

Sadhna of Mahavira as Depicted in Upadhan Sruta

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Acarangasutra, the first of the eleven Angas, deals with the conduct or acara. Remarkably the term 'acara' as used by Mahavira does not connote merely moral conduct, rather, it is of five kinds¹ - knowledge, faith, self-discipline, austerities and spiritual exertion. Thus, it is clear that acara comprehends all the three right means of liberation, i.e. faith, knowledge as well as conduct. As Acarangasutra describes the means of obtaining liberation, it has been designated in Acaranga Nirvyukti, as the essence of the entire Jaina Instruction - (Ittha Ya mokhovao esa ya saro pavayanassa). Acaranga Nirvyukti Verse 91.² It is divided into two Srutakandhas. It is now generally agreed that first Srutakandha is the oldest part of of Jaina canons as a whole. Second Srutakandha of Acaranga known as Cula is certainly a subsequent addition. At present, first Srutakandha contains eight chapters only but the tradition holds that originally it had nine chapters, its eight chapter Mahaparijñā, now being extinct. Some scholars believe that its ninth chapter Upadhanasruta is also added in later times. Jacobi³ also held this view. To quote his words - The last lecture, a sort of popular ballad on the glorious sufferings of the prophet, was perhaps added in later times; (Sacred Books of the East, Intro P. XLVII - pt. 1i). However, valid this claim may be yet it is undoubtedly older in relation to rest of the canonical texts. This chapter, may rightly, be accredited to have the oldest depiction of Mahavira's life, that too, in a realistic and natural way, without any exaggeration. Padmabhusana Pt. Daisukhabhai Malavania,⁴ also held that Upadhanasruta, presented a realistic account of Mahavira's life of sadhna, after initiation (to attainment of omniscience). Dr. Tatia⁵ has also expressed the similar view infact, the biography of Mahavira in the Ayaro, chapter IX, which undoubtedly is the oldest and at the same time absolutely free from mythology, is an illustration of the extreme type of asceticism, adumbrated in the text.

The description of Upadhana Sruta is a testimony to the fact that Mahavira had already practised what he preached. It serves well to illustrate and to set a high example of true ascetic's life. We can say that description of Upadhanasruta alone is sufficient to impart respectability to whole set of ethical doctrine of Jainas. As it is a demonstration of preachings by the preacher himself, in its ideal form. Upadhanasruta, as it stands now, contains 69 gathas divided into four Uddesakas (lectures). According to Acaranga Nirvyukti,⁶ the name of the four uddesakas are - Cariya (Ramblings), Sijja (Seats), Parisahas (Endurance of Hardships) and Acigiccha (abandonment of medication). These contain 23, 16, 14 and 17 gathas respectively. However, this division is not strictly and exclusively applicable to the content of Upadhanasruta. For instance fourth Uddesaka, entitled Acikitsa contains only two verses on abandonment of medication, and description of Hardship is found in IIrd as well in IIIrd Uddesakas.

Before, discussing the sadhana of Mahavira as depicted in upadhanasruta, an understanding of various meanings of term 'upadhana' is essential. In Sutakrtanga tika⁷ Upadhan has been defined as austerity leading to liberation, in Sthananga tika⁸ as that through which sruta/knowledge respires and in Vyavahara Bhasya tika⁹ as that which enriches knowledge. In Aupapatika sutra.¹⁰ it means performance or doing, in Silanka's commentary on Acaranga¹¹ it means pillow, in¹² Upadespanda of Haribhadra, upadhi or Upadhi meaning things, implements or attachment to worldly things. In Pravacanasayra¹³ and Vidhimargaprapa¹⁴ it has been used as austerity performed for the reading of canonical sutras. Generally the term used for that particular austerity, observed to attain knowledge.

We can say that the term comprehends all austerities and performances contributing to liberation. Acaranga Nirvyukti¹⁵ also confirms this view.

where it has been classified as Dravya and Bhava. According to Niryukti, Dravya Upadhana means bed, place of residence, etc. while Bhava Upadhana is austerity and conduct. In the light of foregoing discussion, we can say that the title of the chapter is absolutely right and comprehends the subject-matter dealt within.

About the sadhana of Mahavira, as described in this chapter, Dr. Tatia's¹⁶ observation is to the point. He likens it with sadhana of Buddha. He remarks, "although it is not possible to have a full picture of the course of meditation followed by the Nayaputta, the strands that we are able to gather from stray references, make it plausible that it was not essentially different from one, practised and preached by Gautam Buddha. So far as the way of meditation is concerned, it was not much different. Though both observed the hard austerities in their course of sadhna yet later on Buddha declared the futility of hard penances for the attainment of knowledge while Mahavira commended them. (Ayaro Introduction p. XXIII).

The specific features of his sadhana, draw in our attention are (i) His constant vigilance (ii) His equanimity and equipoised state of mind, (iii) His indifference to external world, (iv) Practice of meditation, (v) Practice of non-violence, (vi) Abandonment of medication (vii) Abandonment of bodily care (viii) Control of sleep (ix) Abandonment of vitiated food, tasty food, (x) Practice of fasting and diet control (xi) Places of residence and (xii) Endurance of Hardships.

In the first uddesaka of third chapter Sitosniya of Acaranga, Mahavira preached apamatto parivae (1.3, 1.11 Aca.) that is one should be ever vigilant. In practice also he was always vigilant and never slackened for a moment as is evident from the term 'Apamatte' (1-9-2-4) and 'No Pamayam saim pi kuvittha' occurred in this sruta (1.9.4.15). Apramattata (Consciousness) and Pramattata (Unconsciousness) are relative terms. One can never be conscious and unconscious simultaneously. When one is conscious of the self, cannot

be conscious of external world and extraneous circumstances. In other words, when one is conscious of the self, becomes unconscious of external world. That is exactly, what marked the sadhna of Mahavira. He was always vigilant to his soul and he had become totally indifferent to all things other than self.

Mahavira remained equipoised all though his sadhana. With reference to his endurance of hardship and favourable and unfavourable and adverse situations the term 'Ahiyasae saya samio' (Aca. 1.9.2.1 and 1.9.3.1) and Avakham bhagavam samiasi (1.9.4.16.) have been mentioned to denote that he bore all hardships with equipoised state of mind. He became absolutely calm and poised, achieving through complete self-purification, discipline of mind, body and speech.

Equipoised state of mind or equanimity is very essential for sadhakas. Absence of it results in attachment and aversion, the ultimate cause of Karma-bondage. One whose mind is equipoised is sure, not to commit sin. This equanimity and equality form the basis of sadhana of Mahavira. Mahavira echoed the similar spirit when he preached 'sammatta-dānsi na kare pavam' (1.3.2) i.e the equanimous person does not commit sin.

Practice of Meditation

Indeed, the practice of meditation is the most persistent theme dominating all other descriptions, constituting the content of Upadhana sruta. Dr. Tatia¹⁷ has rightly observed that ninth chapter is an illustration of the role that was assigned to dhyana in the life of an ascetic. His austerities flowed from his jnana. He meditated day and night, self-restrained, mindful and concentrated.

Mahavira would always choose secluded places for meditation. If he did not get one, he would seclude himself from out world and get himself immersed deeply in the very depths of the innermost soul.

There is a gatha¹⁸ Adu porisim tiryambhittim, cakkhumasajja antaso jhai, depicting a particular mode of his meditation. It has been differently interpreted by scholars ancient as well as modern, Jinadas Gani¹⁹, Silanka²⁰, Jacobi²¹ and Pt. Malavania²² have interpreted it as an instance of meditation while walking, while Acarya Mahaprajna has interpreted it as the instance of Trataka dhyana. Commenting on this gatha he has said that fixing the gaze on the wall has been the meditational technique of Buddhist monks also. Concentrating on a point with detailed and unblinking eyes is called Trataka. By accomplishment of this sadhna of Trataka one can perceive all three worlds viz. upper, lower and middle. According to him. Abhayadevasuri²³ also has interpreted the 'tiryagbhitti' as the rampart of wall or a mound or the rock.

The interpretation of this gatha in the light of Trataka dhyana is correct. It appears that fearsome appearance of Mahavira with eyes bulged out, did not fit with the divine charm attributed to him, later on, by the tradition. That is why, in Curni and tika it has been explained as meditation while walking.

He always meditated in complete motionless state in any posture. He used to meditate in shade in winter and in scorching sun in summer. He never allowed his meditation to be hindered.

The practice of non-violence gets precedence over all other principles that constitute the spirituality. Mahavira, during the course of his sadhana, observed total non-violence. After having fully known the existence of living beings of earth-body, water-body, fire-body, air-body, seeds and vegetation and mobile living beings, and after having recognised their existence and ascertained their animatedness. Mahavira carefully rambled about doing no violence to them. He committed no violence to any living beings either by himself or with the assistance of others. Mahavira would take every care not to cause any hindrance or apprehension to any one whether birds, animals or human beings while on his way for ailms. (1.9.4, 11, 12).

Hardships

Mahavira had to bear terrible hardships of various types caused by inhabitants, animals, insects etc. while in meditation he would be bit even by a snake or a mongoose or a dog; occasionally attacked by ants which made his body bleed and frequently tormented by gad-flies, mosquitoes, bees and wasps. While meditating in a deserted hut he would be discomforted by burglars or debauches, while meditating on the crossroads, he would be upbraided or even hurt by village-guards, equipped with lances or spears. He would often have to bear even sexual advances caused by women.

In the course of depiction of sadhna, one whole uddesaka has been devoted to hardships and adverse conditions he has to face in ladha country (i.e., the districts of Tamulaka, Midnapur, Hugli and Burdavan in West Bengal) surrounded with prickly grass and hilly area. The people frequently attacked him, dogs bite him. Instead of coming to his rescue, inhabitants set dogs on him. He would not brush away encroaching creatures or annoying insects either himself or make others to do so. Sometimes while entering some villages he was forcibly stopped and even hit by people with a slap or a blow, or a stick, or a spear. Some inhabitants would even mangle, spit, fling heaps and thus inflict hardships on him. Some would lift him up and throw him down, while in meditation, some would push him out of his seat. But he had abandoned all care of the body. He was highly tolerant of the feeling of pain and anguish. Like a warrior, Mahavira wearing the armour of total abstinence from sinful activities never subdued by hardships and would never be disturbed and would always meditate.

Just as an elephant fighting on the battle front is not easily baffled by piercing weapons, so also Mahavira remained completely unruffled by and triumphed over various kinds of hardships, he experiences in ladha area.

Endurance of severe cold, snow-fall and scorching heat

At the time of initiation, Mahavira had put only one robe and resolved that he would not cover himself with this robe in winter.²⁴ Accordingly even in the case of severe cold and in snowfall, Mahavira would not even think of seeking windless abode or clothes to wrap up himself with. In cold he would stand under the shed. When the night grew colder, he would come outside in the cold under the open sky and go back to the shed, alternately, conformity with right conduct. In severe cold, he would boldly walk with his hands outspread and would not try to avoid cold by folding arm to his shoulders.²⁵ In summer he would sit in scorching sun.

Abandonment of Medication

Mahavira would not approve medication for himself. Though he was free from internal diseases yet he would occasionally be afflicted by the external i.e. injuries caused by accidents, etc. in the form of attacks by human-beings and animals or other beings. To illustrate his indifference in extreme form towards medication, the instance of cow-boy driving a wooden-nail into his ears, is given in Jaina Literature. A physician 'Kharaka' had to take it out and dress his wound. The moot point, here, is that Mahavira never wished any one to do any thing to him.

Soon after initiation into ascetic life, Mahavira had vowed to lead a life of self-abnegation by abandoning all bodily care. "In accordance with that he abandoned all sorts of purgatives, emetics, unguents, bathing, shampooing or massaging or even cleaning of the teeth."²⁶

Alongwith control of diet and control of senses, control of sleep constituted the main feature of his sadhana. In accordance with his preaching - 'Munino saya jagaranti'²⁷ that is wise are always awake' he would not seek sleep for the sake of pleasure and comfort. On feeling drowsy he would stand up and keep himself side awake.

After long spells of sleeplessness, for the upkeep and maintenance of body, he would have only a nap²⁸. After only a moment's sleep, he would be awake again and would sit in meditation with full internal watchfulness. When, sometimes, sleep tormented him too much at night, he would come out of the resting place and stroll for a about a muhurta or so. According to Acaranga Curni,²⁹ during the entire period of 12. years of his sadhana, he slept only for one Muhurta at Asthikagrama, during which he dreamed of ten dreams. According to Acaranga,³⁰ due to disturbance created by demi-god while in kayotsarga Mahavira lost alertness and slept for a muhurta.

Places of Residences

Though Mahavira would choose a secluded place³¹ for meditation yet he lived in all sorts of places, such as work-houses (like potter's lodge, etc.), assembly houses, shops, manufactories of under a shed of straw³². He sometimes used to stay in inns, in villages and towns, sometime in cremation grounds, in deserted houses or under the trees. What is noteworthy, is that he used to live cheerfully in these diverse lodges and his practice of meditation remained unobstructed.

Abandonment of vitiated food, tasty food and practice of fasting and dietary control

Mahavira always refused such food as prepared for the monks. He was devoid of any ardent longing for delicacies. He would not care whether or not his meal included cooked savoury, vegetables, whether he got cold rice, or stale bean soup, whether his meals consisted of vapid stuff like powder of gram or only grams, whether or not he got any food at all. He did not even think of any particular kind of food. Fully aware of the sinfulness, vitiating the alms that he received; he would never accept vitiated food.

As control of diet and fasting was significant part of his sadhana, he would take meals after ei-

ther two or three or even five days fast. Mahavira lived on three grains for eight months. He would go without water either for over two months or as long as for six months. He would not bother about type of meal or total non-availability of meal. He would eat alms with complete control of his passions.

Beclaiming all his passions, abandoning all kinds of attachments, Fulling all kinds of infatuations with sound or form. Always exerting himself in self-discipline, he never slackened for a moment.

Achieving through complete self-purification, discipline of mind, body and speech he became completely calm and poised. Practised with simplicity of heart. Through entire period of sadhana he remained equipoised and tranquil.

He followed without any reservation the aforementioned code of conduct and attained omniscience or Keval Jnana.

Thus we can say that this chapter has very successfully depicted his rigorous ascetic life, practice of non-violence, non-attachment, self-control and spiritual vigilance. It also gives us the glimpse of his equanimity which was maintained in all the situations, be it pangs of hunger and thirst, vagaries of heat and cold, painful bites of animals and insects and above all barbarous treatment from people.

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