

The Jain Presence in Nepal

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As contrasted with Brāhmanism/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 Aryan region, that is a region where their conduct could be safeguarded. It was bounded by Aṅga-Magadha in the east and Thūṇā (Thaneshwar) in the west, to Kuṇālā (Srāvastī) in the north and Kośāmbī in the south. Under Samprati, 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, Kekayī-ardha, has been located at the base of Nepal, in the north-east of Srāvastī. (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, Srāvastī and Kapilavastu, the latter of which Moti Chandra identifies with Tilaūrākot 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 sārthavāha or

sārvabhāṣa, 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 sārvabhāṣa 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 sārvabhāṣa 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 śreṣṭhins (3) (cf., for example, Hindi seth "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 Arthaśāstra'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

Sārthavāha observes that the canonical literature, the Agas, the upāṅgas, gāthās, cūrṇis and the commentaries pertaining thereto contain cultural data not found in Pāli or Sanskrit literature. The sparcity 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 musk and the other to the thighs of its women. (4)) In discussing the Sārthavāha 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 Jinadāsagaṇi 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 Saṅgha. (5)

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

itaśca tasminduṣkāle karāle kālarātrivat |)

nirvāhārthaṃ sādhusaṅghastīraṃ nīraṇidheryayau ||55||
agunṇamānaṃ tu tadā sādḥūnāṃ viśmṛtāṃ śrūtāṃ |
anubhyasanato naśyatyadhītaṃ dhīmatāmapi ||56||
saṅgho 'tha pāṭalīputre duṣkālānte 'khilo 'milat |
yadamgādhyayanoddeśādyāsīdyasya tadādade ||57||
tataścaikādaśaṅgāni śrīsaṅgho 'melayattadā |
dṛṣṭivādanimittaṃ ca tasthau kiṃcidvicintayan ||58||
nepāladeśamārgasthaṃ bhadrabāhuṃ ca pūrvīṇam |
jñātvā saṅghaḥ samāhvātum tataḥ praiṣīnmunīdvayam ||59||
gatvā natvā munī tau tamityūcāte kṛtāñjalī |
samādiśati vaḥ saṅghastatrāgamanahetave ||60||
so 'pyuvāca mahāprāṇaṃ dhyānamārabdhamasti yat |
sādhyam dvādaśabhirvaṣairnirgamīṣyāmyahaṃ tataḥ ||61||
mahāprāṇe hi niṣpanne kārye kasmīṃścidāgate |
sarvapūrvāṇi guṇyante sūtrārthābhyam muhūrtataḥ ||62||
tadvacastau munī gatvā saṅghasyāśamsatāmatha |
saṅgho 'pyaparamāhūyādideśeti munīdvayam ||63||
gatvā vācyāḥ sa ācāryo yaḥ śrīsaṅghasya śāsanam |
na karoti bhavettasya daṇḍaḥ ka iti śaṃsa naḥ ||64||

saṃghabāhyaḥ sa kartavya itī vakti yadā sa tu |
 tarhi taddaṇḍayogyo 'sītyācāryo vācya uccakaiḥ ||65||
 tābhyāṃ gatvā tathai^oḥkta ācāryo 'pyevamūcivān |
 maivam karotu bhagagānsaṃghaḥ kiṃ tu karotvadaḥ ||66||
 mayi prasādam kurvāṇaḥ srīsaṃghaḥ prahiṇotviha |
 śiṣyānmedhāvinastebhyaḥ sapta dāsyāmi vācanāḥ ||67||
 tatraikāṃ vācanāṃ dāsyē bhikṣācaryāta āgataḥ |
 tisṛṣu kālavelāsu tisro 'nyā vācanāstathā ||68||
 sāyānhapratikramaṇe jāte tisro 'parāḥ punaḥ |
 setsyatyevaṃ saṃghakāryaṃ matkāryasyāvibādhayā ||69||
 tābhyāmetya tathākhyāte śrīsaṃgho 'pi prasādabhāk |
 prāhiṇotsthūlabhadrādīsādhupaṃcaśatīm tataḥ ||70||
 tānsūrrivācayāmāsa te 'pyalpā vācanā itī |
 udbhajyeyurnijaṃ sthānaṃ sthūlabhadrastvavāsthita ||71||
 śrībhadrabāhupādānta sthūlabhadro maddāmati |
 pūrvāṇāṃṣṭakam varṣair apāṭhīdaṣṭabhirbhṛṣam ||72||
 kimudbhagnastadityuktaḥ sūriṇā so 'bravīdidam |
 nodbhajye bhagavankiṃ tu samālpā eva vācanāḥ ||73||
 sūrirūce mama dhyānaṃ pūrṇaprāyamīdam tataḥ |
 tadante vācanāstubhyaṃ pradāsyāmi tvadicchayā ||74||
 sthūlabhadrastataḥ proce 'dhītaśeṣaṃ ca me kiyat |
 saṃkhyāṃ gurustadā cākhyadbindūdadhypamānataḥ ||75||
 pūrṇe dhyāne mahāprāṇe sthūlabhadro mahāmuniḥ |
 dvivastūnāni pūrvāṇi daśa yāvatsamāpayat ||76||
 ityākhyāya sthūlabhadrānujñātā jījamāśrayam |

tā yayuḥ sthūlabhadro 'pi vācanārthamagādgurum ||101||

na dadau vācanāṃ tasyāyogyo ' sītyādiśadguguḥ |

dīkṣādinātprabhṛtyeṣo 'pyaparādhānvyacintayat ||102||

cintayitvā ca na hyāgaḥ smarāmīti jagāda ca |

kṛtvā na manyase śāntaṃ pāpamityavadadguruḥ ||103||

"During the famine, dreadful like the night of annihilation at the end of the world, to survive the Saṃgha 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 Saṃgha met at Pāṭaliputra and, assembling the fragments they recalled, collected eleven Aṅgas. Thinking to recover the twelfth Aṅga, the Dṛṣṭivāda, and knowing that the venerable Bhadrabāhu (the sole repository of that Aṅga) was staying in Nepal, the Saṃgha sent two munis to call him (to the Council). The two munis went there and bowing reverently addressed him, "The Saṃgha 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 Pūrvas and the meanings of the Sūtras." The two munis went off and repeated his reply to the Saṃgha. The Saṃgha, once again, sent two munis with instructions to ask him the punishment an Ācārya should incur who does not heed the bidding of the Saṃgha. If he says it should be exclusion from the Saṃgha, let him be told it is a fitting punishment. When this took place, Bhadrabāhu said to the two munis, "Let the Noble Saṃgha not do so. However, let it do this. May

the Revered Saṅgha 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 Saṅgha 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 Saṅgha 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 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 Sulankī (also spelled Surakī) family of the principality of Sikharapurī (Pharping), fourteenth to sixteenth centuries A.D., was connected with the Solānkī 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 Yathāgumpadsum(?), (valued) at a hundred (paṇas) and land to the size of a piṇḍaka." 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. Ācārya 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 Yathāgumpadśum(?), 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 Publications. New Delhi. 1977. Pp. 50, 77.
3. See, e.g., Ardhakathānaka: Half a Tale by Mukund Lath. Publisher: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan, Jaipur; distributor: Impex India, New Delhi. 1981. On p. 111 Dr. Lath writes "The Nisitha Curpi 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 'sresthi'. 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. Bhayani, Paumacariu, Vol. II, pp.192 and 224.

5. Asim Kumar Chatterjee, A Comprehensive History of Jainism (up to 1000 A.D.). Firma KLM Private Limited. Calcutta. 1978. and Buddha Prakash, "The Genesis of the Digambara-Svetāmbara Split," in Mahāvīra and His Teachings, Bhagavān mahāvīra 2500th Nirvāṇa Mahotsava Samiti, Bombay, 1977. P. 272, fn.4:

[4. taṃmi ya kāle bārasavariso dukkālo uvaṭṭhi saṃjatāito ya samuddatīre. ācchettā puṇaravi pādaliṇṇe mīlitā aṇṇassa uddeso aṇṇassa khaṇḍaṃ evaṃ saṃghāḍiteṃhiṃ tehiṃ ekkārasa aṅgaṇi saṃghātītāṇi diṭṭhivādo natthi nepālavattaṇi bhayavaṃ bhaddabāhussāmi acchati coddasapuvvī .]

6. Sthavirāvalī Charita or Pariśisṭaparvan. Being an Appendix of the Trishasṭīśalākā 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.]

7. Modern Review, 1915, pp. 519-22.]

8. Pratipaditya Nepal, The Art of Nepal. Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with University of California Press, Berkeley, Los

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."

9. Sylvain Levi: The History of Nepal. Part.I. Edited and translated by Theodore Riccardi, Jr.

Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies. Vol. III, No.1, 1975. P.46 f.

10. Levi's reading of the inscription is as follows:

1. [samval̄t 400 2 (||) rājnaḥ ḥrī mānadevasaya samyak pālayato mahīm (|)
āṣāḍhaḥuklasya tithau pañcadaḥyām ḥubhārtthinā (1)
 2. vanijām sār̄tthavāneṇa Guhamitreṇa bhaktitaḥ (|) samsthāpito tra
bhagavān Indro nāma divākaraḥ (2) kṣetraṃ yathāgūmpadḥuṃ-pradeḥ
 3. ḥatasya bhūmih piṇḍakamāni ca
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Gnoli and Vajracārya are in general agreement with the translation. Vajracārya has variants in his reading of the text. (See Licchavikāḷaka Abhilekha. By Dhanavajra Vajracārya. Nepal ra Eṣyali Adhyayan Samsthān. Tribhuvan Viśvavidyālaya. Kāṭhmāṇḍī nepāl.

11. A. K. Chatterjee, A Comprehensive History of Jainism, Vol.I. Firma KLM Private Limited. Calcutta. 1978. P.300.G