

# The Survival of Jainism

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Hardly any scholar has taken interest in investigating into the main underlying currents which helped Jainism survive through the ages since the time of Mahāvīra. Below, we offer our study of the problem of the survival of Jainism in a rather more general character; that is, without entering into its detailed characters of providing references from scholarly research-works and also from the texts of the Jaina literature. We will nevertheless supply a Bibliography of selected works with substantial research bearing on the subject in its wider scope. The interested readers will get sufficient material from the works which assisted in our study and further investigations. It should, however, be mentioned that in our present study we deal with some neglected issues relevant for studies in similar or related problems.

The term : "survival" in its special context with Jainism has two-fold function. It suggests that Jainism (1) maintained its identity in Indian culture, (2) without being merged into the vast ocean of Brahmanism or Hinduism of the time. The problem of the survival of Jainism should be evaluated from two different issues : (1) the teachings of the Jaina ascetics, and (2) their impact on the society as a whole;— i.e. how the society formed a general impression from some striking features of the concepts in the teachings of the ascetics. The latter issue implies lay followers from the existing social communities.

The six ideals forming a code of conduct are the fundamentals of Jainism since its initial stage. They are, as rendered in later terminology : *ahimsā* (non-killing), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *rātrī-bhojana-tyāga* (avoiding meals at night time). These ideals more or less belong to the ethico-social aspect and imply conformity with an elaborated ideal code of moral principles. The said ideals were prevalent among almost all natives of the *āryan* vernaculars of the time.

The ideal code of the time was expressed in one word as "*dharma*" ("duty", "good behaviour", "righteousness") which is often reflected in the ancient literary records, e.g. *Gṛhyasūtras*, *Dharmasūtras*, *Epics*, *Gītā*, *Aśokan Edicts*, *Jātakas*, *Dhammapadas*, *Āyāra*, *Uttar'ajjhāyā*, etc. The ideal code with some of its elements was given a special treatment as a religious entity in Jainism.

Mahāvīra rendered a great service to the society in offering moral values to human beings as whole on par with spiritual progress. He considered full adherence to the code of conduct as a prerequisite for the spiritual uplift. He revived the code and reformed the religion of the time. His philosophy of life was simple for all to understand and live accordingly. He had hardly any great opponents except the *Ājīvikas* in matter of some doctrinal differences, and after overcoming them in disputes, he acquired for his teaching a free and wider field created of almost main hindrances.

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Our contention is quite different. The matter of doctrinal disputes or differences with other thinkers of any category is not the *only* ground for attracting the masses. Doctrinal discourses existed among various reputed thinkers of even early upaniṣadic period, and their differences latter evolved as various systems like Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Vedānta, etc. And it is worth mentioning that the holders of different views were honoured as *rṣis* (seers). Nor is the matter of non-Vedic or anti-Vedic approach of Mahāvīra (and the Buddha) was the main factor for getting popularity among the masses. The vast majority of the entire social communities including the thinkers like Mahāvīra and the Buddha and their followers showed a growing tendency not against the Vedas nor against the Vedic authenticity as such, but against only some of the *brāhmaṇas* who claimed supremacy of the Vedic ritualism over all other religions. They enjoyed their supremacy and cornered all social benefits. They also lengthened, rendered tedious, and secured thereby their monopoly in the ritualistic business. This class of the *brāhmaṇas* became *sanctum sanctorum* of the Vedic ritualism, and so-to-say, an agency in providing social and religious benefits.

Mahāvīra might have developed some differences with other thinkers of the time, but as a whole, his teaching was not anti-Vedic in form and spirit. In the early layers of the Śvetāmbara Jaina texts, e.g. Āyāra, Sūyagaḍa, Uttar'ajjhāyā, etc. we do not come across any statement going against the Vedas and Vedic authenticity, or even against the *brāhmaṇa* community as a whole. In the Āyāra, a person endowed with wisdom is respected as *veda-vid* (knower of the Vedas); in the Uttar'ajjhāyā, virtues are connected with true *brāhmaṇa*-characters; the Āyāra-Nijjutti declares the Āyāra as Veda; on some occasion, Mahāvīra is referred to as *mahā-brāhmaṇa*. Such instances can be traced further and added to the list. In the Uttar'ajjhāyā, which contains early layers of some scattered stanzas further extended with younger layers of jainization, it is difficult to trace any sign of revolt against the entire Vedic cult. But there are some references opposing the supremacy of the Vedic ritualism. Such a revolt was common even in the early society as a whole which is evident also in the early literature, e.g. Nirukta, Epic, Gītā, Upaniṣads, Brahmasūtras, etc.

Whatever teachings Mahāvīra would have offered and which his followers would have later developed as a system,—all gradually centered around the code of conduct. The ethico-social aspect of early period was now emerged as a religio-philosophical doctrine of the Jainas. But so far it had not achieved an independent religious status, and the followers of Mahāvīra were not a distinct “religious” community in the early period. These followers were mostly from the growing mercantile community. Probably, they were attracted by the wandering mendicants around whom masses flocked together to receive religious sermons. And such a favourable situation would have benefited the mercantile classes in establishing contacts with various communities of the society and to widen the scope of their business from place to place.

The reasons for the mass-appealing character of Mahāvīra's teachings are clear : he set forth a new reformed religion with higher evaluation of the code in opposition to the Vedic ritualism, and the religious need of an average man was equally fulfilled irrespective of his caste or class barriers. The fundamentals of the code and strict adherence to them in Jainism had no clash with any institutions : social, religious, and philosophical as well. It acted as a principal factor that helped Jainism survive during its Prakrit-phase, the phase of Prakrit Jainism, i.e. the Prakrit literature of the Jainas from the time of Mahāvīra roughly upto the end of the Gupta era.

The Classical era,—a creative period in Jainism started approximately from the 5th cent. A.D.. The learned monks attempted to switch over their literary activities from Prakrit to Sanskrit. In this period, new dialectics—the Nayas and the Saptabhaṅgi—evolved and standardized. They are the unique contributions of the Jainas in the field of Indian philosophies. Both dialectics serve as tools to support the fundamental doctrine of Anekānta-vāda or Syād-vāda. The veteran Jaina monk-philosophers skilfully absorbed all existing systems

into the all-embracing frame-work of the Anekānta-vāda, but they did not refute the systems unlike the Buddhist thinkers. They first adjusted other systems into the new dialectical fold of the Nayas, analysed and judged them properly as positive ideology, on the contrary, the systems were never contradicted. The frame-work of Anekānta-vāda has an encyclopedic character; it concedes all other systems, and examines them with the dialectical tools of the Nayas and the Saptabhangi. It is a sum-total of all systems and stands still above all !

Almost all thinkers of the time offered full status to the intelligent Jain thinkers and in their treatises granted the Jain views a separate treatment for discussions. Siddhasena divākara, Umāsvāti, Jinabhadra, Devanandin, Akalaṅka, and such other scholiasts enjoyed the prestige they deserved as the elite thinkers of Jainism. On account of "Sanskritization" of the Jain doctrines, Jainism won the distinction of an independent school of philosophy. Even an eclectic nature of the Classical Jain philosophy has to be evaluated from a sociological perspective, it also contributed to the cause of survival of Jainism.

In the medieval period, Jainism could successfully pose itself also as a religion on par with Hinduism. by way of adopting within its fold, some Hindu rites, caste-system, *saṃskāras*, etc. The works like Ādipurāṇa of Jinasena and the synthesizing approach in some of the works of Haribhadra contributed to Jainism in firmly establishing it as a separate sect. Gradually, also some Hindu gods were accepted and given subsidiary status in the Jain mythology and/or Pantheon; the *bhakti*-element was interwoven in the new Stotra literature. Thus, Jainism was hinduized in form, but maintained its independent identity. This situation created a tremendous impact on the society. It made difficult to distinguish a Jain from a Hindu. Even the matrimonial relation between Jains and Hindus was allowed, if the Hindu family was vegetarian or followed Vaiṣṇavism.

It has, however, to be remembered that the code of conduct was still in the center of religious activities, which certified Jainism as a harmless institution in society. Followers of the Jain faith acquired full scope for establishing their contacts with any community and business in any part of India. The very nature of Jainism attracted even the great Mogul emperor Akbar in the 16th cent. A.D.

One most important point regarding Jainism in contrast with Buddhism has to be borne in mind. The Jain monk-scholars aspired after widening their horizon of knowledge even beyond the range of literary activities in their own religion and philosophy. They studied and contributed to other literature of non-sectarian nature, and satisfied the general needs of other classes in the society. They were masters of Pāṇinian Grammar and also of the Prakrit languages. They composed Campūs, Purāṇas, Poems, works on Astrology, commentaries on Romantic works and Grammar,—all irrespective of any barriers of caste and creed. Such literary activities of the intelligentsia from the Jain ascetics have still remained simply a marvel in the field of Classical literature. Moreover, these scholiasts of the Middle Ages were enthusiastic to collect and preserve many valuable manuscripts mostly of the Brahmanical and also of non-sectarian/Romantic literature like dramas, poems, etc. Some of the manuscripts of Jain and non-Jain literature were even copied and preserved in the Jain Bhaṇḍāras. The whole society is much indebted to the Jain monks and the community for preserving the most valuable heritage of ancient India.

Thus, if the Jain philosophers won reputation on account of their philosophical contributions, other Jain monk-authors and scholiasts rooted deeply their social status by means of their contributions to the literary and scientific needs of the society.

We will now examine the other function of the term : "Survival" in its context with Jainism.

A reformer or a thinker when presenting his own views should also offer evaluation of views of others who are reputed on account of their brilliant achievements in the field of religion and philosophy. Such

intercommunication of ideas in course of time gains momentum in the direction of awarding the reformer or thinker a certain position and accepting or sanctioning his views in the literature of the upper class of the society.

The history of Indian religions and philosophies has still to notice this factor of "Sanskritization",—from down-to-upward movement of persons and gradation of their distinct achievements. Whenever any school of thought has resorted to sanskritization, it has a part of the wide-spread Brahmanical ideology. As a result, all existing ideologies, whether *āryan* or *non-āryan*, Vedic or non-Vedic or anti-Vedic,—all were sanskritized and merged into the Brahmanism. Some of them retained their separate identity, e.g. Śaivism, Śākta cult, Sāṃkhya, etc. on account of their distinct views contributing to the Indian religions and philosophies of the time. And the *āryan* society as a whole honoured such sanskritized members as *ṛsis* (seers), or incarnations of God. Also, some deities of the sanskritized faiths were offered places in the Hindu pantheon.

The Buddhists approximately from the 2nd cent. B.C. onward resorted mainly to the philosophical and logical discussions and simultaneously carried on criticism and evaluation of views of the Brahmanical schools of thought. As a result, through intercommunication of ideas—sanskritization—the Buddhism as a philosophy, rich in logic, achieved an esteemed position as a distinct school of thought in the Brahmanical systems. Slowly, the Buddha also occupied a place in the Hindu literature, and was installed as one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. However, real causes of gradual disappearance of Buddhism from the Indian soil are so far as yet not discovered, nor some views in this direction are satisfactorily accepted. Probably the Buddhists through centuries neglected the other,—the secular side of the social communities,—the literary and scientific wants of the general social life of the time. On the contrary, they engaged themselves in one-sided activities of philosophic discussions and theses not easily understandable to an average man. This factor created a void for them in the society.

And ever since the time of Mauryan emperor Aśoka, Buddhism enjoyed some status outside India; from similar events it seems most probable that the Buddhists had a tendency to go far beyond the boundary of India. It was a kind of missionary attitude developed since Aśoka.

But the case of Jainism is unique. It was neither merged into the existing streams of Brahmanism, nor Mahāvīra was admitted as an incarnation of God in Hinduism, and still Jainism survived and its followers lived harmoniously as a part of social community.

As a matter of fact, the Prakrit Jainism required intercommunication of ideas—a sort of sanskritization in society the sanskritization of Jainism started too late, approximately some seven centuries later than that of Buddhism. And when the Jaina philosophy acquired a distinct status in Indian philosophies, the Hinduism was deeply rooted and firmly established.

Mahāvīra limited his activities to only teachings to the masses. He was not serious about and gave no importance even to the Buddha or the Buddhist ascetics of his time, nor had he shown his inclination either to meet or to involve himself in any sort of discussions with the reputed thinkers of his surrounding regions. His meeting with Gosāla Maṅkhaliputta was but a mere accident. Some meetings of Mahāvīra with others as recorded in some Prakrit texts of the Jainas are of little significance. The personalities with whom Mahāvīra had encounters on different occasions remain simply the narrative characters. They could hardly be merited as well-known thinkers of Brahmanism. In any case, it is indeed a strange event in the history that in Mahāvīra's life-time no meeting between him and any reputed thinker took place or has been recorded.

If Mahāvīra remained indifferent in such matters, his disciple Gotama remained alert and acted as one of the living media of intercommunication. He carried his master's message to the common man and mendicant whom he happened to see personally. He also informed Mahāvīra about the discussions or special

events which would have taken place during his casual meetings with someone. Majority of meetings between Mahāvīra and other thinkers had been materialized after they knew something attractive and important about Mahāvīra directly or indirectly through Gotama.

But it seems, later the followers of Jainism could not project the outstanding personality of Mahāvīra as a religious reformer or as a distinguished thinker of India. Before the firm establishment of Hinduism, the ascetics of the Prakrit Jainism could hardly produce any pioneer work in Sanskrit on philosophy, discussing various views of existing systems,—the work, which could stand in competition with Brahmanism and Buddhism of the time. It would have tended Hinduism to admit the founder of the Jaina faith—Mahāvīra as one of the incarnations of God ! Even the Sanskrit commentaries on the Tattvārthasūtra (the first so far available treatise of Jainism in Sanskrit language) were composed not before the 7th cent. A.D. ! The Jaina monks spent, on the contrary, much of their valuable time till the end of 6th or 7th cent. A.D. to codify their scattered literature, and also in rivalry—not with any other community,—but only with their own fellow-brethren !

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