

Origin and Development of Jainism

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions of the world. It has a rich spiritual, cultural and literary heritage to its credit. Indian religious quest has two main streams — Vedic (*Brāhmaṇic*) and *Śramaṇic*. Among the living world religions Jainism, as well as Buddhism, belong to the *Śramaṇic* trend of Indian culture. There were some other *Śramaṇic* religions also but they either like *Ājīvikas*, disappeared in the course of time or like *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* and other ascetic systems of Hindu religions, became part and parcel of great Hindu religion by adopting some tenets of Vedic religion.

Śramaṇic tradition is spiritualistic and soteriological in its very nature. It lays special emphasis on renunciation of worldly belongings and enjoyments and on emancipation from worldly existence, i.e., the cycle of birth and death. It may be accepted without any contradiction that these very ideas of emancipation (*mokṣa/mukti/nirvāṇa/kaivalya*) and renunciation (*tyāga/samyama/vairāgya*) have been cultivated by the *Śramaṇas*. Asceticism is the fundamental concept of *Śramaṇic* tradition. It is on this ground that the religions of *Śramaṇic* tradition such as Jainism and Buddhism differ from the early Vedic religion. The early Vedic religion was against asceticism and emphasized the material welfare of the individual and the society. The Vedic seers in their hymns were praising the worldly existence and praying for their own health and wealth as well as of their fellow beings, while the *Śramaṇas* were condemning this worldly existence and propounding the theory that this worldly existence is full of suffering and the ultimate end of human life is to get rid of the cycle of birth and death. Austerity, renunciation, emancipation, atheism, the

supremacy of human being over gods, equality of all beings, opposition to the supremacy of Brahmins and to animal sacrifices and emphasis on moral values were some of the fundamental tendencies of *Śramaṇic* tradition. We also find that some of the above mentioned tendencies such as renunciation and emancipation were totally absent from the earlier form of Vedic religion. These concepts were contributed by the *Śramaṇas* to Indian culture in general and Hinduism in particular.

Antiquity of Jaina Tradition

The antiquity of Jainism goes back to the pre-historic period of Indian culture. In support of this view Prof. H. Zimmer observes, "there is truth in the Jaina idea that their religion goes back to remote antiquity, the antiquity in question being that of the Pre-Aryan" (*Philosophies of India*, p. 60). We find references to *Vrātyas* and *Arhats* in *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda*, the oldest texts of the Indian literature. These *Vrātyas* and *Arhats* of Vedic period are the ancestors of Jainas. They are also known as *Śramaṇas* in *Upaniṣadic* period. Alongwith the references of *Vrātyas*, *Arhats* and *Śramaṇas* in *Vedas* and *Upaniṣadas*, we find mention there of some Jaina *Tīrthaṅkaras* such as Ṛṣabha, Ajita and Ariṣṭanemi. It conclusively proves that Jainism, in its oldest form as *Vrātya* or *Arhata* tradition, was prevalent at the time of the composition of *Vedas* hence its antiquity goes back to pre-Vedic period, i.e., at least three to five thousand years before Christian era. Secondly, in Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa some seals of meditating *Yogīs* have been found, which show that the tradition of performing meditation and *Yoga-sādhana* was present much prior in Indian Culture to the arrival of *Aryans* and

their *Yajña* rituals because no *Yajña-vedī* is found in these excavations.* At that time present Jainism was known as a *Vrātya-dharma* or *Arhat-dharma*.

Later on, in the *Upaniṣadic* period (c. 800 B. C.) the *Vrātyas*, *Arhats* and *Śramaṇas* were divided into various religious schools. At that time (c. 800 B. C. to 500 A. D.). Jainism was known as *Nirgrantha-dharma*. In Buddhist Pāli Tripiṭaka and the ancient Jaina canons as well as in the pillar-edicts of Aśoka the religion of Lord Pārśva and the Mahāvīra is mentioned in the name of *Nirgrantha Dharma*. Historicity of Lord Pārśva, the 23rd *Tīrthaṅkara*, is now well established and accepted by all the scholars. According to Jaina tradition the predecessor of Lord Pārśva is Ariṣṭanemi. He is supposed to be the real cousin of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus, the historicity of Ariṣṭanemi can also be established on the basis of the historicity of Lord Kṛṣṇa. If we hold Lord Kṛṣṇa to be a historic person, then Ariṣṭanemi is also historical. We find his name not only in *Vedas* but in *Upaniṣads* and Hindū *Purāṇas* also. Some scholars furnish an inscriptional evidence to prove the historicity of Ariṣṭanemi (Neminātha). There is found a Copper deed of gift of a Babilonian King Nebuchandrazar (1140 B. C.) at Prabhaspattan in Gujrat. It, as per reading of Dr. Prananath (T.O.I., dt. March 19, 1935), indicates that the King must have come to Mount Revata to pay homage to Lord Neminātha. Though the reading is not accepted by all the scholars yet we cannot reject it as totally false. Lord Nami of Mithilā, the 21st *Tīrthaṅkara* of Jainas, is also accepted as a *Rṣi* in *Upaniṣadic* and Hindū *Paurāṇic* tradition. So far as the historicity of Lord Rṣabha is concerned, it is a well established fact that not only his name but his life-story and teachings also occur in *Bhāgavat* and some other *Purāṇas*. According to Prof. Dalasukh Malvania, who is well-

* *Yajña-Vedī* has been identified in some Indus Valley sites such as Kalibaṅgam. (Editor)

read in Buddhist canons, the name of some Jaina *Tīrthaṅkaras* such as Rṣabha, Padma, Candraprabha, Puṣpadanta, Vimāla, Dharma, Nami, Ariṣṭanemi and Mahāvīra also occur in Buddhist literature in the form of previous *Buddhas*, *Bodhisattvas* or *Pratyekabuddhas*. *Theragāthā* also mentions the Vaddhamāṇa Thera. According to its earlier commentary, Aṭṭakathā, he was Licchaviputra. In my humble opinion, he was not else than Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, the 24th Jaina *Tīrthaṅkara*. Thus, it can be said with a degree of certainty that all the Jaina *Tīrthaṅkaras* are not legendary characters. Though, it may be true that some legendary characteristics might have crept into the life-stories of Jaina *Tīrthaṅkaras* presented in Jaina *Purāṇas*, their very existence can not be challenged. Whether we accept the historicity of Jaina *Tīrthaṅkara* or not, it is beyond doubt that the Jaina ideas of renunciation, austerity, penance, self-mortification, non-violence, celibacy, meditation etc. were prevalent in the pre *Vedic* period. Sri Ramchandra observes that, "*Upaniṣads* represent the Brahmanical spiritual thought. As seen later, the Brāhmaṇas did not accept spiritualism truthfully. They borrowed spiritual thoughts from their Pre-Aryan adversaries, now friends, in a perverted manner.... The *Śramaṇic* culture was ascetic, atheistic, pluralistic and 'realistic' in content.* This comes out clearest from a consideration of the earliest faith of the Jainas — one of the oldest living surviving sects of the *Munis*. The pre-*Upaniṣadic* materialistic (*Pravṛtti-Dharmic*) Vedic thought later evolved pseudo-spiritual thought (*Nivṛtti-Dharmic*) mainly through the influences of the Muni-Śramaṇa culture, in pre-Buddhistic times, within its fold (Ramchandra Jain — *The Most Ancient Aryan Society*, pp. 48-49). It is this semi-materialistic and semi-spiritualistic thought which gave birth to a new form of religion, which is known as Hinduism.

* Cf. : The editor's "Studies in the Origin of Buddhism." (Editor)

Hinduism is nothing but an assimilation of *Vedic* and *Śramaṇic* traditions.

Jainism & Hinduism

However, these two distinct trends (*Brāhmaṇic*) as well as *Śramaṇic* have been prevalent in Indian Culture from its earliest days. But our culture, being a composite one, a water-tight compartment among its different shades is not feasible at all. We cannot understand Indian Culture completely without understanding its these two different constituents, Viz., *Śramaṇic* and *Vedic*, developed later on in the form of Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. So one thing must be clear in our mind, that studies and researches in the field of Indology are not possible in isolation. In fact, Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism are so intermingled and mutually influenced by each other that to have a proper understanding of one, the understanding of other is essential. No doubt, these different trends are distinguishable but, at the same time, we must realize that they are not separable. Though on the basis of some peculiarities in theory and practice we can distinguish them yet it is very difficult to make a complete separation, because none of these trends remained uninfluenced by one another. The earlier *Śramaṇic* trend and its later shades such as Jainism and Buddhism had influenced the *Vedic* tradition, which later on developed in the form of Hinduism. The concepts of *tapas* or austerity, asceticism, liberation, meditation, equanimity and non-violence, which were earlier absent in *Vedas*, came into existence in Hinduism through *Śramaṇic* influence. The *Upaniṣadas* and the *Gītā* have evolved some new spiritualistic definitions of *Vedic* rituals and they are the representatives of the dialogue which had taken place in *Śramaṇic* and *Vedic* traditions. The *Upaniṣadic* trend of Hinduism is not a pure form of *Vedic* religion. It incorporates in itself the various *Śramaṇic* tenets and gives a new dimension to *Vedic*

religion. Thus, we can say that Hinduism is an intermingled state of *Vedic* and *Śramaṇic* traditions. The voice, raised by our ancient *Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis* and *Munis* as well as *Śramaṇas* against ritualistic emphasis of *Vedic* tradition and worldly outlook of caste-ridden Brahminism, became stronger in Jainism and Buddhism along with the other minor *Śramaṇic* sects. Thus, the *Upaniṣadic* trend as well as Jainism and Buddhism provided a resort to those fed up with *Vedic* ritualism and the worldly outlook towards life.

Not only Jainism and Buddhism but some other sects and schools of Indian thought such as *Ājīvikas* and *Sāṅkhyas* also adopted more or less a similar attitude towards *Vedic* ritualism. However, Jainism and Buddhism are more candid and forthcoming in their opposition towards *Vedic* ritualism. They reject outrightly the animal-sacrifice in *Yajñas*, birth-based caste-system and the infallibility of the *Vedas*. In the form of Mahāvīra and Buddha, the most prominent rationalist preachers, we find the real crusaders, whose tirade against caste-ridden and ritualistic Brahminism, crippled with its inner inadequacies, gave a severe jolt to it. Jainism and Buddhism have come forward to sweep away the long accumulated excrescences grown on Indian culture in the form of rituals, casteism and superstitions. But we shall be mistaken if we presume that in their attempt to clear off the dirt of *Vedic* ritualism, Jainism and Buddhism remained intact. They were also influenced by *Vedic* rituals considerably. After c. 3rd or 4th A.D., ritualism in the new form of *Tāntrika* rituals crept into Jainism and Buddhism and became part and parcel of their religious practices and mode of worship. With the impact of Hindu *Tāntrism*, Jainas adopted various Hindu deities and their mode of worship with some variations, suited to their religious temperament but were alien to it (Jainism) in its pure form. Jaina

concept of *Śāsanadevatās* or *Yakṣa-Yakṣis* is nothing but a Jaina version of Hindu deities. As I have pointed out earlier, the influence has been reciprocal. This can be discerned from the fact that on the one side Hinduism, accepted Rṣabha and Buddha as incarnation of God, while, on the other, Jainism included Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in its list of *Śālākāpuruṣas*, great personalities. A number of Hindu gods and goddesses are accepted as consorts of *Tīrthaṅkaras* such as *Kālī*, *Mahākālī*, *Cakreśvarī*, *Ambikā*, *Padmāvatī*, *Siddhikā* and some others as independent deities such as *Sarasvatī* and *Lakṣmī*. It is to be noted that the Jainas have included Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in their list of sixty-three great personalities before c. 3rd A.D. because a mention of Kṛṣṇa in the early canonical text is found. Not only this, an epic on the story of Rama was composed in Jaina tradition by Vimalasūri in between c. 1st-5th A. D. Similarly the image of Jaina Sarasvatī (c. 2nd A. D.) is also found at Kaṅkālī Tīlā, Mathura. Thus, evidently various Hindu deities were included in Jainism before c. 3rd A. D.

The moot point, I intend to come to, is that different religious traditions of our great Indian culture have exchanged various concepts from one another. It is the duty of the scholars to study and highlight this mutual impact which is the need of the hour and thus, to bridge the gulf that exists between different religious systems due to the ignorance of their interactions and that of history of mutual impacts. Though it is true that *Śramaṇic* tradition in general and Jainism and Buddhism in particular have some distinct features, discriminating them from the early *Vedic* or *Brāhmaṇic* tradition yet they are not alien faiths. They are the children of the same soil and they come forward with a bold reformatory spirit. It would be a great mistake if we consider that Jainism and Buddhism, are a mere revolt against Brāhminism or faiths alien to Hinduism. The Western scholars have committed a blunder in high-lighting this view

and laid the foundation of enmity and disintegration in this great Indian culture. But, in reality, it was not a revolt but a reformer's crusade. In fact, *Vedic* and *Śramaṇic* traditions are not rival traditions as some of the Western and Indian scholars wrongly constitute, they are complementary to each other. These two represent the two aspects of human existence — physical as well as spiritual. There has been a deliberate effort to create a gulf between Jainism and Buddhism on the one hand and Hinduism on the other, by Western Scholars. Unfortunately, some Indian scholars, even Jaina scholars have supported their point of view, but in my humble opinion this is a false step taken in a wrong direction. It is true that *Śramaṇic* and *Vedic* traditions have divergent views on certain religious and philosophical issues, their ideals of living also differ considerably, but this does not mean that they are rivals or enemies of each other. As reason and passion, *śreya* and *preya*, in spite of being different in their very nature, are the components of the same human personality, so is the case with *Śramaṇic* and *Vedic* traditions. Though inheriting distinct features, they are the components of one whole Indian culture. Jainism and Buddhism are not rivals to Hinduism, but what they preach to the Indian society may be termed as an advanced stage in the field of spirituality as compared to Vedic ritualism. If the *Upaniṣadic* trend, in spite of taking a divergent stand from *Vedic* ritualism, is considered as part and parcel of Hinduism and an advance towards spirituality, what is difficulty in measuring Jainism and Buddhism with the same yardstick? If *Upaniṣadic* tradition is considered as an advancement from Vedic ritualism to spiritualism, then we have to accept that Buddhism and Jainism have also followed same path with a more enthusiastic spirit. They stand for the upliftment of the weaker section of Indian society and redemption from priesthood and ritualism. They preach the religion of common man, based on

the firm footing of moral virtues, instead of on some external rituals.

Today, scholars working in the field of Jainology need a new approach to reinterpret the relationship of Jainism with Hinduism, particularly its Upaniṣadic trend, in the light of ancient Jaina texts of c. 4th and 3rd B. C. such as *Ācārāṅga*, *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* and *Isibhāṣiyāṁ*. I am sure that an impartial and careful study of these texts will remove the misconception that Jainism and Hinduism are rival religions. In *Ācārāṅga*, a number of passages bearing affinity with *Upaniṣadas*, in their words and style as well as in essence are found. *Ācārāṅga* mentions *Śramaṇa* and *Brāhmaṇa* simultaneously, not as rivals, as considered later on. In *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* (c. 4th B.C.), we find a mention of some *Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis* such as Videhanami, Bāhuka, Asitadevala, Dvaipāyana, Pārāśara and others. They are accepted by Jains as the *Ṛṣis* of their own tradition though they followed different codes of conduct. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, addresses them as great ascetics and great men, who attained the ultimate goal of life, i.e., liberation. *Isibhāṣiyāṁ* (*Ṛṣibhāṣita*), considered formerly as the part of Jaina canon, also mentions the teachings of Nārada, Asitadevala, Aṅgīrasa, Pārāśara, Āruṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Yājñavalkya, Uddālaka, Vidura and many other Upaniṣadic *Ṛṣis*, depicted as *Arhat Ṛṣis*. These references of the Jaina canonical works not only prove the open-mindedness of Jainism, but also that the stream of Indian spiritualism is one at its source, irrespective of divisions later on into Upaniṣadic, Buddhist, Jaina, *Ājīvika* and other rivulets. The work *Ṛṣibhāṣita* is a clear testimony to the assimilative and tolerant nature of Indian thought in general and Jaina thought in particular. Today, the society, deeply bogged into communal separatism and strife, such great works are our torch bearers.

Thus, the position accorded to the *Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis* in early sacred texts of Jainism is a clear

evidence that the stream of Indian spiritualism is one at its source. We may not have a proper understanding of the various trends if we treat them in isolation. *Ācārāṅga*, *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* and *Ṛṣibhāṣita* may be understood in a better way only in the light of *Upaniṣadas* and vice-a-versa. Similarly the *Suttanipāṭa*, *Dhammapada*, *Theragāthā* and other works of Pāli canon may only be studied properly in the light of Prākṛta Jaina canons and the *Upaniṣadas*.

Jainism and Buddhism

As already mentioned Jainism and Buddhism, both belong to the same *Śramaṇic* tradition of Indian culture. Mahāvīra, the 24th *Tīrthaṅkara* of Jains and Gautama, the Buddha, are contemporaries, flourished in the c. 6th and 5th B. C., at a time when the simple natured worshipper of early Vedic religion became caste-ridden and ritualistic. Western thinkers regard both of them as the rebel children of Hinduism but they are really, the reformers. They provide a spiritual meaning to the *Vedic* rituals and challenge the infallibility of the Vedas and undercut the indisputable superiority of the Brāhmaṇas. Both, being atheistic in nature hence, do not accept the concept of God as a creator and controller of the world. They establish the supremacy of man instead of the God and other deities and declare that man himself is the maker of his own destiny. It is the man alone and none else who can attain even Godhood through his moral life and spiritual practices. For both of them every living being is capable of attaining *Nirvāṇa*, i.e., Godhood or Buddhahood. Both of them rejected the concept of grace of God. For them, solely our own self, is responsible for misfortune as well as sufferings. Thus, they both accept the supremacy of self and law of *karma*. Moral code, preached by Buddha and Mahāvīra, in general sense is also similar. To get rid of the cycle of birth and death, i.e., from worldly sufferings, is the common end of Buddhism, Jainism and the *Upaniṣadic* thinkers. Both, Buddhism

and Jainism preach five *śīlas* or mahāvratas, with only one difference, that is, in place of non-possession of Mahāvīra, Buddha preaches non-consumption of intoxicative drugs.

The major differences between these two sister religions from the view-point of metaphysics and ethical code are following :

(a) First, while the *Upaniṣadic* thinkers contemplate one eternal and immutable reality behind the world of phenomena and plurality, the Buddha found everything impermanent and changing and thus substanceless *Niḥsvabhāva* and sorrowful. Mahāvīra synthesised both the above extreme views, he saw no contradiction between permanence and change. For him being and becoming — both are the aspects of the same reality. He defined reality as origination, decay and permanence. Lord Mahāvīra never believed in absolute permanence or total cessation.

(b) Secondly, the philosophical approach of Buddhism towards other philosophical doctrines was negative, while that of Jainism was positive. Lord Buddha preached that one should not fall in or accept any of the *dṛṣṭis*, i. e., philosophical view-point, whether it is of eternalism or of nihilism, because being one-sided, none of them represent a right view-point. But Mahāvīra said that both the doctrines are partially true, if they are viewed from different angles; so one should not discard one's opponent's view, as totally false. For Jainas different opposite views may be acceptable from different angles. To Mahāvīra nothing was absolutely true or false, hence, he remained positive in his approach all the time. Again, while Buddhism laid stress only on the changing aspect of reality, Jainism gave due consideration to the changing as well as the eternal aspect of reality.

(c) Regarding moral and religious practices, Jainism advocates rigorous and strict austerities, while Buddha condemns this rigorous outlook and recommends a middle path.

In spite of similarity in their mission, Buddhism flourished more on others' soils than on its native land and established itself as a world religion, while Jainism could never had a firm-footing on the foreign soil. It remained firmly rooted in India through all the periods of Indian history, while Buddhism, after c. 9th-10th A. D. was totally uprooted from its own land of origin. Why did these two religions meet the diametrically opposite fates ? There were many reasons behind it. To name a few, Buddhism in its early days found such royal patrons as emperor Aśoka and Kaniṣka, fired with the missionary zeal of spreading it outside India and had the territory of their empire across the Indian borders. Though Jainism also in its early days found some royal patrons as Candragupta Maurya, Samprati and Khāravela, yet they did not try for the expansion of Jainism on foreign soil. Moreover, the Jaina monks did not choose to go outside India, because it was very difficult for them to observe their strict code of conduct outside the country and they did not like to be flexible in their code of conduct. Another most important reason was that the Buddha had recommended the middle-path and remained flexible throughout his life, in prescribing the moral code for his monks and nuns. This middle-path and flexibility, made Buddhism more adaptable to the foreign soil. But due to the same reasons Buddhism was so adapted by Hinduism that it could not retain its independent entity in India. First of all the middle-path of Buddha was not very far from the teachings of the *Gītā*. Not only this, *Mahāyāna* an offshoot of Buddhism had very little to mark it out from the original stock of Hinduism. Secondly, the Buddha himself was accepted as the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu. Thirdly, flexibility in moral code made the life of Buddhist monks so luxurious and even corrupt that in India they could not retain the respect of common men. Jainism, on the other hand, throughout, had a

leaning towards extremism and remained strict and mostly inflexible in its moral code. That is why, Jaina monks could not go and propagate Jainism across the boundaries of India. Fourthly, owing to its strict code of conduct even for a house-holder it was not easily adaptable in foreign countries. However, it helped in retaining the faith of the common men and its own entity in India. Thus, the extremism of Jaina religion while on the one hand prevented its expansion in India and abroad, but on the other hand, it proved to be the sole cause of its survival in India. It was because of the strict austerities associated with Jainism that it remained a closed set, little understood beyond its adherents. Even the unusual absorbing power of Hinduism could not absorb it. This speaks of its originality, capable of withstanding the chal-

enge of Hinduism. Last but not least among the causes of the extinction of Buddhism from the Indian soil was that Buddhism never tried to develop the order of laymen and lay-women. By the word 'order' they mean the order of monks and nuns. But Jainism always laid stress on the four-fold order — of monks, nuns, laymen and lay-women and that was why it did not lose its identity.

Thus, the two parallel religions, having their origin against the same socio-religious back-ground and beginning their journeys together, drifted wide apart and had altogether a different history. Buddhism almost vanished in India, but prospered in China, Japan, Srilanka and many other countries; Jainism remained in India, neither expanding nor suffering from further shrinking.

