The *Isibhāsiyāi* probably refers to the Vedic Ṛṣi by this name.

An Arahanta Bakkula Thera is referred to in the Pāli text who got the initiation at the age of eighty and became emancipated only within eight days after hearing the preachings of the Buddha. Vakkalaciri (No. 6) of the *Isibhāsiyāi* is probably different from Bakkula Thera of Pāli text, Vakkalaciri probably was a seer of the Brahmanical tradition who used to clad himself with the cloth made of

bark (*valkala*). Mendicants with this dress are common in the Brahmanical tradition who used to clad themselves with the cloth made of bark (*valkala*). (In the Jaina lore, the personality of the Brahmanical “*R̥ṣyaśṛṅga*” has been fused with “*Vakkalaciri*”).

Mahākāsava (No. 9) is obviously the same person who is known in the Pāli texts as Mahākassapa, one of the most eminent disciples of the Buddha. He had attained a very high level in saintlihood. He, in point of fact, is the same great patriarch who presided over the First Buddhist Council held at Rājagṛha in order to make the collection of the words of the Buddha soon after his *Mahāparinibbāna*. (DPPN. Vol. II, pp. 476-483). The prose and the verses occurring in the *Isibhāsiyāi* in his context deal with the theory of *kammavāda* as propounded by the Buddha which supports the authenticity of the text. The text's statements ascribed to Mahākāsava are true, as they should be upheld by one of the Buddha's main disciples like Mahākassapa.

Maṅkhaliputta of the text (No. 11) is obviously “Makkhali Gosāla”, one of the six heretical teachers mentioned in the Pāli texts, who were contemporary to the Buddha. He is also known to the Jaina texts, particularly the *Vyākhyāprajñpti*. Gosāla had his own followers and his own Saṅgha. In the Buddhist Pāli texts he is described as *Saṅghī* and *Gaṇī* which suggest that he was enjoying a high status among the mendicants of Buddha's time. He is said to have propounded the view that there is no cause either ultimate or remote for the depravity of beings or for their reitude. But his views are confused and difficult to understand : (DPPN. Vol. II, pp. 398-400). So we find here, in the *Isibhāsiyāi*, as rightly pointed out in its Commentary, that while the stanzas 1-4 deal with the acquired knowledge, the stanza 5 contradicts the moral insight : (*Isibhāsiyāi*, p. 107).

During the life time of the Buddha, a sage Uddaka Rāmaputta was renowned for ascetic practices. As is recorded, the Buddha also went to him for instructions soon after leaving his home as a wanderer. Although the Buddha abandoned him for finding him not ‘perfect’, he held him in high regard because of his spiritual attainments. In the *Isibhāsiyāi* (No. 23) we find him described both as an *Arahat* and *Isi*. He is said to have believed that, by purifying the eight types of defilements (*mala*), one reaches a stage where he remains for ever. In the Pāli texts he is said to have attained a state of “neither consciousness nor non-consciousness (*Nevasañña nāsañña*), the ‘Fourth’ *jhāna* where factors like *sukha* (happiness) and *ekaggatā* (*ekāgratā*, concentration) exist.

The 26th *Isi* of the *Isibhāsiyāi* is devoted to Māyaṅga who may be identified with Mātāṅga of the Pāli texts. However, there occur four persons bearing this name. He may be the one who is said to be a Paccekabuddha : (DPPN. Vol. II, p. 599). The allegory of *kṛṣi* or tilling of the land as found in the *Isibhāsiyāi* may be compared with the description found in the “*Kāsi bhāra-dvāja-sutta*” of the

Suttanipāta Cf. Gathā 77, *Khuddakanikāya* Vol. I, Nal. Ed., p. 281) and also in the *Samyutta-nikāya* with a little variation.

Piṅga is another Brāhmaṇa *parivrājaka* (No. 32) whose utterances are recorded in the text. His statements may be compared with the sayings of the above 'Isi Māyaṅga'. Both of these *Isis* compare the life of an ascetic with a farmer who tills the land by the bulls, sows the seeds in the field; so also the ascetics till the land of *ātmā*; the *tapa* or penance is the seed, *saṁyama* or moral restraint is like the two *naṅgalas* or furrows and *ahimsā* is the rains of the mendicants. This is the 'divine agriculture' or *Ādharma-garbha-kṛṣi*. Here, again, the allegory is the same as we find in the *Suttanipāta* and in the *Samyutta-nikāya* of the Pāli Tipiṭaka as mentioned in the foregoing. These similar accounts suggest that the ascetics or religious wonderers had to encounter with the people for substantiating their 'unproductive' way of life. The Buddha also had to justify his monastic life by comparing it with the life of a farmer while discussing with Kāsi Bhārdvāja, a big landlord of his time.

Isi Piṅga of the *Isibhāsiyāi* text is said to be a Brāhmaṇa *Parivrājaka*. The *Anguttaranikāya* mentions one Brāhmaṇa named Piṅgiyānī of Vesālī who is said to be the follower of the Buddha. (*DPPN*. Vol. II, p. 199ff.) Again, in the *Samyuttanikāya* (I. 35, 60), another Piṅgiya is described as a Bhikkhu who attained Arahātship. It is difficult to discern Piṅga of the *Isibhāsiyāi* from any of the Pāli texts. The Jaina text probably refers to an earlier Piṅga from whom a line Piṅgiyānī emanated. But the allegorical illustrations are interestingly similar which point to the archaic nature and hence antiquity of the *Isibhāsiyāi*.

The utterances of the two sages, namely Sātiputta and Sañjaya are placed in the text one after another (Nos. 38 & 39). Sātiputta has been identified with Sāriputta of the Pāli canon. He is one of the two "Chief Disciples" (*Aggasāvakas*) of Gotama Buddha, the other is Moggallāna. The Buddha has praised Sāriputta as 'foremost among those who possessed wisdom' (*Etaggaṃ mahāpaññānam*): He is looked upon as a sage next to the Buddha, as wise in understanding the Dhamma as the Buddha himself. Significantly, in the *Isibhāsiyāi*, he is the only saint who is designated as 'Buddha' and 'Arahat' while other sages hold the title of 'Isi' and 'Arahat' or 'Isi' or 'Arahat' only. Probably because of his first grade spiritual achievements he was held in high esteem and reverence by all other religionists of the period. He was probably popular among other sects and equally among the Jaina saints who also paid him full regard on account of his spiritual attainments. The compiler of the *Isibhāsiyāi* probably was aware of the esteemed personality of Sāriputta and so calls him 'Buddha' (not *isi*), and thus, the text in the original linguistic form may be a composition of not later than the 3rd or 2nd cent. B. C., if not still earlier. The other saint Sañjaya, a contemporary of Sāriputta (and also of the Buddha and Mahāvira) is included in the list of six 'heretical teachers'

in the Pāli texts. (DPPN. Vol. II, p. 999ff.) He is called there Sañjaya Velatthiputta. Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two 'Chief Disciples' of the Buddha were his earlier disciples before they joined the Order of the Buddha. Sañjaya had formed his own Saṅgha and probably had gathered a good number of followers. It is recorded in the Pāli texts that he had died soon after Sāriputta joined the Saṅgha of the Buddha at Rājagṛha. Sañjaya of *Isibhāsiyāi* appears to be the same saint who is known to the Pāli texts. In the Commentary (*Saṅgrahaṇī*) of *Isibhāsiyāi*, both Sāriputta and Sañjaya are described as non-Jain saints in the *tīrtha* (life time) of Mahāvīra. This indicates the authenticity of the text and also proves that both were contemporary to the Buddha and Mahāvīra, as also evidenced from other sources.

The teachings of the above-noted saints succinctly recorded in the *Isibhāsiyāi* and traceable in the early Pāli Buddhist texts, are once more points in evidence as regards the venerable antiquity of the text. The author of the text is well aware of the great saints of ancient India and so he records their names and their teachings on the whole fairly/accurately. Thus, this text is one more valuable source for the evaluation of the religious ambience of the times that were contemporary, preceding, and immediately succeeding Buddha and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra.

Note and References

- 1, Ed. Walther Schubring, L. D. Series 45, Ahmedabad 1974.
2. Cf. Rhys Davids, Pali-English Dictionary, p. 385; R. C. Childers, *A Dictionary of Pali Language*, p. 309; *Abhidhānarājendra*, Vol. V, p. 1325; *Tattvārthādhigama* of Umāsvāti, Pt. II (Surat, 1980), p. 309; *Sarvārthasiddhi* Ch. X-9. Also cf. for Rṣi in *Amarakoṣa*, 2.7.42. Cf. *Mahāvamśaṭīkā* XII, p. 277 (Nal. Ed.).
3. *Devaputras Khusanasa[†]arogadakṣinaye sarvabudhana puyāe pracagabudhasa puyāe-Epigraphia Indica*—I, XIV, p. 295, *C.I.I.*, Vol. II, Pt. 1, No. XXVII, p. 77.
4. DPPN, Vol. II, p. 52ff.