

# **HARAPPA AND JAINISM**



Front and Back View of Male Torso, Red Stone (Jasper)  
Found in Harappa (now in Pakistan)

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**HARAPPA AND JAINISM**

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**Introduction by Dr. Jyotindra Jain**

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## INTRODUCTION

Jainism is one of the oldest religious systems of India to have survived until the present time. In all probability it existed in similar form in Northern India in the sixth century BC. There is hardly any doubt that the religion was already articulated by Parsvanatha, who lived before Mahavira.

The word *Jaina* is derived from Sanskrit *jina* (conqueror) and refers to the revered beings of this religion who have conquered the World, in other words, who have overcome the pains of wordly life. This applies especially to the *tirthankaras*, those who have 'found the ford' through the ocean of birth and rebirth in this world. According to Jainism there are 24 *tirthankara* teachers, of this system. The first *tirthankara* was Rishabha who obviously lived in much more ancient past than Mahavira, who is supposed to have lived 2600 years ago.

Contrary to the belief of many a historian who has paid only casual attention to the problem of chronology and dating of the various *tirthankaras* of the Jaina faith, T.N. Ramachandran in his most original and studious work: "Harappa and Jainism" has harnessed all the possible literary and archaeological source material to argue, quite convincingly, that Jainism is as old as Harappan civilisation and that the first *tirthankara* of the Jainas might have flourished in the last quarter of the third millennium B.C. For his arguments he uses the testimony of the naked images of Harappa as well as the glorification of the Rigvedic Vrishabha, the proclaimer of great truths, who protested against Vedic sacrifices and injury to animals.



P.R. Deshmukh in his book: "Indus Civilisation, Rigveda and Hindu Culture" refers to elements of Indus Culture in Jainism. According to him the Jainas trace the origin of their *tirthankaras* from Rishabha who is also known as Adinatha. The name Rishabha is the same as Vrishabha in Sanskrit and it means the bull. Jainism traces its relation to Adinath or Rishabha whose symbol is bull. Therefore, according to Deshmukh, the first *tirthankara* of the Jainas comes from the Indus Culture. He also points out that nudity of the Indus icons and that of Jainism is another link.

According to Jaina philosophy there are two groups of substances which are eternal and indestructible. These are called *jiva*, Living beings and *ajiva*, non-living entities. Living substances are identical with the soul. It is the soul that knows things, performs activities, enjoys pleasures, suffers pains. Because of the propensities generated by its past actions, the soul comes successively to inhabit different bodies. At the highest point are perfect souls that have overcome all *karma*, actions, and have attained omniscience. At the lowest end are the least perfect souls, inhabiting the bodies of earth, water, fire, or plants. Midway between these two extremes are souls with two to five senses — worms, ants, bees and ultimately men. The non-living or inanimate substances form the physical world in which the souls dwell. This world consists of matter, time, space and the states of motion and rest.

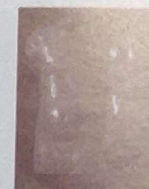
The soul is inherently perfect and possesses infinite knowledge, infinite power and infinite happiness, but, because it has desires and the impulse to act,



it is associated with various kinds of bodies and thus tied to the chain of birth and rebirth in this world. The only cause of birth and rebirth is the passion which causes bondage and arises from anger, pride, infatuation and greed. These are sticky substances which attract particles of matter to themselves. Only complete dissociation of the soul from matter can lead to liberation. This dissociation can be attained by preventing the adhesion of new matter to the soul (*samvara*) and by destroying the old *karma* of the past (*nirjara*). This goal can be reached through the acquisition of right knowledge, right faith and right conduct, the so-called 'three jewels' of Jainism. Right knowledge can be obtained only by a careful study of the teachings of the *jina* who have attained *kevala-jnana*, supreme knowledge. Right faith is a respect for truth and comes only when the *karma* are extinguished. Right conduct is the practice of *pancamahavrata*, the five great vows. These are the vows of *ahimsa*, non-violence, the vow of *satya*, truthfulness, the vow of *asteya*, not stealing, the vow of *brahmacarya*, celibacy, and the vow of *aparigraha*, detachment from possessions. Of these vows the vow of *ahimsa* is carried to an extreme. *Ahimsa* not only means a refusal to take life of any kind, but also a refusal even to think or speak of molesting any living creature and to permit or encourage others to do so.

Another very important principle is *aparigraha*, non-attachment to sense-objects. This consists mainly of displaying indifference to any preferences or likes and dislikes with regard to colours, smell, climate, food, clothing etc.

A path of renunciation of material values and that of non-injury to any living



being that was founded 5000 years ago has continued in India till the date without interruption. In a world torn apart by the forces of violence and destruction Jainism has all the more relevance as a ray of hope.

Jyotindra Jain





Male Torso, found in Harappa (Sindh, Pakistan)



## Harappa and Jainism

The most monumental products of the Indus Civilization are stone sculptures. 13 pieces of statuary, including two well-known and much discussed stone statuettes from Harappa have so far come to light. Three of them represent animals. Five represent stereotyped squatting God.

The two statuettes from Harappa have revolutionized existing notions about ancient Indian Art. Both the statuettes, of less than 4" in height, are male *torsos* exhibiting a sensitiveness and a modelling that was both firm and resilient. In both there are socket holes in the neck and shoulders for the attachment of heads and arms made in separate pieces.

In one of the statuettes under discussion the body is represented as a volume modelled by an unrestrained life-force pressing from within, activating every particle of the surface. It is in the throes of a subtle and rumbling movement emanating from the core of the body. The figure which appears to be modelled from within, is actually at rest, yet brims with movement. The figure is so full of strength that it appears to grow in stature as well, but, actually it is tiny, being 3"-3 1/4" high only. The massive torso unfolds life that has mysteriously crept into the forms, keeping it all alert though seemingly at rest like the gyration of a top. In short, the statuette records unconsciously the inner movement of life within the plastic walls of its body. As such it is a sculpture of 'modeled mass'. This physical type continues through the ages as the veritable standard in Indian Art for



divinities in whom the force of creative activity held under control (जितेन्द्रिय) is to be shown, as for example, in the Jinas or *Tirthankaras* or deities deep in penance or meditation.

The other statuette, also from Harappa, represents the nimble figure of a dancer whose gliding curves and emphasized planes are inter-twined as it were in space in the endless function of following the movement of the dance. The volume of the figure is not only evenly distributed round its axis but also well balanced in the intersection of the planes all within the very space created by its body movements. The body's external movements are so well expressed that they govern the unit of space and volume in which the *torso* exists. In other words, it is a sculpture of *lines and planes curved into space*. This and the other static statuette already described represent two characteristic modes of Indian sculpture, the one recording the inner unconscious movement of life within the plastic walls of the body and the other the outer movement of the body by an act of will within the space encircled by that very movement. Both statuettes are dated about 2400-2000 B.C. The head or heads, arms and genital organ of the dancing figure were carved separately and socketed into drilled holes of the *torso*. The legs are broken. The nipples were cut separately and are fixed with cement. The navel is cup shaped. A hole is drilled on the left thigh. The other static figure presents an adipose youth in an element of "frontality" in which the muscular forms are delineated with careful observation, restraint and breadth of style which is a notable feature of the engraved seals of Mohenjo-Daro. The dancing figure is so lively and fresh that it



has no affinity to the dead formalism of the Mohenjo-Daro statuary. It appears to be ithyphallic, lending force to the suggestion that it may represent a prototype of the later day Nataraja, the dancing form of Siva. All art-critics have declared that for pure simplicity and feeling, nothing that compared with these two masterpieces was produced until the great age of Hellas.

The stone statuette in the element of "frontality" also establishes a fundamental truth about ancient Indian Art, namely, that Indian art is as firmly rooted in nature as it is well established in its social environment and its supramundane origin. It at once represents a divinity with all the virtues of strength and creative activity held under control, not to be thrown out but to be utilized for introspective peace (*Santi*). This indeed is what we see associated with the Jaina Gods and *Tirthankaras* whose colossal images such as *Sravanabelagola*, *Karkal* and *Yenur in Mysore* arrest public attention. With senses controlled by physical effort, with strength and creative activity restrained metaphysically by the silken thread of *Ahimsa* and with the physical features (*limbs*) completely abandoned to the rigours of clime and weather, in the pristine and natal state of absolute nudity the colossal statues of the Jaina *Tirthankaras* and Jaina ascetics such as of *Bahu Bali* at *Sravanabelagola* in Mysore have a lesson to humanity that non-violence is the only panacea for human suffering (*Ahimsa Parmo Dharmah*). The Harappan statuette being exactly in the above specified pose, we may not be wrong in identifying the God represented as a *Tirthankara* or a Jaina ascetic of accredited fame and penance (ज्ञपो महिमा). Though its date—2400-2000 B.C. — has been disputed by some archaeologists, there is nothing in its style to differentiate it from that of certain terracotta figurines





and representations on some of the engraved seals from Mohenjo-Daro. In this connection, Sir Mortimer Wheeler's views on this statuette as published in his *Indus Valley Civilization* (Cambridge History of India, 1953), page 66, are worth quoting:

"These two statuettes, just under 4" in height as preserved, are male *torsos* exhibiting a sensitiveness and vivacity of modelling entirely foreign to the works considered above. So outstanding are their qualities that some doubt must for the present remain as to the validity of their ascription to the Indus period. Unfortunately the technical methods employed by their finders were not such as to provide satisfactory stratigraphical evidence; and the statements that one, the dancer, was found on the granary site at Harappa and that the other was 4' 10" below the surface in the same general area do not in themselves preclude the possibility of intrusion. *Attribution to a later period is also not free from difficulty* and doubt can only be resolved by further and more adequately documented discoveries of a comparable kind. From the concluding remarks of Sir Wheeler it is, however, clear that the attribution of a later period to the statuette is as much difficult as a negation to it of the earlier date of third millennium B.C. The chances are thus equal.

Let us now determine the subjective and objective worth of the statuette under description. Its subjective worth has already been noticed. *It is of a naked God standing erect in the element of frontality with shoulders well-backed and physical features clear-cut delineating that life is moving within the modelled mass in a well regulated and controlled plastic order. The genital pose rhymes with the spirit*



*of control bringing out the force of the conception of a Jina (conqueror of the senses).* In contrast to this, one may study the engraved seal from Mohenjo-Daro (Cambridge Hist. of India, 1953, Pl. XXIII) of the third millennium B.C. representing Rudra>Pasupati>Mahadeva seated in meditation in the midst of mortals such as men, animals such as rhinoceros, buffalo, tiger, elephant, antelopes, birds and fish and exhibiting the penis erectum (*Urdhva-etas*) pose standing for the upward force of creative activity. The iconography of the God noticed in the Mohenjo-Daro seal is fully explained by the following *Riks* from the Rig Veda:

1 ब्रह्मा देवानां पदवीः कवीनां ऋषिर्विप्राणां महिषो मृगाणां ।

श्येनो गृध्राणां स्वधितिर्वनानां सोमः पवित्रं अत्येति रेभन् ॥ IX-9-66

"Brahma among gods, leader of the poets, Rishi of sages, buffalo among animals, hawk among birds, axe among weapons, over the sieve goes Soma singing.

2 त्रिधा बद्धो वृषभो रोरवीति महोदेवो मर्त्यानाविवेश ॥

"The thrice-bent bull goes on roaring—The Great God has completely entered the mortals."

3 रुद्रः पशूनामधिपतिः

"Rudra is the lord of creatures."

In the light of the above interpretation of the Mohenjo-Daro seal from *Rig Veda* it should be easy to identify the statuette under description by a reference to





the *Rig Veda*. While leading an Archaeological Expedition to Afghanistan in the months of May, June and July, the writer of this article had occasions to verify the records of Yuan Chwang (600-654 A.D.), whose itinerary in Afghanistan and elsewhere is a factual record of variety and scientific and human interest. His description of Hosina-Ghazni or Ghazna, Hazara or Hosala is of great significance. He says, "There are many *Tirthaka* heretics here, who worship the *Ksuna Deva*." "Those who invoke him with faith obtain their wishes. People both far off and near show for him deep reverence. High and low alike are filled with religious awe of him... The *Tirthakas* by subduing their minds and mortifying flesh get from the spirits of heaven sacred formulae, with which they control diseases and recover the sick." *Ksuma Deva* (*Suna* or *Sisna deva*) was probably *Tirthakara* or *Tirthankara* or their follower that illumined the pantheon of Jainism, which is famous for its gospel of *Ahimsa*. The record of Yuan Chwang bears testimony to the spread of Jainism even in Afghanistan. In the life account of the Buddha we read that among the opponents of the Buddha stood foremost 6 chiefs or *Tirthakas*-*Puana*, *Kassaya*, *Gosala*, *Kuccayana*, *Nigantha Nathaputta* and *Sanjaya*. We can recognize in *Gosala* the *Gosala* of Ajivika faith and in *Nigantha Nathaputta* the last and 24th Jaina *Tirthankara* Mahavira. Thus Yuan Chwang's description of the god as *Ksuna Deva* indicates that he is referring probably to the naked Jaina *Tirthankara*, the term *Tirthakas* also standing for *Tirthakaras* or *Tirthankaras*. The advent of Jainism in Afghanistan is indeed a revelation.



The term *Ksuna Deva* may probably stand for the term *Suna* or *Sisna Deva*. While going back to the *Rig Veda* we find that the *Rig Veda* refers to naked Gods as *Sisna Devas* in two hymns which invoke Indra for protection of Vedic sacrifices from the naked Gods (*Sisna-Devas*):

1 न यातव ईद्र जूजुवर्नो न वंदना शविष्ठ वेद्याभिः ।

स शर्धदर्यो विषुणास्य जंतोर्मा शिशनदेवा अपि ग ऋतनः ॥ VII-22-5

"Oh Indra! no evil spirits have impelled us nor fiends" Oh Mighty God, with their devices. Let our true God subdue the hostile rabble. Let not the naked Gods (*Sisna Devas*) approach our holy *Yajna* or worship."

2 स वाजं यातापदुष्पदा यन्त्सवर्षाता परिषदत्सनिष्यन् ।

अनर्वा यच्छतदुरस्य वेदो घ्नञ्छिनदेवो अभिवर्षसाभूत् ॥ X-99-3

"On most auspicious path he (Indra) goes to battle. He toiled to win heaven's light, full fain to gain it. He seized the hundred-gated castle's treasure by craft, unchecked, slaying (in the affair) naked Gods (*Sisna Devas*)"

MacDonnell, in his *Vedic Mythology*, page 155, remarks that the worship of *Sisna Devas* was repugnant to *Rig Veda*. Indra is besought not to let *Sisna Devas* approach Vedic sacrifices, Indra is said to have slain the *Sisna Devas* when he stealthily saw treasures hidden in a fort provided with 100 gates.

These two *Riks* flash before us the truth that we are perhaps recognizing in



the Harappa statuette a fullfledged Jain *Tirthankara* in the characteristic pose of physical abandon (*Kayotsarga*) a pose which has been immortalized in the later day colossal statues of Jaina *Tirthankaras* and *Siddhas* such as at Sravanabelagola, Karkal, Yenur etc. One may wonder if a later day Jaina iconographic plastic pose such as *Kayotsarga* could have appeared as early as the Harappan or Mohenjo-Daro times (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC). Surely, the conceptions of absolute nudity and inner abandon of all physical consciousness for the realization of the Jaina fundamental doctrine of *Ahimsa* can lead only to one pose. It is this pose that we find at Harappa in the statuette under description. There is thus a continuity and unity in this ideology and there are no other iconographic details in the statuette to confuse or lead us astray. Also the nude pose is in strict contrast to the Vedic description of their God Mahadeva > Rudra > Pasupati as *Urdhva-Medhra* the pose in which we find him depicted on the steatite seal of Mohenjo-Daro (Cambridge History of India, 1953. Plate XXIII).

The chronology and hierarchy of the series of 24 Jaina *Tirthankaras* do not stand in the way of the date of the Harappa statuette. The present list of *Tirthankaras* (*Vartamana Tirthankaras*) include 24, of whom we know that Mahavira was a contemporary of Buddha who flourished in the 6th century B.C. Parsvanatha, the 23<sup>rd</sup> *Tirthankara*, flourished more than 250 years before Mahavira and Neminatha, 22<sup>nd</sup> *Tirthankara*, was a cousin of Lord Krishna, the friend of the Pandavas of *Mahabharata* fame. Even on a rough computation we get a date like the 9th century B.C. for Neminatha, the contemporary of Krishna, the Lord of the Bhagavad-Gita.



Recent excavations at Hastinapura near Meerut, the cradle of the activities of the Pandavas, have given a date as 1100-800 B.C. of occupation. We have yet to account for 21 *Tirthankaras* that preceded Neminatha in a hierarchical order. If we push back the dates proportionately to each *Tirthankara*, we are led to find that the first *Tirthankara* Adinatha also called Vrishabha Deva stands on the threshold of the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. The statuette under description has been assigned by critics a date between 2400-2000 B.C. That the first *Tirthankara*, the founder of Jainism, Adinatha, also bore the name Vrishabha is significant, for the *Riks* of the Rig Veda are fond of repeating that it was Vrishabha that performed the function of proclaiming great truths including the advent of a Great God-

त्रिधा बद्धो वृषभो रोरवीति महोदेवो मर्त्यानाविवेश ।।

That Adinatha *alias*, *Vrishabha* Deva founded a new order of faith in a sheer spirit of protest against Vedic sacrifices and injury to animals is the first fundamental event that took place in the career of Jainism. Subsequent events and followers of Adinatha—the *Tirthankaras* and *Siddhas*—put his faith on a firm wheel—the wheel of *Ahimsa*—and set it moving which, as it moved into time and space, gained strength like electric coils and surcharged the atmosphere with the reverberation "*Ahimsa parmo-dharmah*".

That Vrishabha Deva should have been naked is a point too well-known to be disputed as absolute nudity being an indispensable factor of holiness was the pivotal doctrine of the Jaina creed. If the *Rig Veda* seeks the help of Indra, one of

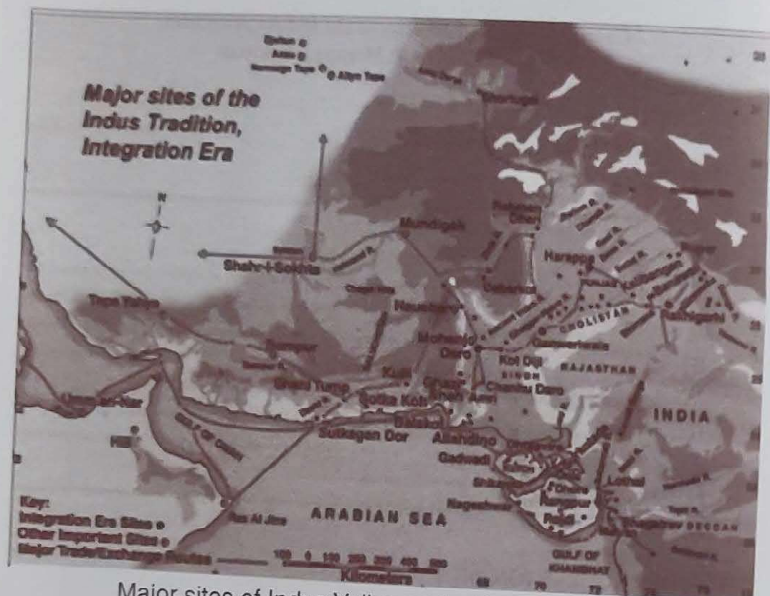




the Vedic Gods, for protection of Vedic sacrifices from *Sisna Devas* or the naked Gods, it is obvious that the Rig Veda is only chronicling a fact of history, namely, that the origin of Jainism such as *Vrishabha Deva* contemplated and ushered in was with the purpose of putting an end to animal sacrifices that were associated with the Vedic *Yajnas*. To win the confidence of one and all and to convince humanity of the loftiness of his mission, the First *Tirthankara* threw away all clothing, thus exposing himself and his followers to the lime-light of self-sacrifice which began with physical sacrifice (*Kayotsarga*). That the other *Tirthankaras* perpetuated this doctrine is the delightful story that Indian art in the service of Jainism presents to humanity. The statuette under description is therefore a splendid representative specimen of this thought of Jainism at perhaps its very inception.



Male sculpture, Polished Stone, Found at Harappa (Pakistan)  
Now at National Museum, New Delhi (India)



Major sites of Indus Valley and adjacent regions



Ramachandran, T. N. (1901-1973) Former Joint Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi.

Thiruvankadu Narayana Yajva Ramachandran, fondly referred to in academic circles as T.N.R., was born to Sri Narayanan and Smt Visalkshi in Thiruvankadu village of erstwhile Thanjavur District in Tamil Nadu in 1901.

After his formal education in his village, he joined Presidency College, Madras and completed Master's Degree in Sanskrit under Professor Mahamahopadhyaya Kuppuswamy Satrigal. Dr. V. Raghavan and Dr. C. Sivaramamurthy were his class fellows.

Later he joined the Govt., Museum at Chennai as a Curator of the section on archaeology. He started his career at this institution by documenting the Buddhist Sculptures from the Stupa excavated by Dr. G Jouveau-Dubreuil of Pondicherry (1882) near Goli village in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh.

Later he joined Indian Museum, Calcutta and then joined Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and retired as Joint Director General. He led the first Archaeological Expedition of Indian Archaeologists in Afghanistan (1956). For almost a decade he was the head of UNESCO Museums Project in India.

He joined hands with Dr R.Subrahmanian, the excavator of Nagarjunakonda site and interpreted many discoveries with his great knowledge on Vedic rites. His explanation of the Asvamedha yajna remains in Nagarjunakonda valley projected the Vedic leanings of Ikshuvakus of Andhra.

He was very close associate of Dr. Sarvapally Radhakrishnan, former President of India and Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Ayyar, former Diwan of Travancore State. He is said to have passed on his knowledge of Karana sculptures to Dr. Ms. Padma Subramaniam, the dancer who wrote a thesis on Bharathanatyam.

He was honored by Government of India by Padma Bhushan award in 1964. T.N. Ramachandran passed away in 1973.