

I SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

I. SMALL MINORITY

Among the Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh and other religious minority communities of India, the Jaina community occupies an important place from different points of view. The Jainas have smallest population among the six major religious communities listed by the Government of India in their Census Report of 1981. In the total population of India, viz. 66,50,87,849, the Jaina population is only 32,06,038. Thus the percentage of the Jaina population to the total population of India is only 0.48. It means that per 10,000 persons in India 8,264 are Hindus, 1,135 are Muslims, 243 are Christians, 196 are Sikhs, 71 are Buddhists and only 48 are Jainas.

2. ANTIQUITY AND CONTINUITY

Further, the Jaina community is one of the very ancient communities of India. The existence of Jaina religion can be traced not only to the Vedic period but even to the Indus Valley period of Indian history. The names of the Jaina Tirthankaras are mentioned in the Vedas and there are evidences which show that the Indus Valley people must be worshipping Rishabhadeva, the first Tirthankara of the Jainas

along with other deities. Thus hoary antiquity is a special feature of the Jaina community and it is pertinent to note that this feature is not present in the other religious minority communities in India.

Apart from antiquity, the Jaina community has got the characteristic of unbroken continuity. Few communities in the world can claim such a long and continued existence. Even in the past, it appears, the Jainas were never very numerous and did not form an overwhelming majority of population in India. It is really a matter of wonder to find how the Jainas could maintain their perpetuity when the followers of many other religions and sects, which were prevalent in the past, are not found at present in India. Thus the survival of the Jainas, as a separate entity from the hoary antiquity to the present day, can be considered as their distinctive feature.

3. INDIAN CHARACTER

Moreover, unlike other religious minority communities in India, the Jaina community is Indian in every sense of the term. The Jainas are the indigenous inhabitants of this country and their mythological and historical personages are also from this country: The languages used by the Jainas for writing and speaking purposes have necessarily been Indian. The sacred

temples and places of pilgrimage of the Jainas are located in India only. It seems that the Jainas never undertook religious expeditions on a large scale in foreign countries with a view to convert their residents to Jainism. The Jainas, therefore, have no religious connections or affiliations with people outside India. Hence the total absence of extra-territorial affinities has been a special and prominent feature of the Jaina community. The Jainas never look to any foreign country, small or large, for help or guidance in their religious and other matters.

4. SEPARATE ENTITY

The Jainas, though small in number, constitute a separate entity and have succeeded in maintaining their distinctive features. Jainism being an independent religion its followers have got their own and vast sacred literature, distinct philosophy and outlook on life, and special ethical rules of conduct based on the fundamental principle of Ahimsa. The entire activities of the Jainas are moulded by the considerations of Ahimsa. Thus, Ahimsa forms the very basis of their life and even to the present day strenuous efforts are made by the Jainas to avoid Himsa, as far as possible, in every walk of life and in every activity. This utmost importance given to the observance of Ahimsa in the life of every individual is not found in other communities of India even though they may

attach some value to the principle of Ahimsa. In fact, it can be stated that, the Jaina community is the only community in the world which meticulously observes the principle of Ahimsa to the maximum extent possible.

The independence of Jaina religion is now acknowledged on all hands. It is established beyond doubt that Jainism is a distinct religion of India and not an offshoot of either Buddhism or Brahmanism. The Jaina religion, philosophy, ethics, gods, temples, sacred places, objects, manners and places of worship, sacred books, cosmology, mythology, ideology, teachers, ascetics, vows, holy days, rites, fasts, festivals, outlook on life and culture with its emphasis on Ahimsa are not only distinct from their Hindu counterparts but also not accepted and followed by the Hindus. Even in the observance of certain common customs and manners the Jaina way of looking at them is quite different from that of the Hindus. For example, the Hindus regard the marriage as a religious sacrament, while the Jainas consider it as a civil contract. Among the Hindus adoption is a religious ceremony, this is not so among the Jainas. According to Jaina Law a widow inherits the property of her deceased husband, but this position is not accepted by the Hindus. In the death ceremonies the Jainas do not observe the days in memory of the dead. In

view of these differences in the tenets and practices of Jainism from Hinduism and other religions of India, the followers of Jainism form a distinct religious community. Thus this separateness of Jaina community from the Hindu community is regarded as the characteristic feature of the Jaina community.

5. SHRAMANA REPRESENTATION

Further we find that from ancient times two different types of culture, viz., the Brahmana culture and the Shramana culture, have been existing side by side in India. Of these two cultures, the Hindus represent the Brahmana culture and the Buddhists and the Jains represent the Shramana culture. But Buddhism practically disappeared for a long time from India, the land of its origin, though it triumphantly flourished in other parts of the world, especially in the East. On the other hand, Jainism did not cross the borders of India, yet it persisted, in comparatively small measures, through all these centuries in different parts of India. Thus the Jaina community has served and is still serving as a representative of the Shramana culture in India and it is considered as a unique feature of the Jaina community in India.

6. REGIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Though Jaina community is a small one it is spread all over India. From ancient times to the present day the Jainas are scattered throughout the length and breadth of India. The most outstanding peculiarity of the Jainas found in different regions of India is that the Jainas got themselves completely assimilated with the people of the region concerned, whether in the North or in the South. The Jainas adopted the customs and manners, dress and ornaments, games and amusements, occupations and professions, tools and weapons, housing and furniture etc. of the people of the region concerned. Apart from the mere acceptance of these traits of culture, the Jainas assiduously tried and greatly succeeded in enriching the various aspects of the culture of the region. In this way the Jainas, though small in number, have contributed a great deal to the development of art and architecture, logic and philosophy, languages and literature, education and learning, charitable and public institutions, and political, material and spiritual welfare of the people of different regions of India. These varied and lasting contributions of the Jainas to the Indian culture have been vary substantial especially in relation to their meagre number in India. This shows the complete identification of the Jainas with the various regions and sections of people in India irrespective of their caste, creed and

religion. It can be said to the credit of the Jainas that they always maintained very cordial relations with the people of the region. In the long history of the Jainas we do not come across any instance when they, even though in power, persecuted the followers of other religions. This outstanding work in the field of culture is regarded as a prominent feature of the Jaina community.

7. PRESTIGIOUS MINORITY

Throughout its long and eventful history the Jaina community has produced a large number of eminent personalities in different fields. For example, in the political field in the past the Jainas have contributed the empire-builders like Chandragupta Maurya; extraordinary rulers like Kharvel in Kalinga, Vanaraja and Kumarapala in Gujarat and Amoghavarsha in the Deccan; male military generals like Chamundaraya and Gangaraja; female military generals like Jakkiyavve, Saviyavve and Bhairavadevi; devoted and capable ministers like Bhamashah in Rajasthan and Vastupal and Tejapal in Gujarat; and the renowned Jaina Acharyas like Simhanandi and Sudatta who were virtually responsible for the founding of the Ganga Kingdom *in the 2nd Century A.D.* and of the Hoyasala Kingdom in the 11th Century A.D. in Karnatak. In other fields of literature, sculpture, architecture,

medicine, social work, etc. the Jainas have produced eminent authorities. The gam,. tendency can be noted even at present. In recent times the Jainas have contributed captains of industry, commercial magnates, political leaders, constructive workers, able administrators, social reformers, gifted artists and devoted educationists. In the struggle for freedom the Jainas' contribution in the form of men, money and materials was very outstanding. In the post-Independence period the Jainas have been rendering valuable services in different fields and on their personal merits and achievements they are securing goodwill of others both for themselves and for their community. As a result we find that the Jaina community has secured a place of honour and respect among the different communities of India.

