The Jain Presence in Nepal
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As contrasted with Brāhmaṇism/Hinduism and with Buddhism, there are no readily recognizable traces of Jainism in contemporary Nepal though the Jain presence in the adjacent area in the past is on record.

Mahāvīra severely limited the movements of Jain monks and nuns to an area which he defined as an Aryam region, that is a region where their conduct could be safeguarded. It was bounded by Anaga-Magadha in the east and Thūpā (Thaneshwar) in the west, to Kuṇāla (Srāvasti) in the north and Kośāmbī in the south. Under Sampratī, the grandson of Aśoka, the area was extended to the twenty-five and a half countries comprising his empire, with the charge that Jain munis be venerated. The identification of the last country on the list, Kekāra-ardha, has been located at the base of Nepal, in the north-east of Srāvasti. (1)

Of the trade routes of antique times, the Uttarāpatha, stretching across the north of the Indian continent, facilitated traffic for the sārthas, the caravans which linked flourishing cities and towns, among them Vaiśālī, Srāvasti and Kapilavastu, the latter of which Moti Chandra identifies with Tilaurākot in Nepal. He equates Janakpur, in Nepal, with Mithilā, the capital of Videha. (2)

The itinerant merchant, under the constant threat of robbers lying in wait along his way, entrusted his well-being and precious possessions to the security of the caravan and its skilled sārthavāna or
sārthavāhana, the entrepreneur, who was responsible for the management and success of the venture. He made arrangements for the operation of the caravan, its route, its schedule, the types of vehicle and, the assignment to them of the participants in each enterprise — old and young, male and female, merchant, casual commuter, and so on. He dealt with the official representatives of the countries along the route, negotiating with them and paying the required surcharges. (A sārtha has been described as a consortium of merchants who invested equal amounts of capital and, travelling in a caravan, carried on trade with outside markets. One might view the sārthavāhana as a forerunner of the present-day multinational organizations.) Furthermore, the caravan leader had many opportunities to observe and store in mind for future reference social scenes and political events set against the background of the geographical phenomena of the areas he traversed. This leads me to the conclusion that the court officials, identified as ārādhīnī (3) (cf., for example, Hindi āṣṭhānī "merchant")[3] were not only financial advisers and tax assessors and as well as collectors to rājās and their officers, but could also function as heads of intelligence networks equipped with first-hand information obtained from their widely ranging merchant-colleagues. (I need only refer to the Arthasāstra's comments on the recruitment for espionage of wayward merchants and monks - Jain and Buddhist.)

For other clues to the Jain presence in Nepal we turn to Jain writings. Moti Chandra in his Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India which first appeared in Hindi under the title
Sārthavāna observes that the canonical literature, the अगस, the upāṅgas, gāthās, cūrṇis and the commentaries pertaining thereto contain cultural data not found in Pāli or Sanskrit literature. The sparsity in available texts has made access to this material difficult. (For example, one encounters in the Paumacariu of SvaYambhu of the second half of the 9th century A.D., stray references to Nepal, one to its mask and the other to the thighs of its women. (4)) In discussing the Sārthavāna Moti Chandra contrasts Buddhist with Jain writers: "... it is difficult to [learn] from Buddhist literature in what kinds of goods the merchants traded and what was their organization ... Jaina literature believes in giving even the minutest details ... The Jaina monks were wanderers ... and, while travelling from place to place, they did not fail to observe the life of the people. Jainism was also chiefly the religion of merchants and, therefore, the Jaina literature has not failed to describe the various aspects of the life of their followers. Jain monks, wherever they went, studied [the] geographical and social conditions and also the local language in order to preach ... Whatever ... their date ... the material preserved is ancient ... ."

Both Digambara and Svetāmbara traditions are in general agreement that during the reign of Candragupta Maurya (c. 322-298 B.C.) a severe famine in Magadha, lasting a dozen years, forced a migration of the Jains to the south. The Āvaśyakacūrṇī of Jinadūsagāñī Mahattara (fl. second half of second century A.D.) first records the Svetāmbara
tradition describing the move to Nepal of Bhadrabāhu, the head of the
Samgha. (5)

The famed Jain savant Hemacandra (fl. mid-twelfth century A.D.),
gives a fuller account in the Sthāvatīvalī or Pariśiṣṭaparvan, the
appendix to his Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣa-carīta. (6)

ītāvca tasminduskle karaile kālarātrivat |

nirvāhārtham sādhusamgastīram niranidheryayau ||55||
agupanām tu tadā sādhunām vismītaṃ āruṭam |
anubhyasanato naṣatyadhītaṃ dhīmatāmapi ||56||
saṃgho 'tha ptaḷiḥputre duṣkālaṃte 'khilo 'miṭat |
yadamgādhyayanodesādyāśādyasya tadādade ||57||
tatacaikādaśāmāni ārīsaṃgho 'melayattadā |
dṛṣṭivādanimittam ca tasthau kimoidvicintayan ||58||
nepāladeśamārgastham bhadrabāhuṃ ca pūrvinam |
jnātvā samghah samāhvātum tataḥ praiśīṃmunidvayam ||59||
gatvā natvā munī tau tamityūcāte kṛtāṅjali |
samādiśati vaḥ saṃghastatṛgamanahetave ||60||
so 'pyuvāca maṇāpraṇam dhyānamārabdhamaṣtī yat |
sādhyaṃ dvādaśabhirāṣaīnirgamiṣyāmyaṃ tataḥ ||61||
maṇāpraṇe hi nispānte kāye kasmāciddāgate |
sarvapūrvāṇi guṇyante sūtrārthādhyāṃ muhūrttataḥ ||62||
tadvacastau munī gatvā saṃghasyaśaṃsaṣatmatha |
saṃgho 'pyaparamāhūyādideṣeti munidvayam ||63||
gatvā vācyāḥ sa ācāryo vaḥ ārīsaṃghasya āsanam |
na karoti bhavettasya daṇḍaṃ ka iti śamsa naḥ ||64||
saṅghabhānyaḥ sa kartavya iti vakti yadā sa tu

tarhi taddaṇḍhayogyo 'sītyācāryo vācyā uccakaiḥ ||65||

tābhyaṁ gatvā tathaiva kta ācāryo 'pyevamūcivān

maiṃ karotu bhagagāṃsāṃghaḥ kim tu karotvadiṃ ||66||

mayi praśādaṁ kurvāṇaḥ śrīsāṃghaḥ praṇipotviha

śīṣyāṃmedhāvinastebhyaḥ sapta dāsyāmi vācaṇān ||67||

tatraikam vācaṇām dāsyey bhikṣācaryāta āgataḥ

tisṛṣu kālavelāsu tisro 'nyā vācaṇāstathā ||68||

sāyāṇhapratikramane jaṭe tisro 'parāḥ punaḥ

setsyatevaṃ saṃghakāryaṃ matkāryasyāvibādhyā ||69||

tābhyaṃ metya tathākhyāte śrīsaṃgho 'pi praśādabhāk

praṇipotsthūlabhadrādhisādhupāśaṣṭatīṃ tataḥ ||70||

tānsūrrivācayāmāsa te 'pyalpā vācaṇā iti

udbhajyeyurnijanṃ sthānaṁ sthūlabhadrastavāsthita ||71||

śrībhadrābhānupādānta sthūlabhaddro maddāmati

pūrvannāṃṣataṁ varṣair apāṭhādaṣṭabhīrbrām ||72||

kimudbhagnastadityuktaṁ sūripā so 'bravīdidam||

nodbhajye bhagavān kim tu samālpā eva vācaṇān ||73||

sūrirūcē mama dhyānaṁ pūrṇaprayāmanāṃ tataḥ

tadante vācaṇāstubbhyam praddhyāmi tvadicochaya ||74||

sthūlabhadrastataṁ proce 'dhītaṣeṣam ca me kiyat

saṃkhyāṁ gurustadā cākhyabindūdadhyupamāṇataṁ ||75||

pūrṇe dhyāne mahāprāṇe sthūlabhadro mahāmuni

dvivastūṇāni pūrvāṇi daśa yāvatsamāpayat ||76||

ityākhyāya sthūlabhadrānuṣṭaṁ jijamārayam||
During the famine, dreadful like the night of annihilation at the end of the world, to survive the Samgha went to the sea. At that time the sacred texts, neglected, were misremembered by the monks and from lack of practice, were about to be lost, even though they were studied by the learned. When the famine was over the entire Samgha met at Pāṭaliputra and, assembling the fragments they recalled, collected eleven Āṃgas. Thinking to recover the twelfth Āṃga, the Dṛṣṭivāda, and knowing that the venerable Bhadrabāhu (the sole repository of that Āṃga) was staying in Nepal, the Samgha sent two munis to call him (to the Council). The two munis went there and bowing reverently addressed him. "The Samgha sends for you." He replied, "I have begun the Mahāprāṇa-meditation which will take twelve years to complete. When I have completed the Mahāprāṇa, I will recount in a short time all the Purvas and the meanings of the Sūtras." The two munis went off and repeated his reply to the Samgha. The Samgha, once again, sent two munis with instructions to ask him the punishment an Aćārya should incur who does not heed the bidding of the Samgha. If he says it should be exclusion from the Samgha, let him be told it is a fitting punishment. When this took place, Bhadrabāhu said to the two munis, "Let the Noble Samgha not do so. However, let it do this. May
the Revered Samgha be gracious and send learned students to whom, when it is convenient (i.e., in the intervals during my performance of the Mahāprāṇa), I will recite seven lectures to them every day." The Samgha agreed and sent to Bhadrabāhu five hundred munis, headed by Sthūlabhadra. Of the group, only Sthūlabhadra was able to keep up with Bhadrabāhu to the completion of the Mahāprāṇa and was able to learn the first ten Pūrvas.

Subsequently, having reason to consider Sthūlabhadra unworthy, Bhadrabāhu discontinued his lectures, even though he begged his forgiveness. He finally relented and said he would instruct Sthūlabhadra in the remaining Pūrvas, with the provision that these (the last four Pūrvas) cannot be taught by him to anyone. Sthūlabhadra assumed the leadership of the Samgha after Bhadrabāhu's death."

In the matter of the dearth of Jain archaeological remains we can quote the historian, Vincent A. Smith, who, writing in 1915, noted: In olden days the creed of Mahāvīra was far more widely diffused than it is now. In the 7th century A.D., for instance, the creed had numerous followers in Vaiśālī (north of Patna) and in eastern Bengal, localities where its adherents are now extremely few. I have myself seen abundant evidences of the former prevalence of Jainism in Bundelkhand during the mediaeval period especially in the 11th-12th centuries. Jain images in the country are numerous in places where a Jaina is now never seen.(7)
A contemporary scholar, Luciano Petech, suggests in his Medieval History of Nepal [p. 195] that the Sulâṅkî (also spelled Surakî) family of the principality of Sikharapuri (Pharping), fourteenth to sixteenth centuries A.D., was connected with the Solâṅkî dynasty of Gujarat, several of whose kings were either Jains or influenced by them. He further suggests that the Pharping family had migrated from that area. A Book of Omens noted on page 38 in his Art of Nepal by Pratipaditya Pal contains an interesting reference to a "Jain mendicant." (8)

Sylvain Levi in his History of Nepal, Pt. I, (9) describes an inscription which he found at Kathmandu written on the pedestal of a statue which has disappeared and replaced by another image. The gist of his translation reads: "In the year 402, while the king Mānadeva governed the earth properly . . . the chief of a company of merchants, Guhamitra, erected with devotion a holy Divākara under the name of Indra. He assigned for revenue a field in the locality of Yathāgumpadārum(?), (valued) at a hundred (paṇas) and land to the size of a pīṇḍaka." Levi, I should note considered the composite divinity, i.e., Divākara-Indra, erected and worshipped by Guhamitra puzzlingly syncretic. (10)

Again we turn to Jain sources for its solution. Kācārya Raviṣeṇa, the author of the Padma Purāṇa, c. 678 A.D., refers to himself as the granddisciple of Arhatmuni, the disciple of Divākara whose preceptor was the earliest guru, Indra. (11) The inscription can now be interpreted: Guhamitra, the head of a sārtha, a Jain, erected the image to the Ur-
guru, Indra, whose disciple was Divākara and that he, Guhamitra, had
donated a portion of land in Yathāgumpadāsaḥ(?), the yield of which was
for the maintenance of the image and its attendant shrine.

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Perhaps this beginning will encourage interest in studies into the
traditions of groupings in the Newar merchant-castes, e.g., the
Shresthas/Sheshyas, for further evidence of Jain presence in Nepal.

NOTES

1. Jagdishchandra Jain,
Prakrit Narrative Literature, Origin and Growth, pp. 155-56; and
Bṛhatkalpa Sūtra 1.50.

2. Moti Chandra, Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India. Abhinav

Publisher: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan, Jaipur; distributor:
Impex India, New Delhi. 1981. On p. 111 Dr. Lath writes "The
Nīśṭha Cūrṇi a Jain text written by Jinadas Gani in the 7th century,
records that one of the ministers in a king's council of his days was
called the 'āresthi'. He was an important businessman, representative
of merchants and trading guilds of the state." See, also, pp. 7-8 of
this earliest biography of the mid-seventeenth century where the author
describes his Jain father's service in Bengal as a revenue-collector for the diwan, himself a pious Jain. "He had five hundred men serving under him as potdars [read: fotdār] (revenue-collectors), who were all lucky men, busy amassing great wealth."


[4. taṃmī ya kāle bārasavariṣo dukkālo uvaṭṭhi saṃjñāito ya saṃuddatīre. ācchettā puṇāra vi pāḍaliputte miliṭa aṇṇassa uddeso aṇṇassa khamḍaṃ evaṃ saṃghādeśhām tehiṃ ekkāraṇa aṃgāṇi saṃghāṭitāṇi diṭṭhivādo natthi nepālavattantī bhayavaṃ bhaddabāhussāntī acchati coddasapuvvi .]

6. Sthāvīravālī Charita or Parīśishṭāparvan. Being an Appendix of the Trishashtisālaṇakā Purusha Charita by Hemachandra. Edited by Hermann Jacobi, Ph. D., Published for the Bibliotheca Indica. Calcutta: Printed at the Baptist Mission Press and published by the Asiatic Society, 1891.])


Angeles, and London. 1985. Among inauspicious symbols listed in the
caption to the illustration are "... owl, rooster, donkey, deer, naked
Jain mendicant, alligator, snake, and Saiva Kapalika."

translated by Theodore Riccardi, Jr.

10. Levi's reading of the inscription is as follows:
1. [sambala]t 400 2 (1) rājānāḥ śri ṃānadevasaya samyak pālayato mahīm (1)
Śrīśaṃkhaṇḍaklasya tithau pāncadaśyāṃ śubhārththiṇā (1)
2. vaṇijām sārthavāneṣa Guhāmitreṇa bhaktiṣaḥ (1) saṃsthāpito tra
bhagavān İndro nāma divākaraḥ (2) kṣetraṃ yathāgūmpadçuṃ-pradeçe
3. ċetasya bhūmiḥ piṇḍakāmāṇi ca

Gnoli and Vajracārya are in general agreement with the translation.
Vajracārya has variants in his reading of the text. (See
Licchavikālaka Abhilekha. By Dhanavajra Vajracārya. Nepal ra Eśvalī