

The Jaina Universe in a Profile of Cosmic Man

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This is a short article I sent to the Umāsvāti Seminar held in Delhi in January 1999 which I could not participate in. Very fortunately it has not been published yet, and I am indeed happy to dedicate it for the commemoration volume of my late dear teacher Pt. D. D. Malvania, who guided me in writing my Ph.D. thesis, “A study of the **Tattāvarthasūtra** with **Bhāṣya**, with Special Reference to Authorship and Date” (pub. by L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1982) and “A Study of the **Bhagavatsūtra** — A Chronological Analysis” (pub. by Prakrit Text Society, Ahmedabad, 1994). In this brief paper, I would like to pose upon the Cosmic Man-shaped Jaina loka in order to speculate when and why such a strange idea of the universe arose to the Jaina theoreticians, and if Umāsvāti was aware of its significance.

Umāsvāti's **T.S.**, that was composed sometimes in the late middle of the 5th century A.D., is a compendium of the theoretical contents of massive Jaina canonical works. He organized it in terms of seven tattvas in some 350 sūtras, and wrote its commentary or **bhāṣya** himself. Since then, it has become a common practice for the students of Jainology, to be introduced to the outline of Jainism through his **Sabhāṣya T.S.** However, this prakaraṇa, written in terse Sanskrit is extremely difficult to comprehend, even with the help of his own **bhāṣya**, and naturally numerous commentaries have been continuously written on it up to this day. Students of Jainism today have to thus take up the **Sabhāṣya T.S.**, as a rule, along with some modern commentaries on it at the very beginning of their Jainological studies.

It is in these modern commentaries on the **T.S.** that we find an exposition of the Jaina loka built in the form of

World-Man or Cosmic Man, standing with his legs apart and resting his hand on his waist. The same exposition is, however, not found in the earlier ones. Umāsvāti describes the shape of loka in his **bhāṣya** to sūtra III. 6 in the following way. The lower world stands in ākāśa like a down turned earthen bowl, the middle world is in the shape of a cymbal (jhālara), and the upper world is also like a drum (mṛdaṅga). The whole universe is, then, said to resemble a vajra, which means, according to Monier William's Sanskrit Dictionary (p. 913), the form of two transverse bolts crossing each other like ' ' this.

His description of the loka above as well as that of its structure and dimension made in the T.S. and its **bhāṣya**, Chs.III-IV, do not contradict those made in the modern works, except the unit of 'rajju' in measuring the loka, which is the post-Umāsvāti usage. An illustration of this Jaina loka, for instance, shown in Figure 1, may naturally arouse our imagination that it resembles a human being, having his head on top and his hands at the part of waist that falls in the position of the middle world. But Umāsvāti does not compare it to Cosmic Man as modern commentators on the T.S. do. Neither do so the early commentators of the T.S., both Śvetāmbara and Digambara, including Haribhadra, Pūjyapāda and Akalaṅka, whose works I hold. I shall be most happy if any scholar would be kind enough to inform me, of the earlier works on the T.S. or otherwise that refer to the Jaina loka expressed in human appearance.

Schubring mentions in **The Doctrine of the Jains** (p.206), "A third non-canonical conception refers to a world of human appearance (as loke puruṣa)".⁽¹⁾ He, then, makes a note that an expressly female figure appearing in Grünwedel's **Alt-Kutscha**, I. 47, etc. is quite doubtful. True, an idea of the loka in a profile of Cosmic Woman can never be accepted

in the context of Jainism. However, as illustration of a female-figured Jaina loka, dated the 18th century, Rajasthan, has been widely circulated in Japan also, as shown below.⁽²⁾

Schubring also mentions that the name of the regions called 'Graiveyaka (neck)' in the loka and the expression of 'loka-mastaka (head of the universe)' made in the **Daśavaikālikasūtra** IV. 25 make it clear that the Jaina loka is shaped in human appearance.⁽³⁾ The **Daśavaikālikasūtra** is one of the earliest canonical works, however, this part is obviously a later interpolation. Be that as it may, the loka was one of the earliest topics that the canonical authors had to work on, because without firmly establishing its shape, size and structure, etc., they could not advance and develop their theories of jivas and ajivas that abide therein. The Jainas are the natural philosophers, and they postulate that the aloka or non-universe exists by which the loka is supported. Arguments on this matter appear in quite early canonical stages.⁽⁴⁾

The **Bhagavatisūtra** (=Bh.) VI. 5. 240-241 refer to Tamaskāya or the black body which envelops the four lower kalpas rising from the Aruṇavara Ocean, and from its end begins Kṛṣṇarāji or the black field at Brahma loka. Since these regions are always bright due to the natural brightness of vimānas, and since the Jyotiṣkas brighten the middle worlds, it is difficult to fathom why the canonical authors had to postulate these dark regions in the Jaina cosmography. But a solution to this problem can be arrived at, only if we take the Jaina loka in a profile of Comic Man. For, then, we can suppose that Tamaskāya is situated in the position of the womb with Kṛṣṇarāji on top, which assumes a symbolic form of the swastika. These dark regions, then, will signify the cosmic garbha, the innermost shrine of the Jainas, in which located is Mt. Meru in the form of liṅgam. A plausible

explanation of all this is that the then canonical authors adopted the popular lingam worship of Śaiva School in order to represent Mt. Meru as a symbol of the eternal potency of Jainism. These regions are thus placed above the profane lower world.⁽⁵⁾

These texts in the **Bh.** above belong to the final canonical stage, when the Jaina centered world view was thoroughly established. Their description of Tamaskāya and Kṛṣṇarāji presupposes that the Jaina loka was assumed in a profile of Cosmic Man. Then, the trasa nāḍi or a tunnel running vertically through the center of the loka, must be suggesting itself to be the cosmic axis of the Jainas.

The structures of the three worlds and the four types of beings residing therein are described in the **T.S.** III-IV. Umāsvāti must have used the so called Paṇṇatti texts for his source materials in composing these chapters. From the data offered so far above, it is very clear that the shape, size and structure of the Jaina loka had been already established by Umāsvāti's time. Therefore, the Jaina theoreticians in the later canonical stages including Umāsvāti were fully aware that the shape of their universe was made to resemble Cosmic Man. But curiously enough, they didn't dare to refer to this fact. It is likewise strange that the post-Umāsvāti authors like Haribhadra, Pūjayapāda and Akalaṅka maintained the same attitude of keeping silence about this matter. It just went on, as if handing down a secret inside to the succeeding Jaina theoreticians, untill the modern authors broke with its taboo. But, why ?

The **Bh.** XIII. 4.478-479 refer to the directions starting from the central point in the middle world, which is situated in the middle of two thin layers at the top of Ratnaprabhā. This theory of directions must have evolved in the final canonical stage, in connection with locating the central point

of the loka, against which a kevali must fix the central point of his physical body, in order to perform kevali samudghāta at his final moment of life.⁽⁶⁾ The T.S. Ch.10 which is relevant to mokṣa, is silent about this method of kevali samudghāta. Now, the T.S.V.15 and its bhāṣya state that a jiva can occupy one by asaṅkhyāta part of lokākāśa up to the whole of it. The entire lokākāśa has to be occupied by a kevali by spreading his soul in order to cut off his total karmas at the time of liberation. This process is known as kevali samudghāta. This is the only time when a jiva can occupy the entire lokākāśa. Umāsvāti, who keeps silence about kevali samudghāta, is thus surely well acquainted with its concept.

“You can attain liberation by way of ahiṃsā,” said Māhāvira. But as time went on Jainas developed their own doctrinal system, and their method of salvation had to be, then, theorized in view of their advanced dogmatical scheme. Jainism advocates dualism of the jiva (=ātman) and the matter (=ajiva), and karma belongs to the category of matter. Since Jainas do not postulate Creators or God, they assume that jivas and matter have existed since times eternal, and that world phenomena have also been occurring by the mutual bondage of jivas and karmas since the beginning of eternal time. The Jaina theoreticians in the canonical age, then, had to solve the problem as to how to enable a kevali to eradicate his total karmas at the time of liberation, in the purview of their karma doctrine. Jivas and karmas, say the Jainas, have been inseparably bound since the beginningless time. Then, how can they ever be separated ? It must have been a grave and pressing issue to be solved by the then canonical authors.

Here, Jaina canonical authors got help from the traditional Brahmanical concept of ‘Ahaṃ brahmāsmi’ in the

Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad and 'Tattvam asi' in the **Chāndogya Upaniṣad**. In other words, the unification of Ātman with Brahman is the well known established method of freedom from saṃsāra in the Brahmanical tradition. The Jaina authors resorted to the same method, and established 'kevali samudghāta', the Jaina method of annihilating a kevali's entire karmas and attaining liberation, by allowing him to be unified or to become one with Cosmic Man, the Jaina loka.

In order to deny one's total self and become free from it, there is no other way for him, but to transcend the level of his own self and becomes one with the Absolute One, Brahman or God, or with whatever name you may wish to call Him. Likewise, if a kevali wants to be absolutely free from his entire karmas that have been inseparably bound with his transmigrating self since the beginningless time, there is just no other way for him, but to transcend the level of such self and becomes one with the Absolute One, who stands outside the phenomena of saṃsāra. The Jaina theoreticians had to thus build their loka in a profile of Cosmic Man.

Buddha who was a historical person in Hinayāna Buddhism, came to be also considered as pervading throughout the universe in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This idea was soon followed by the carollary that Buddha is no other than the cosmic world itself. This cosmic world is called Buddha's 'dharma kāya', that is often expressed by Cosmic Vairocana. This idea, of course, goes back to that of Puruṣa in the 'Puruṣa-sūkta hymn' in the **Rg-veda** X. 90. Puruṣa or Original Man is here depicted as God of sacrifice as well as the object of sacrifice, by whose immolation the present world including all things, human beings, devas and all others including social systems are derived. The Jainas thus followed in the wake of Mahāyānists.

The adoption of the idea of Brahman to the Jaina system must have occurred at some canonical stage, that was much earlier than the time of Umāsvāti. However, the Jaina loka which resembles Cosmic Man, is ajiva or matter, thereby kevali samudghāta is difficult to allow a kevali to attain his final perfection. Then, if the Jaina loka were assumed to be Cosmic Jina or God who enables a kevali's unification with Him, in as much as the case of Brahman and Mahāyānists' Cosmic Buddha, it would be contradicted by their dual system of jiva-ajiva that excludes the existence of the Absolute One. A kevali thus falls into a dilemma in performing kevali samudghāta, this being a method and a mechanical process of eradicating his entire karmic matter particles, that have been bound inseparably with his soul since times eternal, by way of spreading his entire soul space throughout the lokākāśa in a profile of Cosmic Man, and exploding them, just as a fully blown balloon bursts at its maximum expansion to exclude its air inside.

Due to some dissatisfactory factors hidden in this method of karmic destruction, Jaina theoreticians in the canonical age including Umāsvāti, could not openly say that the Jaina loka resembles Cosmic Man. Post canonical theoreticians, then, followed the same practice of their predecessors. However, as time went on, its grave significance came to be gradually forgotten, and the modern commentators of the T.S. must have started to elucidate that their loka is built in the appearance of Cosmic Man. Then, there also appeared an idea of the Jaina loka in a profile of Cosmic Woman, as mentioned already. This Jaina loka expressed in a figure of Cosmic Woman belongs, most probably, to a tantric line.



Foot-notes

1. Schubring, W. : **The Doctrine of the Jainas**, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1962, p. 206, note 1. He also makes a reference to Kirfel's **Bilderatlas**.
2. Figure 2, from Akira Sadakata's **Indo Uchūshi** (Indian Cosmography), p. 233. The same illustration is also found in Heibonsha's **Sekai Daihyakka Jiten** (World Encyclopaedia), v. 3 (1988), illus.p.63, under 'uchū (universe)'.
3. Schubring, op. cit. p. 206.
4. Refer to my **Study of the Bhagavatīsūtra**, § 145-146.
5. " " " " " " " § 157-160.
6. " " " " " " " § 163 & 165.

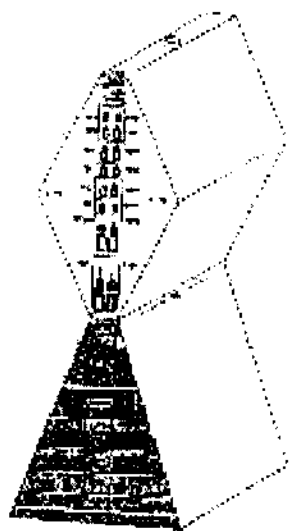


Figure 1



Figure 2