

Jaina Path of Education

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Education aims at equipping man with the art of living—living a successful life. In ancient and medieval India education and religion were closely related, or rather, religion also played the role of educating its followers. Jainism has been no exception to this fact. Therefore, Jainism can be said to have had its own influence on the educational system and values of India, more particularly of the ancient and medieval period.

A characteristic feature of the Hindu system of education in ancient days was its Gurukula system : The teacher's house itself was the school, the higher educational institute and the hostel—all in one. The four Vedas, the six Aṅgas, the eighteen Dharmaśāstras, logic, grammar, lexicography, economics, sociology, law (Cāṇakya), medicine, astrology etc.—all these subjects were taught in the course of seven or eight years. Later with the retention of the Gurukula system, places of pilgrimage also developed as centres of education. Gradually in places like Takṣaśīla educational centres of University level and model came up. Some Agrahāras turned up to be small centres of education. Some pontiffs of the Hindu maṭhas took considerable interest in and helped the cause of education. Such work, in varied ways and by many pontiffs, is going on even to this day.

As we enter and peep into the early Buddhist sphere of education, we are struck with a peculiarity that imparting of education took place mostly in the monasteries and it was meant for the newly initiated monks. But later on, outsiders too began to be admitted into these monasteries and non-Buddhist subjects too came to be introduced for them. As a result of such gesture, in due course of time there appeared Universities of international fame like Nālandā, Valabhī and Vikramaśīlā. Soon these Universities earned a name as educational centres of high order amongst the seekers of knowledge even from foreign countries, particularly from those in Middle and East Asia. But later all these, unfortunately, fell pray to the reckless plunder and arson of the

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Muslim invaders. Then with the later Buddhism, its hold on education in India too disappeared. But the present excavated part of the great Nālandā University very well speaks to the visitor today of its old grand scale of planning and facilities provided therein.

Now coming to the sphere of education falling within the compass of early Jainism, what we find conspicuously is that no Jaina University like that in Takṣaśilā or Nālandā, nor other centres of education of those models, came into existence. The reason for this is not far seek. The great vow of *Aparigraha* (non-possession) appears to have been at the root of this phenomenon. According to this vow the Jaina monk cannot own or possess any property of any kind; and because of this strict injunction, there did not at all exist Jaina monasteries in those days. Even keeping books with oneself was considered as breach of the vow of *Aparigraha*. This led also to the loss of considerable part of the scriptural knowledge on the part of the early Jaina monks.

The Jaina Ācāryas, in the early period, kept on always wandering and camping as per the dictum 'one night at the village, five nights in the town (or city) and ten nights in the wood' :

“ग्रामे एकरात्रं नगरे पञ्चरात्रं अटव्यां दश रात्रं”

and they spent most of their time in observing their vows and practising penances. It was at the time of delivering sermons to their laity that they used to educate them. Each Ācārya had his own interesting and effective method in this regard. Moreover as the Jaina Ācārya wandered about according to the dictum cited above, he kept on imparting religious education to his monk-pupil, who, with previous permission, had accepted him as his teacher. Such instruction was given punctually and systematically in the manner of the mother-bird tenderly and punctually feeding its young ones :

“जहा से दिया-पोय एवं ते सिस्सा दिया य राजो य अणुपुव्वेण वाइय ।”

(Āyāra, I-6-3, Calcutta ed. 1967).

Such monk-pupil, after initiation, used to be with his teacher for 12 years and during this period he could amass almost the entire scriptural knowledge. Then the young monk, with his teacher's permission, used to go on wandering independently and according to the rules of the Saṅgha. Scholars opine that such system was in vogue from 500 B. C. to 100 A. D.

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Then during the first half of the 1st Century A. D., there began to appear here and there caityas or basadis introduced and maintained by the lay community; and according to Dr. J. P. Jain, from the 3rd Century A. D. the Jaina monks began to stay in such *caityas*, and during the period between the 5th and 6th centuries A. D. there distinctly appeared two categories viz., *Vanavāsī* and *Caityavāsī* among them. Later on, gradually, the *Caityavāsī* monks began to teach the children of the laity also in addition to their own monk-pupils who lived along with them. That new course of instruction could have been : exposition of the *Aṇuvratas*, *Śikṣāvratas* and *Guṇavratas*; bad effects of *Saptavyasana*, exemplification of *Punya* and *Pāpa*, elucidation of the path leading to liberation etc. The *Caityavāsī* monks, as years passed on, may have also commenced to impart general education of the primary stage to the children of the round about laity. Later some members of the lay community also may have started Primary Schools or *Pāṭhaśālas*. It is reasonably presumed that such primary education commenced with a salutatory sentence like 'ओ नमो सिद्धार्थ' the corrupt form of which viz., 'ओ नामासीध' it is said, was available till the 20th century A. D. in numerous schools of Northern India.

We have already noted that during the period between the 5th and 6th centuries A. D., there appeared among the Jaina Ācāryas two categories viz., *Vanavāsī* and *Caityavāsī*. Almost during this very period, there set in the *Bhaṭṭāraka* tradition among the Digambaras. These *Bhaṭṭārakas* converted many Jaina Maṭhas (monasteries) into mini centres of religious education. It is possible that subjects like lexicography, grammar, mathematics, astrology etc. were also studied in such centres. Because numerous manuscripts of works on these subjects, besides those on religion, philosophy etc., are found even to this day systematically preserved in these maṭhas. It is also interesting to note that the *Bhaṭṭāraka* tradition is still alive in places like Latur, Pratapgad, Śravanabelagola, Moodbidri, Kolhapur etc.

An important outcome of the educational work conducted and carried over by the *Caityavāsīs* and the *Bhaṭṭārakas* etc. is that there appeared, in due course of time and under their care, manuscript libraries of varied sizes and contents. Some of them later developed into eminent libraries called *Śāstrabhaṇḍāras*. Important works of secular nature too were preserved in them. Some scholars hold that the

idea of Public Library is a Jaina one, and that the earliest *Grantha-bhāṇḍāra* (*Śāstrabhāṇḍāra*) is found is Rajastan. This tradition of Jainā Manuscript Library has come down all along to this day. Such Libraries at Jaisalmer, Patna, Arrah, Moodbidri, Kolhapur etc., have earned the value of a national asset and attract scholars from abroad too.

From this brief survey of the educational aspect of early and medieval Jainism, we gather the following points : The Jaina teachers imparted religious education to their monk-pupils regularly and directly, and to the laity through sermons. Later the *Caityas* or *basadis* also served as schools of general type of primary education, in addition to religious education, for the children of the laity of the surrounding areas. *Pāṭhaśālas* were also run by some members of the lay community. The *Bhaṭṭiraka* tradition developed in their maṭhas mini centres of education, religious as well as partly general. Later, gradually, there appeared manuscript libraries in some of the basadis and maṭhas. The general type of education, however, did not make much progress so as to enter into its higher order. The reason for such state of affairs, as Dr. Altekar observes, is that the Jaina community, mostly belonging to the merchant class, did not think much about higher education for their children. They mostly trained their children in their own family business and later accomodated them therein alone. This tendency can be seen among some Jaina merchants even to this day.

Though the Jaina teachers did not build outstanding educational centres like Takṣaśīla and Nālandā, the work done by them in the field of social education or mass-education is unique. Well equipped with the vast scriptural and general knowledge, bearing pure thinking and conduct, always wandering about as a model for other young monks and the pious laity, every Jaina teacher was almost a moving mini University. His sermon was a powerful means of mass-education ; the religious story (*dharma-kathā*) in the sermon was an effective medium of such education; and narration of such story in an interesting and entertaining manner was a wholesome method followed by him. Thus through various stories, the constituent (individual and social) virtues of the *Śrāvaka-dharma* and other ethical principles were imprinted on the minds of the masses. In order to keep away the common people from the seven vices (*Saptavyasana*), many Jaina teachers have told numerous interesting stories, which we can read even today in the rich Jaina narrative litera-

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ture in different languages and of different periods. Thus religious or ethical instruction in an entertaining manner is the secret of successful social education or mass-education achieved by the Jaina Ācāryas. During the reigns of some of the Kadamba, Gaṅga, Cālukya and Rāṣṭrakūṭa rulers, the Jaina teachers have successfully carried out such mass-education in Karnatak. This is also true of Rajastan and Gujarat under their favourable rulers. The cumulative effect of such education in these provinces could be seen in the fact that the virtues of regard for *Ahiṃsā* etc. in general and vegetarianism in particular were nurtured by most of the people of those and later days—including the present days to some extent—in these regions. Moreover some scholars think that the percolation of the principle of *Ahiṃsā* to the very root of Gandhiji's mind is the later fruit of such age-long education by Jainism.

Another interesting factor in the educational values of Jainism is that in the day-to-day practice itself of the *Śrāvaka-dharma* by the members of the lay community is found the carrying out of some important educational principles. *Dāna* (gift), *Śīla* (protection of minor vows), *Upavāsa* (observance of fast) and *Pūjā* (worship) are the four constituents of the layman's way of pious life ; and they play a very important role in his total life. The gift of *śāstra* (books) of *jñāna* (knowledge) is one of the four facets of *Dāna* (gift), the first constituent of the *Śrāvaka-dharma*. *Śāstradāna* means to provide the right person with the right book (or books, the vehicles of knowledge) at the right time. The educational importance of this aspect of gift can be illustrated from a gesture of an eminent historical personage of medieval Karnatak ; when printing was unknown with a beneficial motive of augmenting interest in (religious) literature, in 973 A. D. The great pious lady Attimabbe wife of general Nāgadeva (under the Western Cālukyas) got prepared 1000 copies of Ponna's *Śāntipurāṇa* and distributed them to the deserving ones. The worth and strength of this *Śāstradāna* is seen even today among numerous well-to-do members of the Jaina community extending a helping hand towards publication of worthy books, encouragement to scholars in their pursuits, liberal donations to educational institutions etc. A number of educational trusts have come up out of this motive in different parts of the country.

Moreover of the six duties to be carried out daily by the *Śrāvaka*, viz., *Pūjā* (worship, prayer etc.) *Vārtā* (the exercise of honest lively-

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hood), *Dāna* (alms giving), *Svādhyāya* (self study of scriptural and other religious works), *Saṁyama* (practising self-restraint and observing vows) and *Tapa* (penances like *Pratikramaṇa* etc.), *Svādhyāya* represents an important educational tenet in the sense that it makes the layman or laywoman indulge in an ideal type of self-study daily. This can be explained just by merely enumerating the constituent parts of the act of *Svādhyāya* : *Vācanā* (reading), *Praśna* (questioning), *Parivartanā* (reception, revision), *Anuprekṣā* (meditating and reflecting) and *Dharma-kathā* (listening to or relating religious story). Hence, there would be no exaggeration if it is remarked that the way of life prescribed by Jainism for the pious lay man and lay woman, represents a perennial stress on self-education on the part of each member in the community.

Then we must take into account a very important contribution of the Jaina Ācāryas to the cause of education in general : Though the Jaina teachers did not build great educational institutes, they have composed and left for posterity a great number of treatises on many different subjects which have been serving as valuable means of higher education for the last several centuries. Their contribution to the disciplines of metaphysics, ethics, logic, philosophy, poetry, grammar, lexicography is considered as excellent and, at times, unparalleled. The work of Kundakunda, Umāsvāti; Vaṭṭakera, Siddhasena, Haribhadra, Jinasena, Udyotana, Somadeva, Hemacandra etc. are accepted as valuable gems in the syllabi of several modern universities in India and abroad. Moreover, the Jaina *Syādvāda* (Doctrine of Seven-fold Predication) has been estimated to be a rare asset of Indian thinking. Similarly it is the Jaina teachers and monks who, with devoted efforts, cultivated and gave literary status to the South Indian languages like Kannada, Tamil and Telugu. This historical phenomenon also contains an important educational principle viz., effective instruction through the medium of the mother tongue, which was practised first by Mahāvīra-Svāmi himself.

Lastly coming to the modern days, the Jaina community as a whole has been adjusting to the needs of the time. Its members have been paying sufficient attention to the educational needs of their children from their very early age and educating them in the various branches of learning both in India and abroad. Wealthy and pious members, as usual, have extended their helping hand towards building

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numerous educational institutions which are open for all. Institutes like the Syādvāda Mahāvidyālaya (Varanasi), The P. V. Research Institute (Varanasi), The Vaiśālī Research Institute (Bihar) etc. sprang up and are exclusively devoted to the Jainogical and Prakrit Studies. Indological institutes like Bhāratiya Jainapith, L.D. Institute of Indology (Ahmedabad), the Bhāratiya Vidyā Bhavan (Bombay), the Oriental Institute (Baroda) etc. also are contributing Considerably to the cause of Jaina studies. Individuals as well as members with collective gesture have come forward to set chairs in Universities for Jaina studies in different parts of the country. The U. G. C. and some of the state Govts too have recently recognised the value of the Jaina and Prakrit studies. The Jaina Ācāryas also are trodding progressive path of education. Besides their usual routine of imparting religious and ethical education through their sermons to the masses wherever they stay or move, they are also playing the role of the main spirit behind building notable educational centres, where education in varied branches is to be imparted in accordance with the Jaina ideals. For example, Kothaḷī (Karnatak), Kumboj (Maharashtra) etc. represent primary and secondary stage of such education. The Jaina Viśva Bhārati at Ladnun (Rajastan) has already developed into a virtual University with these ideals, where fresh interpretation of doctrines like Anekāntavāda and new experiments in scriptural teachings are going on. Another centre of these ideals and high stature viz., Ādarśa Mahāvīra Vidyāpīṭha. is said to come up soon somewhere near Ahmedabad. At Veerāyatan (Bihar) is coming up fast a unique institute with such ideals and novel experiments in the teachings of the Jina.

This brief critical survey of the Jaina path of education from the early period to the modern days, discloses some important educational principles and values which also indicate the contribution of Jainism to the field of education in India in general. They can be enumerated as follows :

- (i) Carefull presevation of ancient works of lerning.
- (ii) Effective education through the mother-tongue.
- (iii) Mass education through sermons delivered in an interesting manner.
- (iv) Self-education as a part of the daily routine of an individual—
And
- (v) Ahimsā. Aparigraha and Anekāntavāda for social health.

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