

# JAIN REMAINS FROM RAJGIR

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Rajgir, situated about 60 miles to the South-east of Patna, is one of the oldest cities of India and has a glorious history in the domains both of politics and religion. Its soil has been sanctified by its long and cordial association with famous preachers such as the Buddha and Mahavira and this is perhaps the reason why we find this city mentioned in the Buddhist and Jain literature in greater detail than in any Brahmanical works.

We do not know with certainty, who was its founder or when it was founded. The Vedic literature is totally silent about it, but Pali and Prakrit literature speak of its power, prosperity and magnificence in the life time of the Buddha and Mahavira. The antiquity of Rajgir is corroborated by the archaeological sources also. The N.B.P. ware, which are now referred to the seventh century B.C., have been found in the deepest layer at Rajgir.<sup>1</sup> But A. Ghosh is of the opinion that "Occupation in Rajgir must have been earlier as is indicated by the presence of pottery in the layers earlier than those producing these wares".<sup>2</sup> It is doubtful whether the archaeologists have reached the virgin soil.

Rajgir was variously known as Girivraja (with reference to its topographical position - a city surrounded by hills), Rajagṛha (the abode of Kings), Vasumati (from the mythical king Vasu who, according to the Ramayana, was the founder of the city)<sup>3</sup>, Brhadrathapura (from Brhadratha, father of King Jarasandha of the Mahabharata fame and founder of the Brhadratha dynasty of Magadha)<sup>4</sup> Kusagrapura (meaning the city of superior - Kusa grass).<sup>5</sup>

Rajgir was the chief centre of Jainism during the lifetime of Mahavira, who is said to have spent the major part of his life there. According to the traditions, it was the birth place of the twentieth Tirthankara Suvratanatha. Even before Mahavira, Jainism was prevalent here. Srenika's father is said to be a follower of the Parsvanatha sect.<sup>7</sup> According to the Digambara scriptures, the first sermon of Mahavira was held at Rajgir. Here he converted eleven learned Brahmanas as his Ganadharas (disciples). Moreover, his eleven chief ganadharas are also said to have died there.<sup>8</sup> In the preamble to many of the dialogues of Vardhman Mahavira contained in the Svetambara Jain Canon, he is shown as living in the Gunasila or Gunasilaka Caitya outside the city of Rajgir to the north-east of it.<sup>9</sup> Gunasila caitya lies in Gunavs, a village eleven miles to the south of Rajgir.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest antiquarian remains we have there belong to the pre-Gupta age. The Sonabhandara cave on the Vaibhara hill, belonging to this period, contains an inscription dated 1st - 2nd century A.D.<sup>11</sup> According to this inscription, Muni Vairadeva, "a jewel among teachers and of great lustre" caused two caves to be excavated for the residence of Jaina ascetics, with images of Arhatas installed therein.<sup>12</sup>

There is a ruined temple on the Vaibhara hill with a central chamber flanked on all sides by a row of cells containing Digambara images of the Gupta period. There is a seated figure of Neminatha in another chamber which contains a fragmentary inscription in Gupta characters referring to Chandragupta, probably Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty. The pedestal of the image represents a conchshell flanked by Dharmacakra on either side. The interesting feature of the sculpture is the representation of a young prince standing in front of a wheel which also serves the purpose of the halo. The prince seems to represent Cakrapurusa.<sup>13</sup> Besides this, we have three standing figures of the Tirthankaras in other niches bearing Kusana art motifs, showing stiff shoulders.

There are two rock-cut caves, adjacent to each other, excavated on the southern face of the Vaibhara hill. Of them the western one is called as Sonbhandara. Cunningham identified the Sonbhandara cave first with the Pippala Cave<sup>14</sup> and later on with the Saptaparni cave.<sup>15</sup> Sonbhandara cave consists of a large chamber 34' x 17' and is provided with a doorway and a window. The roof is of arched shape with a rise of 4 ft. 10 inch. These

are exactly the architectural features, quite characteristically and rarely to be found only at the Barabar caves. What is most interesting is the fact that the cave is highly polished inside. These caves show in their architectural features so close an affinity with the Barabar caves of Asoka and Dasaratha, that the opinion of Fergusson and Dr. Burgess, who attribute their construction to the period of the Maurya dynasty, has everything in its favour.<sup>16</sup> The Sonbhandara cave may thus be considered to be among the earliest Jain monuments at Rajgir datable probably to the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. Inside the Cave is placed a Sikhara-shaped sculpture of black stone depicting a Jain Tirthankara on each of its four faces (Chaumukha). On the pedestals of these images are the figures in pairs of bulls, elephants, horses and monkeys, each pair flanking a wheel, thus indicating the first four Tirthankaras, Rsabhadeva, Ajitnatha, Sambhavanatha and Abhinandana. It was also noticed by Buchanan.<sup>17</sup>

The adjacent cave is in a more ruinous state. It consists of a rock-cut chamber 22 1/2' x 17'. Inside, on the southern wall of the cave, are six small figures of Jain Tirthankaras carved in relief and representing Padmaprabha, Parsvanatha and Mahavira.

On the hill-tops of Udaygiri a very large number of Jain temples are found built in comparatively recent times. As observed by Broadley they all contain charanas or foot-prints of the Tirthankaras, generally carved in black basalt, but sometimes in marble and invariably surrounded by a Nagari inscription. The earliest of these inscriptions is dated V.S. 1504 (1447 A.D.).

On the Vaibhara hill, there is a small Jain temple built by one Hukumat Rai. A little distance to the south of temple we have a small Jain temple, dedicated to Dharmanatha and Santinatha, the 15th and 16th Tirthankaras. It contains two images and carana with an inscription about 200 years old. Just about a quarter of a mile away, there is another Jain temple of considerable dimension. Square in form and surmounted by four handsome minarets and a cupola, the temple was built by one Pratap singh of Murshidabad. There is a pradaksina (passage) encircling the central shrine. There is also an octagon chapel, containing caranas at each corner.

A. Ghosh has given a description of an ancient ruined Jain temple which does not find mention by any other explorer.<sup>19</sup> Kuraishi's list does

not mention it, but instead refers to a brick enclosure with a small shed inside containing a number of Jaina sculptures some of which bear inscriptions. The area containing this temple seems to have been covered with debris which was cleared by A.Ghosh, and as a result this ancient temple was exposed. This temple consists of a central chamber facing east, surrounded by a court which again is flanked on all sides by rows of cells. The central chamber and cells are provided with niches in the walls to contain images, which mostly represent the Jaina Tirthankaras. It also contains a few inscriptions which are referred by Chanda.<sup>20</sup> One of the inscriptions on an image of Mahavira is as early as the 5th Century A.D. which would perhaps indicate the earliest date of a shrine at the site. Most of the images are now missing.

Among the images in the niche facing east in the Central Chamber is a figure seated cross-legged in dhyana-mudra on a throne resting on a female figure lying on her side. The throne contains lions at the extremities and a wheel in the centre. On the halo appear musical instruments played upon by unseen hands. The image to the left is that of Rsabhadeva seated on a pedestal with two bulls and wheel and wearing on the head a jata-mukuta or matted hair. The inscription on the pedestal belongs to the 8th century A.D. and reads Acharya-Vasant-Nandin-dedharmoyah, 'The pious gift of the teacher Vasantanandin'.<sup>21</sup> There is another mutilated image consisting only of the crossed legs of a figure supported by bulls, the pedestal bearing the inscription deva(ya)-dharmayam Thiroka sya, 'the pious gift of Thiroka'.<sup>22</sup>

The cell round the central chamber contains some loose sculptures representing Parsvanatha and Mahavira, and in one case, a seated image with a horse on the pedestal (indicating Sambhavanatha) and two elephants on the halo holding a parasol. In one of the cells to the north of the main building is a sculpture depicting a heavenly scene in accordance with Jaina mythology. A male and a female figure are seated on a pedestal in lalitasana, the latter holding a child on her left knee, under a tree on which appears the figure of an Adi-Jina in dhyana-mudra.<sup>23</sup> Near the main building is another room with its stairs on the north, containing a few images. One of them represents Neminatha, as is evident from a pair of conch-shells on the pedestal. Thus, the Jaina establishments on the Vaibhara hill are certainly old.

The ruins on the top of Vipula hill are dealt with only by Broadley. A few hundred yards to the Mahadeva temple in north-west existed two Jaina temples, one dedicated to Hemanta Sadhu and the other to Mahavira. A little distance away from this place there existed an enormous platform 130'x30'x6' above the rocks, on which stand four Jaina temples of recent date, in the construction of which Buddhist carvings are used. The first of the series is dedicated to Chandraprabha, the 8th Tirthankara. The second temple which is divided into two chambers is dedicated to Mahavira. The third temple is dedicated to the 20th Jaina Tirthankara, Munisuvrata who is said to have been born in Rajgir. And the fourth temple contains four caranas, which are dedicated respectively to Mahavira, Parsvanatha, Santinatha and Kunthunatha, the twenty fourth, twenty third, sixteenth and seventeenth Tirthankaras respectively.

Another interesting site sacred to the Jains in Rajgir is the Maniyara Math. The name was originally given to a small Jaina shrine built in 1780 A.D. Cunningham recovered three small figures from the surface of the Matha, one of which was a standing naked figure with a seven-headed serpent hood, looking like that of Parsvanatha.<sup>25</sup>

A cave in the Udayagiri hill contains a very ancient image of Parsvanatha with placid facial expression and expanded serpentine hoods. Behind it is the lotus seat, and the wonderful and artistically arranged coils of the snake below the lotus seat create admiration in the minds of the visitors for the forceful inspiration of the master artists of those days. A fine specimen of art, this image has seven snakes with their hoods spread at the back of the head. The eyes, ears, nose and lips are very finely executed and the bend of the hands joined together, and at base on the feet padmasana and the finely chiselled body are remarkable specimens of ancient sculpture.<sup>26</sup>

From the above study it would appear that Rajgir was an active centre of Jainism in ancient times as it is now, where interesting remains of Jaina shrines and sculptures are still extant. Jainism continues to inspire its devotees in large numbers from different parts of the country to visit the various shrines on top of the five hills of Rajgir.

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