

Emperor Khāravela and the Jaina Tradition in Orissa

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After the invasion of Kaliṅga by the great emperor Aśoka the history of Kaliṅga is somewhat obscure. But in about 1st century B. C. there emerged the great Kaliṅga empire having Khāravela as its great sovereign ruler. The inscription in the Hāthīgumphā cave in the Uday-giri hill near Bhubaneswar details the manifold achievements of Khāravela. The damaged condition of the rock leaves many more events of Khāravela's reign unknown, yet whatever remains is enough to give clear evidence of the glorious rule of Khāravela, whose eventful career is a landmark in the history of Kaliṅga, nay in the history of ancient India.

Khāravela belonged to third generation of the royal Chedi dynasty of Kaliṅga. From his title, Mahārāja and Mahāmeghavāhana it appears that he was a very powerful king during his time. He was endowed with all auspicious signs of a ruler and was well-versed in the art of writing, accountancy, law and administration. At the age of sixteen he was installed as Yuvarāja and took the responsibility of administration. Eight years later he was crowned king.

Khāravela was not merely a great conquerer. He was a good administrator as well and ruled his kingdom with perfect peace. For public welfare he spent large sums on irrigation, gardening and house building. His own palace, Mahāvijayaprāsāda was also magnificently built. He repaired and enlarged a canal which was originally excavated by a Nanda king three centuries ago. This Nanda king was probably Mahāpadmananda. Another curious incident was that the great image of Jina Rṣabhadeva which was carried away by this Nanda king to Magadha from Kaliṅga at the time of his invasion, was again brought back to Kaliṅga by Khāravela.¹ Thus he avenged the wrong done to Orissa and its people through centuries by Magadha emperors. Khāravela being a devout Jaina patronised Jainism. He excavated a number of caves in the Kumārī Parvata (Khaṇḍagiri hill) and also a monastery in

1. See K. P. Jayaswal, JBORS Vol. III Dec. 1917 pp. 425-85.

the neighbourhood for the Jaina monks. Since a considerable portion of the inscription referring to the above is damaged, nothing can be guessed as to what happened during the latter part of the reign of Khāravela. From the Udayagiri caves, it appears that the king himself, in company of his queen, led the life of a Śramaṇa during his old age. We know nothing about his descendants and the fate of his conquests after his death.

Another great name in the ancient history of Kaliṅga is king Brahmadatta. He is believed to have embraced Jainism. There are many place names in Orissa which were meant mainly to commemorate some of the Jaina legends as narrated in the Jaina scriptures.

A mountain range called Baula is situated in a village namely Poḍāsiṅgi in the Keonjhar district. A side of this region is marked by the ruins of a wall. The images of a number of Tīrthaṅkaras, Yakṣas and Yakṣiṇīs are scattered over here. In the table-land above here one also finds a large status of Mahāvīra. This region was previously under Toṣālī. The name Baula appears to be a corrupt form of Vipula (of Rājagiri) on which Mahāvīra first preached his doctrines. It is interesting to note that the circular size of the above mountain range bears similarity with that of Rājagiri hills.

Apart from the above historical evidences, there are also literary and religious evidences to show the impact of Jainism on the Orissan culture. The influence of Jaina literature is clearly noticed in the poems of ancient Oriya poets. The story of giving one hundred loads of lotus flowers by Krishna to Kamsa and the term Rādhācakra used in connection with the revolving wheel that was pierced through by Arjuna in Draupadi Svayambara all find mention in the ancient Oriya literature.² The famous Oriyā Bhāgavata written By Jagannātha Das in the sixteenth century contains a chapter in its fifth sarga to preach Jaina doctrine by way of the instructions imparted by Ṛṣabhadeva to his one hundred sons. Here it is said that total emancipation lies in renunciation of binding forces such as desire and hatred.

In mid-nineteenth century Orissa saw a great religious movement in the form of what is known as Alekha dharma. The sole preacher of this religion is known to be Mahimā Svāmī. This sect does not believe in idol-worship, does not approve of caste system, preaches pity and

2. See Sārālā Mahābhārata and Rasakallola of Dinakṛṣṇa.

non-violence. Alekha bhajana or Śūnya Upāsana or meditation on the void or non-entity is core of this religion. The saints of this faith wear a bark garment known as Kumbhīpaṭa after the name of the tree called Kumbhī. The monks usually lead the life of Parivrājaka and wherever they go they do not remain there for more than a night. The avadhūtas, as they are called, live a rigorous way of life without inflicting pain on others. The shrine of this religious sect is at Joranda in the Dhenkanal district. The Viṣṇugarbhapurāṇa of Caitanya Das and Stuti Cintāmaṇi of Bhima bhoi are the two immortal poems which preach this religion. The teachings of Ṛṣabhadeva find mention in the Viṣṇugarbhapurāṇa.

The doctrine of non-violence and doing good to others even at the risk of one's own self which are the very essence of Jainism, are nicely portrayed in popular folk literature of Orissa. The ideal of Jaina asceticism find its echo in popular poem like Ṭikā Govindacandra etc.

The sacred memory of Pārśvanātha is alive among the people of Orissa and the caves of Khaṇḍagiri stand witness to his religious preaching. Jainism which was at the apex of glory in Orissa during the reign of Khāravela remained as such till the fifth century A. D. when the tantricism in Jainism rose its head to compete with that of the Buddhists. This trend remained until the rise of Vaiṣṇavism in the tenth century A. D.

Last but not the least, Lord Jagannātha of Purī and the Jagannātha cult which have been dominating the entire culture and literature of Orissa through centuries are said to be originated from Jainism. Lord Jagannātha is regarded as Ṛṣabhadeva and the word nātha associated with His name has a close likeness with the names of the Jinās suffixed by nātha or deva. The Jagannātha cult in Orissa is believed to have its origin from early Vedic period, thus finding a coincidence with the origin of Jainism about the same period. The famous car festival of Lord Jagannātha is a reminiscence of the Caitya Yātrā of Jainas. The Kalpa Vaṭa (fig tree believed to be wish-fulfilling), Cakra kṣetra, the twentyfour steps to the Purī temple symbolising the twentyfour Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras are all associated with Jainism. Indrabhūti in his 'Jñānasiddhi' offers his salutation to Lord Jagannātha by calling Him both Jina and Buddha and resembling the sky (Śūnya).

praṇipatya Jagannātheṁ sarvajinavarārcitam/
sarvabuddhamayaṁ siddhivyāpinaṁ gaganopamam//

परिसंवाद-४

Pandit Nilakantha Das, a noted literateur and writer of Orissa opines that the Jagannātha cult started purely from Jainism³ and in course of time it has combined in it several religious doctrines. In fact now we see that Lord Jagannātha who is popularly invoked as *Patitapāvana* (purifier of the fallen) is a harmonious blending of all religious faiths *sarva-dharma-samanvaya*).

Lastly it has to be admitted that the cultural, religious and the literary tradition which prevails in Orissa through the ages right from the times of emperor Khāravela and still earlier are the result of the impact of Jainism.

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Comments

As regards the Jina images carried away by Nandarāja the author identified the Nanda ruler as Mahāpadmananda with certainty which must not be taken for granted in the present state of our knowledge. The author has suggested such identity of place-names (Baula-Rājagiri) and physical features which appear to be imaginary and more over has nothing to do with the Jaina tradition in Orissa. The author is also tempted to make wild guessings, one of which pertains to Jagannātha cult. The concluding paragraph is however ambiguous and demands and explanatory note.

— Maruti Nandan Prasad Tirvari.

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3. See Oḍiā Sāhityara Krama Pariṇāma. Also see Oḍisāre Jaina dharma by Dr. Laxminarayana Sahu. Also see my article Influence of Jainism on Orissan Culture.