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**JAIN BHAWAN
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Contents

BAPPABHAṬṬI SŪRI AND JAINISM IN BENGAL	165
Chitta Ranjan Pal	
POSSITION OF THE NIRGRANTHAS (JAINAS) IN BENGAL DURING THE PERIOD OF “MĀTSYANYĀYA” OR “THE ANARCHY”	173
Chitta Ranjan Pal	
WERE THE MONKS EXPELLED FROM THE BUDDHIST SAMGHA BY AŚOKA THE JAINAS ?	180
Chitta Ranjan Pal	
BIBLIOTHECA JAINICA	193
Satya Ranjan Banerjee	

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BAPPABHAṬṬI SŪRI AND JAINISM IN BENGAL

Chitta Ranjan Pal

Bappabhaṭṭi Sūri was the most honoured Jaina monk of his time. It is said that he belonged to the Moḍha Gaccha¹ of the Svetāmbara sect of the Jainas. His spiritual attainments, theological knowledge, literary talent, dialectical skill as well as his zeal for the promotion of Jaina religion made him a legendary figure even during his life-time.

Bappabhaṭṭi's religious activities were not confined to his native kingdom alone, but extended over to different regions of the then India. In a medieval tradition quoted by Jinaprabha Sūri² it is told that he had organised a restoration of the old stūpas made by Gods at Mathura, thirteen hundred years after Mahāvīra, the last Tīrthānkara of the Jainas.

In the *Upadeśatarāṅgiṇī* of Ratnamandira Gaṇin (15th century A.D.), there is a legend which states that Ācārya Bappabhaṭṭi and his royal patron, King Āma were implored to intervene in the dispute between the Digambara and the Svetāmbara sects over the possession of the Girnar Hill.³

Prabhāvaka-carita, a collection of biographies of twenty-two Jain Ācāryas, was written by Prabhācandra in the 13th century A.D. Prabhācandra in a terse, succinct and well-knit couplet (śloka) had brought to our view multifaced talents of this learned Ācārya.

1. Sādhvī Saṅghamitrā "Varīṣṭha Vidvān Ācārya Bappabhaṭṭi," Śramaṇa, Vol xiv. no 4.
2. Jain Journal, Vol III, No. 4 Māhāvira Jayanti Special, 1969.
3. *Upadeśatarāṅgiṇī*, Chapter IV, quoted from Ramāprasad Chanda's "Śvetāmbara & Digambara images.

The fine and concise śloka expressing the special traits of the learned monk is quoted below :

*“Bappabhaṭṭir bhadrakīrtir vādī Kuñjarakeśarī
Brahmacārī Gajavarorāja pūjita ityapi.”*

The couplet means that Bappabhaṭṭisūri had a second name, Bhadrakīrti; he was proficient in dialectics, he had vanquished a disputant, obtained for himself, the grand title “the lion who defeated the elephant in debate,” he was the greatest Brahmacārī or the most punctilious observer of the vows of chastity among the monks and was honoured by the royal personalities of the time.

In 1348, Rājaśekharasūri wrote his famous book “*Prabandha-koṣa*”. This Koṣa contains twenty four stories, ten of which are related to the biographies of Jaina preceptors including that of Bappabhaṭṭi sūri. As the “*Bappabhaṭṭi-sūri-prabandha*” was written about five hundred years after the demise of the great Ācārya, it abounds in legendary and fictitious elements.

After the perusal of the legends centering round his early life, it may be stated that Bappabhaṭṭi, at a very tender age was ordained to monkhood by Siddhasena, the preceptor of the Moḍha Gaccha of the Śvetāmbara community.⁴ Sometime after his initiation, he got acquainted with prince Āma of Gopagiri and this acquaintance, in course of time, turned into an inseparable and permanent bond between the two - Bappabhaṭṭi and prince Āma.⁵

On being crowned king of Kanauj, Prince Āma brought Bappabhaṭṭi to his royal court where he spent many years at a stress. But “the morally enervating atmosphere of the royal court” proved uncomfortable to him.⁶ So, one day he secretly left the court and the kingdom of Āma and proceeded towards the East and reached

4. Sādhvī Saṅghamitra, Śramaṇa. vol XIV. no. 4.

5. Mrs Steveson, Heart of Jainism, p. 83.

6. Ibid.

Lakṣaṇāvātī, the Capital of Gauḍa, where king Dharma was on the throne at that time. Vākpatirāja, the courtier of king Dharma, brought Bappabhaṭṭi to the royal presence.

Spiritual attainments and theological knowledge of Bappabhaṭṭi made a deep impression upon King Dharma who did not hesitate to pay homage and extend lavish hospitality to the Ācārya. It is said that Bappabhaṭṭi convinced king Dharma of the soundness of Jaina faith and the Gauḍa King adhered to the new religion.⁷

At that time there was a very learned Buddhist scholar and dialectician named Vardhana - Kuṅjara in Lakṣaṇāvātī. King Dharma invited Bappabhaṭṭi to enter into a debate with the Buddhist scholar. The Buddhist scholar was so adept in religious disputations that it was almost impossible to defeat him in any debate. So Bappabhaṭṭi took the recourse of a clever trick and defeated him in the debate and gained for himself the grand title of Vādikuṅjara-keśarī “i. e. the lion who defeated the elephant in argument.”⁸

The long absence of Bappabhaṭṭi from the royal court proved painful to king Āma who sent emissaries to Lakṣaṇāvātī to bring him back to Kanauj. But the Ācārya declined to leave Lakṣaṇāvātī. So king Āma in disguise went to Lakṣaṇāvātī where he had to spend a night at the residence of a lady of ill-repute and was ultimately successful in bringing the Ācārya back to Kanauj.⁹

After his arrival to Gopagiri or Kanauj, Bappabhaṭṭi went to see his preceptor, Siddhasena, who was waiting for death at that time. The old preceptor handed over the charge of guiding the Gaccha to Bappabhaṭṭi and breathed his last like a true Jaina monk by Sallekhana.¹⁰

Bappabhaṭṭi delegated the charge of guiding the Gaccha to two senior monks Nanna Sūri and Govinda Sūri¹¹ and departed to the royal court of Kanauj where he found that King Āma had been

7. Ibid.

8. *Prabandhakōṣa* (Bappabhaṭṭi Prabandha).

9. Ibid.

10. *Sādhvī Samghamitra, Śramaṇa*, vol. XIV, no. 4

11. Ibid.

enamoured by the beauty of a bewitching dancing girl from whose clutches he was able to save the misled king and set him to right path.¹²

In another legend related to Gauḍa it is stated that once king Yaśovarman, all of a sudden, attacked King Dharma, defeated and killed him in the battle field. Then he made Vākpati, the courtier of king Dharma, captive. Vākpati wrote in prison the famous Prākṛit Kāvya *Gauḍavaha* in praise of King Yaśovarman. The eulogy so pleased the King that he set Vākpatirāja free.¹³

Bappabhaṭṭi spent greater part of his life at the court and Kingdom of Āma and the king promoted the cause of Jaina religion at his advice in his kingdom by building monasteries, Upāśrayas etc. Sometimes, king Āma accompanied Bappabhaṭṭi to his religious missions¹⁴ and at a mature age king Āma, the Pratihāra King, died and some years after the death of King Āma, Bappabhaṭṭi starved himself to death like a true Jaina monk in 839 A.D. at a ripe age of 94 years.¹⁵

Like the life-stories of other religious preceptors, the biography of Bappabhaṭṭi is an admixture of legends and history, facts and fictions. At the back ground of the religious performances of the Ācārya, activities of some royal personalities of history, like king Yaśovarman, prince Āma, king Dharma, poet Vākpatirāja are discernable, but in these royal activities lack of synchronization of chronology is evident. But it is not a very difficult task to winnow the husks of legends and fictions from the kernel of historical truth.

12. Mrs. Stevenson, Heart of Jainism.

13. *Prabandhakoṣa* (Bappabhaṭṭi Prabandha)

14. *Upadeśataranṅiṇi* quoted from R.P. Chanda's Śvetāmbara and Digambara images.

15. *Prabhāvākacaritra* (quoted from Sādhvī Samghamitra's article, Śramaṇa, vol XIV no. 4

From the legends it is evident that Ācārya Bappabhaṭṭi was a contemporary to both prince Āma of Gopagiri (Kanauj) and king Dharma of Bengal. Prince Āma has been identified with Vatsarāja of Pratihāra dynasty by some historians¹⁶ whereas some scholars have identified Āma with Nāgabhaṭṭa II of the same dynasty¹⁷. As the identification of Prince Āma does not fall within the purview of our discussions, we may skip over this question. King Dharma at whose court Bappabhaṭṭi was well-received was none but Dharma Pāla, emperor of Bengal and with Dharma Pāla, king of Bengal, Vatsaraja and Nāgabhaṭṭa of the Pratihāra dynasty had to wage many battles. But to make Yaśovarman of Kanauja, a contemporary of king Dharma who was stated to have been killed by Yaśovarman, is not only an example of anachronism but also a misstatement of historical fact. In fact, king Yaśovarman of Kanauj was slain by Lalitāditya of Kashmir, many years before the accession of Dharmapāla to the throne of Gauḍa. It is also to be noted that Lakṣaṇāvati was made the Capital of Gauḍa about three hundred years after Dharmapāla.

After a little digression, let us now concentrate upon legends related to Gauḍa kingdom and its ruler. As already stated, Bappabhaṭṭi convinced Dharmapāla of the soundness of Jaina faith and converted him to Jainism. At first glance, the claim seems to be nothing but vainboasting, but after a little deliberation, the claim seems to have a semblance of truth in it. It is a well-known fact that Dharmapāla was a Buddhist and adorned his kingdom with monasteries and stupas. He patronised thousands of Buddhist monks and scholars. In spite of being a Buddhist, he was eclectic in religious disposition, granted four villages to a Brahmin for the performance of worship of Nārāyaṇa. He also appointed Garga, a Brahmin by caste, to the high position of the chief minister.¹⁸ So it was but natural for Dharmapāla, a tolerant

16. Age of Imperial Kanauj, ed. by R.C.Majumdar. p.290

17. Jain Journal, Vol III, No. 4 Mahāvīra Jayanti special. 1969.

18. Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar, Banglādeśer Itihāsa Vol I. p. 67.

king to show respect to the reputed preceptor of the Jainas as well as to his faith. This attitude of Dharmapāla to Bappabhaṭṭi and to his faith was construed as conversion of Dharmapāla to Jainism.

It has been already stated that Bappabhaṭṭi was invited by king Dharmapāla to enter into a religious debate with a great Buddhist scholar Vardhanakunjara whom he eventually defeated and earned for himself the grand designation of “*Vādi Kuñjara Keśari*” the lion who defeated the elephant in argument.”¹⁹

As the name “Vardhana-Kunjara” could not be traceable to the list of the Buddhist teachers and preceptors who flourished during the reign of king Dharmapāla, it was thought by Jinologists and historians that the whole event of the debate as well as the defeat of the Buddhist scholar was invented for the glorification of the Ācārya. But it seems to the present writer that the event is not a figment of imagination of the medieval Jaina authors. The event of debate is not illusory, but an historical fact and the name of the participant Buddhist scholar is Pūrṇavardhana traceable to the galaxy of Buddhist Ācārya.²⁰ (The identification of Vardhana Kunjara with Pūrṇavardhana has been discussed at the end of the article.) Though Rājāśekharasūri speaks of the victory of the Jaina Ācārya, he did not belittle the scholarship and erudition of the Buddhist disputant. Even he did not underrate the hold of Buddhist religion upon the people of Gauḍa Vaṅga, because Rājāśekharasūri did not hesitate to divulge that Vardhana Kuñjara/Pūrṇavardhana was defeated by a clever trick which was played upon him by Bappabhaṭṭi. Of course, the playing of such tricks over their opponents were not considered a matter of shame, according to the standard of that age.

As stated earlier, the name of the Buddhist scholar who participated in the religious disputation was Vardhana-Kunjara-an unusual and peculiar name to be the proper name of a person. The

19. Mrs. Stevenson, Heart of Jainism.

20. Tāranātha's “History of Buddhism in India”. ed. D. P. Chattopadhyaya p. 276.

name is a compound of two words - (I) Vardhana and (II) Kuñjara. The meaning of the word Vardhana is *vṛdhi* or growth or development whereas the meaning of the word kuñjara is *hastī* or an elephant. So the meaning of the compound Vardhana Kuñjara is *Vridhi Hasti* or *Vardhana - Hasti*. It is to be noted that the name would have been endowed with a meaning had the name been Kunjara Vardhana. Such names as Nandi Vardhana, Rājya Vardhana were not unknown in ancient India. In Sanskrit, when the word kuñjara is placed after another word, it undergoes a change in meaning. As, for example, Nara-kunjara means *nara-śreṣṭha* or greatest of men or best man.

In the same way, Vardhana - kuñjara, may mean fullest of growth or in Sanskrit “Pūrṇa - Vardhana”. So, there should be no difficulty in identifying Vardhana Kuñjara with Pūrṇa-varadhana.

In this connection, it will be better to remember that, Rājaśekharaśūri in “*Prabandhakōṣa*” did not use the proper name of king Āma anywhere. In another book, “*Āryamañjuśri mūla kalpa*” kings of different dynasties and different times were never called by their proper names but either by synonyms or by the first letter of their proper names. As, for example, ‘H’ for Harsavardhana “R” for Rajyavardhana and “Soma” - a synonym for king Śaśāṅka of Bengal etc. have been used.²¹

The present writer is of opinion that Vardhana Kuñjara of Jaina tradition and Pūrṇavardhana of Lāmā Tāranātha’s book is identical and the same person. Lāmā Tāranātha in his famous book “History of Buddhism in India” has put up a list of Buddhist preachers, teachers and scholars who illuminated the horizon of Eastern India during the reign of Dharmapala.²² In that list Pūrṇavardhana occupies a pre-eminent place among the Buddhist Ācāryas. And to Pūrṇavardhana Tibetan Tanjur attributes the authorship of a commentary on Abhidharmakoṣa and an abridged version of the same.

21. R. C. Mazumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, p.53.

22. Tāranātha’s History of Buddhism in India, p. 276. f. n. 13.

It seems that Vardhanakuñjara of Jaina tradition and Tāranātha's Pūrṇavardhana is one and inentical person and this Pūrṇavardhana who was a great scholar and a reputed author had the misfortune of being defeated by Jaina Ācārya Bappabhaṭṭisūri.

The notion that there was no Buddhist scholar bearing such name as Vardhanakuñjara needs rectification. In fact, Pūrṇavardhana of Tāranātha's account and Vardhanakuñjara of the Jaina writers was the same person, figuratively the Buddhist scholar was so-called by the Jainas.

In conclusion, it is to be stated that whatever might be the name of the Buddhist disputant and whether Vardhanakuñjara and Pūrṇavardhana was the same person or not, there is no denying the fact that a religious debate did really occur between a Buddhist scholar and Bappabhaṭṭi in which the latter triumphed. This event proves the existance of a fair number of Jainas in ancient Bengal and Bappabhaṭṭi's triumph boosted up the morale of this Jaina community. It is for the sake of Jaina community of Bengal that Bappabhaṭṭi overstayed in the Kingdon of Gauḍa (declining the overtures from king Āma) and not for the hospitality and respect shown to him by Dharmapāla.

In fact, the long sojourn of Bappabhaṭṭi to Bengal, the vain but bold claim of conversion of Dharmapāla to Jaina faith, the discomfiture of a Buddhist scholar in a religious debate all these facts unerringly point to the vigorous existence of the Jaina community in an age when Buddhism was in resurgence in Bengal.

POSITION OF THE NIRGRANTHAS (JAINAS) IN BENGAL DURING THE PERIOD OF “MĀTSYANYĀYA” OR “THE ANARCHY”

Chitta Ranjan Pal

Among the heretical religions, Jainism was popular in Bengal for a period of more than a millennium from the B. C. 4th century to the middle of the A.D. 7th century. Hien-en-Tsang's travel account “Si-yu-ki” is the last literary record which speaks of the existence of a large number of Nirgranthas (Jainas) in Puṇḍravardhana and Samataṭa.¹ After “Si-yu-ki” no written foreign or indigenous records pertaining to the existence of the Jainas or Nirgranthas in Bengal have come down to us.² Inscriptional evidence is simply non-existent. All-out non-existence of the literary and epigraphic evidence referring to the existence of the Nirgranthas (Jainas) in Bengal for a period of five hundred years from the middle of the 7th century to the advent of the 13th century A.D. had led Jainologists to conclude that the Nirgranthas (Jainas) had suffered a sudden collapse in Bengal after the middle of the A.D. 7th century.

These scholars had adduced two causes for this sudden decay : (1) unprecedented efflorescence of Buddhism, consequent upon the enthronement of the Pāla Kings in Bengal and (2) the resurgence of the Brāhmanical Hinduism in Bengal under the umbrellas of the Sena and Varman Kings.³

As the post-seventh century literary as well as epigraphic evidence is virtually non-existent, so if any allusion to the existence of the Jainas either direct or disguised is met with should be scrutinized with care and patience.

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1. Watters - Yuan Chwang. Vol II
 2. N.R. Ray - Bāṅgālir Itihāsa (Ādiparva)
 3. R. C. Mazumder - Jainism in Ancient Bengal, Jain Journal, vol XVIII. no. 4

In fact, the history of Bengal for over a period of a century since the death of the King Śaśāṅka of Kaṛṇasuvārṇa is itself an age of darkness. The period from the second half of the seventh century to the second half of the eighth century A.D. was an age of untold sufferings and miseries for the people of Bengal as they were the victims of “a series of foreign aggressions and successive changes of royal dynasties”.⁴ In this context Lāmā Tāranātha’s observation is worth quoting: “In odivisa, in Bengal and the other five provinces of the East, each Kṣatriya, Brāhmaṇa and merchant constituted himself a king of his surroundings, but there was no king ruling in the country” (Indian Antiquary, Vol : IV, p. 365 ff.)⁵. The much-maligned “*Ārya Mañjuśri-mūla-kalpa*” stated in the same vein, “after the death of Soma(Śaśāṅka), the Gauḍa Political system (*Gauḍatantra*) was reduced to mutual distrust, raised weapons and mutual jealousy - one (King) for a week, another for a month and then a republican constitution. Such will be the daily (condition) of the country on the bank of the Ganges where houses were built on the ruins of monasteries.”⁶

In Sanskrit such an anarchical condition of a country is called “Mātsyanyāya” which literary means “the swallowing of smaller fishes by the bigger ones” and politically it signifies the “absence of any central ruling authority” resulting in unmitigated chaos and untold miseries reigning supreme all over the country.⁷

When such was the political condition of Gauḍa, Vaṅga, Kaṛṇasuvārṇa and other regions of Bengal, the socio-religious condition of the country can better be imagined.

4. R. C. Majumdar - History of Ancient Bengal.

5. Quoted from R. P. Chanda’s “Gauḍa Rājamāla” p.25. f.n.1.

6. K. P. Jayswal’s translations, Quoted from R.C. Mazumder’s History of Ancient Bengal p. 82

7. R. C. Mazumder - History of Ancient Bengal p. 82

From the shady and cryptic accounts of “*Ārya Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*” it seems that except the Tīrthikas or the followers of Brahmanical religion, other non-Vedic heretical sects i. e. the Buddhists were on the verge of extinction.

The decaying religious picture of Buddhism as depicted by the Chronicle (*Ārya Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*) must be taken with a grain of salt. The position of the Buddhists in Bengal was not so gloomy as the author of “*Ārya Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*” would have us to believe. It is true that the Brahmanical religious sects which were in a dominant position all over North India, were also growing in strength in different parts of Bengal. But that does not mean that Buddhism was in a decaying condition during the dark age of “Mātsyanyāya”.⁸

A Buddhist royal family i. e. the Khadḡas was found ruling in Eastern Bengal covering the whole of “Samatata” and a part of “Vaṅga” from 650 - 700 A.D. The accounts left by Chinese travellers “It-sing” and “Sengchi” make it clear that Buddhism was growing from strength to strength and widening its spheres of influence. It might be possible that Buddhists, being enfeebled in some isolated areas, deserted some monasteries, but in many regions of ancient Bengal, Buddhism was in a vigorous state. The persecutory measures of Śaśāṅka failed to extinguish the fire and fervour of the followers of the Buddha for their religion.⁹ Similarly the hostility of the Tīrthikas during the period of Mātsyanyāya failed to dampen their zeal for the religion. Had not been the Buddhists, a force to be reckoned with even in the dark days of Mātsyanyāya, Gopāladeva, the founder of the Pāla dynasty, would not have dared to espouse the cause of Buddhism. As rightly remarked by Dr. R.C. Mazumdar, “The establishment of the Buddhist Pāla dynasty in Bengal about the middle of the eighth century A.D. may not, therefore, be a mere fortuitous event but was facilitated by the growing dominance of Buddhism in this region.”¹⁰ So many, but not all of the monasteries in

8. N.R.Ray's Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa (Ādiparva) p. 382

9. Watters, Yuan Chwang (Part II). Watters.

10. R. C. Mazumdar - History of Ancient Bengal p. 524

ruins as stated by “*Ārya Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*” were Buddhist in origin. Some of the monasteries in ruins probably belonged to other non-Vedic sects.

Now, the question is - which were the non-Vedic sects except the Buddhists, that fell victims to the persecution and maltreatment of the Tīrthikas during Mātsyamāya and even earlier ?

Like the Buddhists, the Nirgranthas (Jainas), were heretical in religious persuasion and were victims of the persuasion of King Śaśāṅka of Kaṇhasuvarṇa. Śaśāṅka not only destroyed the monasteries, caityas and rest-houses of the Nirgranthas (Jainas), but also deprived them of their livelihood.

Let us quote from “*Ārya Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*” the relevant śloka which tells of the oppressions perpetuated by Śaśāṅka upon the Nirgranthas (Jainas).

*“tato ’sau krudha-lubdhastu mithyāmanihyasammataḥ
vihārārama caityāśca Nirgranthām vasathām bhuvi vetsyacca tadā
sarvaṃ vṛttirodhakāraka.”*

“Then that angry and greedy evil-doer of false notions and bad opinion will fall down on all the monasteries, gardens and caityas and rest houses of the Nirgranthas and then stop the livelihood of all.”¹¹

It seems that the persecutionary measures of king Śaśāṅka fell more heavily upon the Nirgranthas (Jainas) than upon the Buddhists. And this assumption is not baseless. When Hieu-en-Tsang visited Kaṇhasuvarṇa, immediately after the death of Śaśāṅka, he found many Buddhist monks and monasteies there, whereas he found neither a Nirgrantha monk nor a Nirgrantha monastery in Kaṇhasuvarṇa.¹²

11. Translation by K.P. Jayaswal in “Imperial History of India.”

12. Watters, Yuang Chwang Vol II.

The persecution and ill-treatment which the Nirgranthas (Jainas) had suffered in the reign of Śaśānka probably continued unabated even during the days of the Mātsyanyāya by the Tīrthikas or Brahmanical religious zealots.

We would not be far wrong if we assume that many Nirgrantha (Jaina) monks of Kārṇasuvarṇa and other places left their monasteies in the reign of Śaśānka and subsequently during the Mātsyanyāya days and migrated to the fastnesses of forests and hilly tracts of Western Bengal or other safe places for the performances of their religious practices unfettered or without let or hindrance. Only a handful of Nirgrantha (Jaina) monks probably, any how, remained clung to their old habitations suffering all sorts of privations.

There is no derying the fact that the Nirgranthas (Jainas) were in the habit of leaving uncongenial habitations and migrating to safer zones for the performance of their religious duties from time immemorial. To cite an example, the exodus of a band of twelve thousand Jaina monks to south India under the leadership of Bhadrabāhu, the preceptor of Chandragupta Maurya, may be mentioned.¹³

So all the monasteries in ruins in “the country on the bank of the Ganges where houses were built” did not belong solely to the Buddhists. Some of those ruined monasteries whereupon houses were built” probably belonged to the Nirgrantha or the Jaina sect.

This assumption is no product of poetical imagination or wishful thinking. Some indirect archaeological evidence may be adduced in support of this view. An ancient copper plate inscribed in the year circa 478/479 A.D. records the gift of lands for the maintenance of a Jaina temple and worship of the Arhats or Jainas at the Vihāra founded by Nirgratha-nātha-ācārya, Guha Nandi of the Pañcastupa Nikāya of

13. Mrs. Stevenson - Heart of Jainism.

Benaras.¹⁴ This copperplate has been unearthed at the time of excavation of the site of Pāhāḍpur mound which was the celebrated site of Somapura Mahāvihāra founded by Dharmapāla, the second king of the Pāla dynasty either at the fag end of the 8th century or at the advent of the ninth century A.D.

In fact, the Pāhāḍpur Buddhist monastery or Somapura Mahāvihāra originally was an ancient Nirgrantha (Jaina) monastery constructed at least a century or more earlier than the inscribed date i.e. the 478-79 A.D. Probably the virus which sucked the vigour and life blood of the Jaina Church or Vihāra had stuck to the body of the establishment during the reign of king Śaśāṅka of Karṇasuvarṇa and the virus remained clung to the monastery till its final ruin during the reign of the great anarchy or the Mātsyanyāya when the Nirgrantha (Jaina) inmates of the Vihara left it. The Tīrthika or the Brāhmanical religious zealots occupied the ruined monastery and converted it into a Brahmanical establishment. The images of Brahmanical gods and goddesses like Śiva holding up the Trisūla, fourheaded Brahmā holding a rosary, Viṣṇu seated in Arddhaparyāṅkāsa, a two handed standing Indra in front of an elephant found in the precincts of the Vihara vouchsafe or assert this supposition.¹⁵

Later on, at the end of the 8th century or at the advent of the 9th century A.D. when Buddhism was on its height of popularity in Bengal, Dharmapāla converted it into a Buddhist Vihāra which was admired by all Buddhists and even by foreign Buddhist-devotees who came to Bengal.

Aptly it has been observed, “The Pahadpur monastery seems originally to have been a Jaina establishment, was at a later period converted into a Brahmanical one and then into a Buddhist Vihāra the famous Sompura Vihara of North Bengal.”

14. Pāhāḍpur Copperplate grant of the year 159, Epigraphia Indica Vol XX.

15. C. C. Dasgupta - Pāhāḍpur and its Monuments.

After a brief survey of the socio-religious and political scenerio of Bengal of the days of mātṣyanyāya, it is to be concluded that not all the ruined and deserted monasteries “of the country on the bank of the Ganges” were of Buddhist affiliation as referred to by *Ārya Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*. Some of those monasteries that were deserted and were in ruins during the mātṣyanyāya period were, no doubt, Nirgrantha or Jaina in origin.

WERE THE MONKS EXPELLED FROM THE BUDDHIST SAMGHA BY AŚOKA THE JAINAS ?

Chitta Ranjan Pal

On a thorough scrutiny of the detailed list of the patriarchs of the Śvetāmbara Jainas, Prof. Hermann Jacobi¹ stated that after the sixth patriarch (Bhadrabāhu) a great expansion of Jainism had taken place in North and North-West India. At the same time he brought to light a curious legend embedded in Paumacariya (LXXXIX, 42) wherein it is stated, “In India after the time of the Nanda Kings, the law of the Jina will become scarce”. Paying due weight to this tradition, Prof. Jacobi came to the conclusion that under the Mauryas Buddhism attained the position of a popular religion and became a formidable rival of Jainism, especially, in Magadha and its adjoining regions.

In fact, the steady growth and expansion of Jainism in North and North-West India, for over a century, sustained a serious set back when at the out break of a terrible famine, Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and his preceptor Bhadrabāhu accompanied by twelve thousand recluses, migrated to Mysore where the emperor died of voluntary starvation like a true Jaina saint. Even after the famine was over, the Jaina Samgha could not regain its former position in Magadha and the adjoining territories as the Samgha was torn by internal dissensions and acrimonies.

On the other hand, on conversion of Aśoka to Buddhism, the religion of the Buddha was adorned with great glory and it acquired tremendous potentiality for expansion not only into the empire ruled over by Aśoka, but also to distant lands outside his empire. In a short time legend after legend grew up around the name of Aśoka which

1. Jainism - Hermann Jacobi, in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
p.465 ff.

made him the most venerable luminary in the sky of Buddhism, next only to the Buddha. The legends, on the other hand, painted Aśoka in the hue of a religious zealot who was ever ready to punish any attempt to dishonour the Buddha.

The *Divyāvadāna* and the *Aśokāvadāna* are the store-houses of such legends. In the *Aśokāvadāna* there is a legend wherein it is stated that once a Nirgrantha (Jaina), a resident of Puṇḍravardhana drew a picture of the Buddha being trampled under the feet of a Nirgrantha (Jaina). The news reached the ear of Aśoka who inflicted capital punishment to the offender.²

The *Divyāvadāna* relates the incident in a little different manner. In the *Divyāvadāna* it is told that in the city of Puṇḍravardhana, a lay-devotee of the Nirgrantha (Jaina) order had painted a picture which depicted the Buddha falling at the feet of “the Jina”. The news reached the ear of Aśoka who in a fit of anger killed 18 thousand Ājīvikas. (*Divyānadāna*, edited by Cowell, p. 427). “The account mixed up the Nirgranthas and Ājīvikas, but the name of the sect is uniformly given as Nirgrantha in the Chinese translation.”³

Though the legend was devised to glorify Buddhism and to paint Aśoka as a great devotee of the Buddha, it tainted Aśoka as a sectarian and a persecutor of the Nirgranthas (Jainas).

That Aśoka was not well-disposed (if not hostile) to the Nirgranthas (Jainas) is attested by the legends associated with the tradition relating to the convocation of the third Buddhist council held at Pāṭaliputra during the reign of Aśoka.

The Buddhist saṃgiti or council was convoked because of the enormous growth of material prosperity of the Buddhist monasteries

2. R. L. Mitra - Nepalese Buddhist Literature p . 11

3. R. C. Mazumdar - History of Ancient Bengal, p . 33 fn 24

of Magadha, consequent upon the conversion of Aśoka to Buddhism. The material prospect of the Buddhist monasteries attracted the attention of the heretical monks who had lost their sources of getting regular alms, shelter etc. Therefore, to live in ease and comfort the indigent heretical monks began to join the Buddhist monasteries and put on yellow robes. Thus these heretical monks swelled the rank of the Buddhists. Though these heretics put on yellow robes, they did not eschew their old beliefs.

The heretical recluses who intruded into the Saṅgha along to their old beliefs and practices, preached their old heresies as the doctrines of the Buddha. This irreligious conduct of the heretics caused great distress to the Thera Moggaliputta Tissa who left Pāṭaliputra and took shelter in a secluded retreat on the Ahogangā mountain up the Ganges, where he stayed for seven years and during these seven years no *Upasatha* or *Pavāranā* ceremony was held in any monasteries. Emperor Aśoka was so pained at heart that he ordered for the observance of the *upasatha* ceremony in all monasteries.

But the minister - in - charge misunderstood the command and killed many recluses for disobeying the emperor's order. Stricken with grief at the news of this massacre, the emperor requested the venerable Thera Moggaliputta Tissa to come to the capital where the great Thera came and instructed the emperor in the religion of the Buddha for seven days.⁴

The king then convoked the council. He called the Bhikkhus of several persuasions to his presence and asked them to expound the teachings of the Blessed one. They set forth their misguided beliefs, such as the doctrine of the eternal soul and so on. These heretical monks were given white robes and expelled from the Saṅgha by the king.⁵

4. P. V. Bapat (ed) — 2500 years of Buddhism (relevant chapters)

5. P. V. Bapat - Ibid,

This is the account of the Pāṭaliputra council held 236 years⁶ after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha under the rule of king Aśoka. But some historians had raised some objections regarding the character of the council, because of chronological confusions and silence of Aśokan inscriptions relating to this great event of the Buddhist world. According to the opinion of these historians, the “third Buddhist council was” not a general session of all Buddhists,” but “a sectarian council” attended only by the Theravādins :⁷

Without going into the controversy whether the “Third council” was a general council or a “Sectarian one”, we have to ascertain what part did Aśoka play in this council to preserve the ūnity of the Buddhist Saṃgha and what is the identity of the monks, clad in white robes expelled from the Aśokārāma ? Were they predecessors of the white robed Śvetāmbaras or not ?

Before coming to these questions it is better to examine the Edicts of Aśoka to have a clear picture of the religion or “Dhamma” professed and propagated by Aśoka.

Most of the historians of India consider Aśoka a-rational and righteous king solicitous for the welfare of his subjects and not a dogmatic Buddhist. Though the Buddhist tradition paints Aśoka as the most pious among the Buddhist kings, the “Dhamma” which he inscribed on the “Rocks and Pillars” do not contain any ideal of early Buddhism. His Edicts do not contain any reference to the “Four Noble Truths,” “the Eight-foldpath” and the Nirvāṇa”, which were the main tenets of Buddhism of Aśoka’s age.⁸

6. P. C. Bagchi “ A Comprehensive History of India, Vol II. p 83

7. Dr. P. C. Bagchi, in “A Comprehensive History of India, vol II p 83

Dr. N. Dutta, Buddhist Sects in India, p. 259.

8. Dr. N. Dutta, Buddhist Sects in India. p. 254 ff

On the other hand, he repeatedly stressed upon the desirability of happiness here (*hida-lokika*) and hereafter (*pala-lokika*) R.E 13. In fact, he imparted to his subjects some ethical teachings which are common to all religions. He was not unmindful to the interest of the followers of other religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Ajivikism and other sects and harped upon the virtue of tolerance.

In spite of possessing such rational qualities, Aśoka was a pious Buddhist, as is evident from some of his Edicts⁹. In the Rock Edict VIII issued in the 10th year of his reign, Aśoka stated that he had visited the Saṃbodhi or Buddhagayā. In the 14th year of his reign he had enlarged the stupa of “Kanakamuni Buddha”. In the 20th year of his reign he worshipped the “Birth-place” of the Buddha. In the Bhāvru Edict, he expressed his admiration for the Buddha, Dharma and Saṃgha—the *triratna* of Buddhism and recommended certain texts like “*Vinaya Samukase*”, “*Alaya bāsāni*,” “*Anāgata bhayāni*” etc for the special study of the monks, nuns and lay-devotees. In the Sāranātha, Sāñchī and Kauśāmbī Pillar Inscriptions, Aśoka reveals his solicitude for the concord of the Buddhist saṃgha and announced some measures to prevent and punish the schismatics. At a certain period of his life, he lived with the Saṃgha for one year as an *upāsaka*.

In order to get a clear idea whether Aśoka expelled or threatened to expell erring monks from the Saṃgha and to establish the identity of the monks in question, let us quote the relevant part from the Sāranātha Edict.

“Thus orders king Priyadarśin beloved of the Gods.....Pāṭaliputra..... the saṃgha may not be divided by any one. But whosoever breaks the saṃgha, be it a monk or a nun, shall be clad in white raiment and compelled to live in non-residence”.¹⁰

9. Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, Aśoka, chap VIII p. 231 ff.

10. Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, Aśoka, pp. 40-41, the translation of the 1st para of the Sārnātha Pillar Inscription has been quoted as it is, except “in what not a residence”.

In two other edicts at Kausāmbī and Sāñchi the same instructions have been conveyed to the Mahāmātras of the respective places.

All these three Edicts surprisingly confirm the Buddhist literary tradition relating to the expulsion of the heretics from the Aśokarāma and the consequent punishment inflicted upon them.

In the literary tradition of the third council it had been stated that the heretical monks were expelled clad in white robes (*setakānibattham dattvā*) from the Saṃgha.

In the Edict it has been stated that the heretical monks shall be clad in white robes (*odātāni dusāni*)¹¹ and compelled to live in non-residence (*anāvāsasi*)¹². To explain the term “*odātāni dusāni*” Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar quoted what Prof. Oldenburg had said, “The robes of a Buddhist monk are yellow coloured and when he is given white robes it means that he is unfrocked”. Then Prof. Bhandarkar explained the other term “*anāvāsa*” as expulsion pure and simple (setting aside Buddhaghosa’s explanation relating to this term.) and remarked, “His (Asoka’s) object is only to remove a schismatic from where Bhikṣus stay and unfrock him”¹³

The significance of the two terms “*odātāni dusāni*” and *anāvāsā*” cannot be explained easily and simply. As the Buddhist Saṃgha from its very inception functioned on a democratic basis, so the history of the saṃgha was mainly the story of secessions and not of forcible expulsions and the expulsion of erring monks from the saṃgha was no business of the “Head of the state”. Decision on serious matters like the expulsion of the monks could only be made by the committee of the monks and not even by the chief of the monastery¹⁴

11. Dr. R. K. Mukherji, Aśoka, p. 194 fn 2 and 5

12. Ibid

13. Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, Asoka, p. 47

14. A. L. Basham. The Wonder that was India, p. 285.

or the Saṃgha. So the expulsion of the erring monks from the Saṃgha by Aśoka--the king of the country seems to be inexplicable. One point to be remembered in this connection is that Aśoka was simply a devotee of the Buddha, at best an *upāsaka* and not a monk. So it cannot be expected that he would directly interfere in the activities of the saṃgha and excommunicate some monks from the church. It seems that the real performer of all these ecclesiastical activities pertaining to the expulsion of monks to nonresidence on the eve of the Pāṭaliputra council, was the venerable Moggliputta Tissa backed by other theras of Aśokārāma. Asoka, a pious devotee of the Buddha and the King of the country only implemented the decision communicated to him by Moggliputta Tissa backed by other theras. So to speak in a nut shell, Aśoka's role in the 3rd Buddhist council was that of a "passive performer" and not of an "active doer".

However, the punishments inflicted upon the erring monks by Aśoka were unusual. Not only did Aśoke banish the schismatics to *anābāsa*, but he also did inflict upon them another extraordinary punishment of forcing them to put on white robes.¹⁵

Now, let us explain the significance of the two penalties, inflicted upon the erring monks by Aśoka. The word *anāvāsā* means an abode which is not fit for the "Saṃgha" "a - bhikṣu-ka-āvāsā" as mentioed by Buddhaghoṣa. [*samantapāsādikā*, Introduction]. He, further, enumerated what were called *anāvāsā*. As examples of *anāvāsā* he mentioned the following places - *chetiagharam* (cemetery), *sammañjana attaka* (bath house or plat form), *dāruattako* (log-house) *pāniyamāla* (water shed) *vaccakuti* (privy) and *dvāarakoththako* (towers or battlements of a town gate)" [*Cullavagga*, ii] ¹⁶.

15. Dr. N Dutta, *Buddhist Sects in India*, p. 254 ff.

16. Dr. R. K. Kukherjee, *Asoka*, p. 194 fn 5

The places, mentioned above, were not considered fit for abodes by the monks of the Buddhist faith, but the monks of some other religious sects were in the habit of taking shelters in such places. As, for example, Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, the last Tīrthankara of the Nirgranthas (Jainas) “has been found sometimes to take shelter in workshops, sometimes in garden-houses, sometimes in a cemetery, sometimes in deserted houses and sometimes at the foot of a tree” during thirteen years of his ascetic life prior to the attainment of kevalijñāna.¹⁷

One of the oldest canonical books of the Jainas, *Uttarādhyayana sūtra*, prescribes a cemetery, a deserted house, the foot of a tree and the solitary corner of a house as the fittest shelter for a monk¹⁸. So from the perusal of the list of abodes noted above, conclusion may easily be drawn that “abodes” considered unfit by the Buddhists were regarded as suitable shelters for the Nirgrantha (Jaina) monks.

The second penalty inflicted upon the heretical monks was “to disrobe them and replace their yellow raiments by white robes” and in the language of Dr. R. K. Mukherjee there was no canonical sanction behind this punishment inflicted upon the heretics. In those days monks belonging to different religious orders, were in the habit of using robes made of different materials - like clothes rags, barks, skins leaves etc. and of different colours like red, yellow, white etc. Some recluses would not wear any cloth at all and wander sky-clad. The followers of the Buddha were in the habit of wearing yellow robes and the Nirgranthas and the Ajīvikas were sky-clad: A section of the Nirgranthas (who stayed at Magadha) under the leadership of Sthūlabhadra, adopted the practice of wearing white robes. The false doctrine i.e. belief in eternal soul prevalent among the heretical monks- is one of the basic principles of the Nirgranthas (Jainas)

17. B. C. Law, Mahavira, p. 22

18. *Uttarādhyanasūtra*, 35/6

On the basis of this cryptic internal evidence would we be wrong if we conclude that the majority of the heretical monks who were expelled clad in white robes - were the predecessors of the Śvetāmbara Jains ?

Let us now examine the circumstantial evidence to establish the identity of the expelled monks. Dr. P. C. Bagchi seems to be in favour of identifying the majority of the monks who disturbed the peace of the Aśokārāma as the Ājīvikas.¹⁹

In describing the causes that led to the convocation of the third Buddhist council in Pāṭaliputra, Dr. Bagchi stated, “under Aśoka’s patronage the Buddhist community of Pāṭaliputra which claimed to be more loyal to the teaching of the Buddha became rich in its endowments and revenues and attracted the adherents of the relatively neglected creeds, Ājīvikas and the sectarians of different descriptions who began to wear the yellow robes and disturb the life of Aśokārāma proclaiming their own heresies as the doctrines of the Buddha”²⁰

From the extract it seems that Dr. Bagchi was in favour of identifying the majority of the excommunicated heretics as belonging to this “relatively neglected Ājīvika sect”. But the assumption that the Ājīvikas were a relatively neglected sect and formed apparently a majority of the heretics who disturbed the life of the Aśokārāma-monastery does not stand scrutiny. In the Mahāvamśalikā there is a tradition wherein it is stated that Aśoka’s mother Dharmā was the chief queen of Bindusāra. The preceptor of her father’s family was an Ājīvika saint, Janāsana whom king Bindusāra (Aśoka’s father) summoned to²⁰ interpret the meaning of the queen’s dream before the birth of Aśoka. In the *Divyāvadāna*, the same tradition has been narrated in different language and manner wherein it is stated that Bindusāra summoned the Ājīvika ascetic Pingalavatsa for the

19. P. C. Bagchi, A Comprehensive History of India Vol- II

20. Ibid

examination of all his sons to find out who was the best to be his successor on the throne.²¹

If the literary tradition is to be believed, the parents of Asoka were well-connected with the Ājīvikas and as such the sect cannot be presumed to be neglected at all. It is further to be noted that Aśoka made the grant of cave-dwellings in the Barābara hills to the Ājīvikas²² in the year B.C. 258/257, several years before the convocation of the “Third council at Pāṭaliputra”. So in comparison to other established sects, save and except, the Buddhists, Aśoka was more favourably inclined to the Ājīvikas. This reverence for the Ājīvikas Aśoka probably inherited from his parents, so the Ājīvikas were not at all a neglected and indigent religious order during the reign of Bindusāra and Aśoka. Hence the possibility of the entry of a large number of the Ājīvikas into the Buddhist Saṃgha on the prospect of getting food, shelter etc. does not arise at all.

On the contrary, the Nirgranthas, as stated above, were in a pitiable and deplorable condition after the migration of twelve thousand monks accompanied by Emperor Chandra Gupta and his preceptor Bhadrabāhu to the south, on the visitation of 12 year-long terrible famine. So the entry of a large number of Nirgranthas into the Buddhist saṃgha of the Aśokārāma on the prospect of getting food and medicine was a fair possibility. The history of the Nirgrantha religions order would tell the same tale.

After the departure of Bhadrabāhu, the recognized “Head of the Church” to the south, Sthūlabhadra, a disciple of the former, became the informal head of the recluses who stayed at home, ravaged by the famine and during his pontificate some laxities had crept in the observance of the strict monastic rules obligatory for the Jaina recluses, Among the very many laxities that entered into the Jaina monastic

21. R. K Mudherji, Asoka, p. 64 ff.

22. Dr. R. Bhandarkar, Asoka, chapter VIII p. 23 ff.

organisation, two were very serious. One was the adoption of an innovation in the form of wearing white robes' and the other was the neglect of regular recital of the holy scriptures - a must for the Jaina monks. Consequently, the holy scriptures, retained in memory from the time of the foundation of the religious order, were threatened with the danger of being totally lost.²³

After the famine was over, Bhadrabāhu returned to Magadha with some of his disciples. But he was distressed to see the lax practices which had crept into the monastic organisation and in no time quarrels and acrimonies broke out between the two groups of monks - one that had returned from the south and the other that stayed at home. In order to prevent the total loss of holy scriptures a synod was convoked by Sthūlabhadra at Pāṭalīputra which was not attended by the recluses who had returned from the south. Henceforth the divergence in views and practices of the two sections of the church continued to be more and more accentuated. Being frightened by the ever-widening chasm between the two parties of the monks, Bhadrabāhu retired from active participation in the affairs of the church and his more pushing disciple Sthūlabhadra shouldered the responsibility of leading the Saṃgha. After the death of Bhadrabāhu in circa B.C. 297, Sthulabhadra was made the formal "Head of the Nirgrantha religious order" which position he retained till his death in circa B.C. 252.²⁴

During his patriarchate, as was expected the adherents of the "whiterobes" got the upper hand in the church and various other laxities (probably relating to physical cleanliness, modes of partaking of food, alms-begging) that had already, entered into the church got congenial ground for further development. Mahāgiri, the next patriarch is said to have revived the ideal practice of nakedness. But his endeavour to purge the church of the prevailing abuses ended in dismal failure,

23. Mrs. Stevenson - Heart of Jainism .

24. Mrs. Stevenson - Heart of Jainism p. 73

During the first twelve years of his pontificate three successive schisms seriously weakened the Jaina church.²⁴

Such was the sad plight of the order of the Nirgranthas (Jainas) when king Aśoka was on the throne of Magadha. Under the circumstances, ordinary monks belonging to Jaina church might go astray and swell the rank of the Buddhist recluses of Magadha in the hope of getting alms, cloths, shelters and medicine which were in abundance in the Buddhist Church, consequent upon the conversion of Aśoka to Buddhism.

A peep into the chronology of the events, narrated above, may be helpful for the solution of the problem or question under discussion. Historians of India and abroad are unanimous that Aśoka's coronation took place in circa B.C. 269 and his reign terminated with his death in circa B.C. 232. According to the Śvetāmbara Jaina chronology Bhadrabāhu, the last śrutakevalin's patriarchate started in circa B.C. 317 and terminated in circa B.C. 297 and that of Sthūlabhadra began in the year circa B.C. 297 and terminated in circa B.C. 252 and that of Mahagiri started in circa B.C. 252. According to the Buddhist tradition (Mahāvagga) the third saṅgīti of the Buddhists was convoked 236 years after the Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha at Paṭaliputra - i.e. circa B.C. 251-250 in the Eighteenth the year of Asoka's reign. The date of Sāranāth, Sāñchī and Kauśāmbi inscription is circa B.C. 251.

It is quite evident from the chronology discussed above that Sthūlabhadra was a senior contemporary of Aśoka and Mahāgiri a junior contemporary of the monarch and the Jaina church in Magadha was in the most deplorable plight at the end of the Sthūlabhadra's pontificate and at the beginning of the patriarchate of Mahāgiri and the convocation of the "Third Saṅgīti (council)" of the Buddhists took place at about the same time.

Concurrence of the external and internal evidence and the synchronization of the chronology to it lead us to conclude that the

white robed predecessors of the Śvetāmbara Jainas afflicted by the post-famine scarcity of alms and perplexed by intra-monastic squabbles had taken shelter in a large number into the precinct of the walls of Aśokārāma donning the yellow robes. Probably Moggaliputta Tissa and other senior *theras* of the Aśokārāma had an inkling regarding the previous affiliations of the erring monks or the heretics.

Hence they had taken such uncanonical procedures of clothing the heretics in their former white robes (*setakāni vattham*) and sending them to residences not fit for the Buddhist monks (*anāvāsasi*). In fact, the decision was an ecclesiastical decision, but curiously enough it was executed by the order of a king, (Aśoka) , who was simply a devotee of the Buddha—at best, an *upāsaka*.

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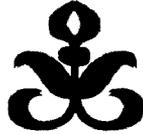
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