

V FLOURISHMENT AND DECLINE

1. CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Jainism is an ancient religion of India and right from hoary antiquity to the present day it has continued to flourish, along with other religions, in different parts of India. Jains, the followers of Jainism, are, therefore, found all over India since ancient times. The Jains are known everywhere for the strict observance of their religious practices in their daily lives. That is why Jainism could survive in India for the last so many centuries. The Jains, in this way, succeeded in continuing to exist as devout followers of a distinct religion in India. But this is not the only distinguishing feature of Jains in India. In fact, the most outstanding characteristic of Jains in India is their impressive record of contributions to Indian culture. In comparison with the limited and small population of Jains, the achievements of Jains in enriching the aspects of Indian culture are really great.

Literature:

Perhaps the most creditable achievement of Jains is in the field of literature. It is evident that right from the Vedic period

two different currents of thought and ways of life known as Brahman culture and Shraman culture were prevalent in India. The Shraman culture is mainly represented by Jains and Buddhists and of them the Jains were the first to propagate that culture. That is why from ancient times we have the Shraman literature besides the Brahmanic literature. The authors of this Shraman literature have contributed their full share to religious, ethical, poetical and scientific literature of ancient India. A close examination of the vast religious literature of the Jains has been made by the great oriental scholar M. Winternitz in his 'A History of Indian Literature.' "The Jains were foremost in composing various kinds of narrative literature like Puranas, Charitras, Kathas, Prabandhas, etc. Besides a very extensive body of poetical narrative, the non-canonical literature of the Jains consists partly of an immense number of commentaries and partly of independent works on dogma, ethics and monastic discipline. They also compiled legends of saints and composed works on ecclesiastical history. Always fond of storytelling, the Jain writers were good story-tellers themselves and have preserved to us numerous Indian tales that otherwise would have been lost. Kavyas and Mahakavyas too of renowned merit have been composed by Jain poets. Lyrical and didactic poetry also are

well represented in the literature of the Jains. Apart from these, the most valuable contributions have been made by the Jains to the Indian scientific and technical literature on various subjects like Logic, Philosophy, Poetics, Grammar, Lexicography, Astronomy, Astrology, Geography, Mathematics and Medicine. The Jain authors have paid special attention to the Arthashastra (or Politics) which is considered to be worldly science par excellence. Thus there is hardly any branch of science that has not been ably treated by Jain writers.”

The literature of the Jains is also very important from the point of view of the history of Indian languages; for the Jain authors always took care that their writings were accessible to considerable masses of people. Hence the canonical writings and the earliest commentaries are written in Prakrit dialects and at a later period Sanskrit and various modern Indian languages were, used by the Jain authors. It is not an exaggeration when Wilson says that “every province of Hindustan can produce Jain composition, either in Sanskrit or its vernacular medium.” It is quite evident *that the Jains* have enriched various regional languages and especially Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu. Regarding the Jain contribution to Kannada literature; the great Kannada scholar R. Narasimhacharya has remarked

as follows, “The earliest cultivators of the language were Jains. The oldest works of any extent and value that have come down to us are all from the pens of the Jains. The period of Jain predominance in the literary field may justly be called the Augustan Age of Kannada literature.” As the Jains have produced their vast literature in these languages since, very ancient times, the Jains have certainly played a very important part in the development of the different languages of India. The medium of sacred writings and preachings of the Brahmins has all along been Sanskrit and of the Bauddhas Pali. But the Jains alone utilized the prevailing languages of the different places, besides Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabharnsha, for their religious propaganda as well as for the preservation of knowledge. The Jains thus occupy an important position in the history of the literature and civilization of India.

Art and Architecture

Along with literature the Jains have always taken their due share in the development of the arts in the country. The Jains have contributed their mite to enhance the glory of India in several branches of art, and architecture. Compared with their number their contribution appears to be imposing. It must be remembered that Jainism did not create a special architecture of its own, for wherever the Jains went they

adopted the local building tradition. While in Northern India they followed the Vaishnava cult in building, in Southern India they adhered to the Dravidian type. Even though the Jains have not evolved a distinct Jain style of architecture, yet it must be said to their credit that they have produced numerous and finest specimens of architecture in different parts of the country. More than any other sect in India the Jains have displayed their intense love of the picturesque white selecting the sites for the construction, of their sacred buildings like temples, temple-cities, cave temples, stapes, pillars and towers. The Jains have erected their temples either on lovely hill tops or in deep and secluded valleys. As the Jain religion Considers construction of temples as a, meritorious act, the Jains have constructed an unusually large number of temples throughout India. Nearly 90 percent of Jain temples are the gifts of single wealthy individuals and as such the Jain temples are distinguished for elaborate detail and exquisite finish. Further the grouping together of their temples into what may be called “Cities of Temples” is a peculiarity which the Jains have practised to a greater extent than the followers of any other religion in India. Such notable temple-cities are found, among other places, at Shatrunjaya or Palatine and Girnar in Gujarat, at Sammeda Shikhar in Bihar, at Sonagiri in Madhya Pradesh,

at Muktagiri in Maharashtra, and at Shravanbelgola and Mudabidri in Karnataka.

Philosophy

As Jainism is an original system, quite distinct and independent from all others, the Jains have developed a separate philosophy which is regarded as a valuable contribution to the Indian Philosophy. In philosophy the Jains occupy a distinct position between the Brahmanic and Buddhist philosophical systems. This has been shown very clearly by H. Jacobi in his paper on “The Metaphysics and Ethics of the Jains.” The Jains call their theory the theory of multiple viewpoints (Anekantavada) in contradistinction to the theory of permanency (Nityavada) of the Vedantins, and to the theory of transitoriness (Vinashvada) of the Buddhists.

Ethical Code

As the Jains have evolved a philosophy of their own, they follow a distinct ethical code based on their philosophy. The Jain ethics stands as a class by itself in the sense that it is the only system which is founded on the main principle of Ahimsa. It is quite clear that the principle of Ahimsa forms the basis of various rules of conduct prescribed for both the Jain laymen and ascetics. Thus one of the significant contributions of the

Jains is the Ahinsa culture. If the Jains are known for anything it is for the evolution of Ahinsa culture and it must be said to the credit of the Jains that they practised and propagated that culture since ancient times. The antiquity and continuity of Ahinsa culture is mainly due to the incessant efforts of the Jain Acharyas. Naturally wherever the Jains were in great numbers and wielded some influence they tried to spread Ahinsa culture among the masses. That is why we find that the areas of Karnataka and Gujarat, which are the strongholds of Jains from the beginning, are mainly vegetarian. In fact it is admitted that as a result of the activities of the Jains for the last so many centuries Ahinsa still forms the substratum of Indian character as a whole.

Political Life

The Jains also distinguished themselves in giving their unstinted support for the improvement of political and economic life in the country. The Jains, especially in Southern and Western India, produced a large number of eminent and efficient monarchs, ministers, and generals and thereby contributed to maintain and improve the political conditions of the people. Not only the ordinary Jains but their saints or Acharyas also aided materially to create the proper political environment necessary for the resuscitation of life in the

country. It is considered that due to the keen interest taken by the Jain saints in political affairs of the country, Jainism occupies an important place in the secular affairs in general. So far as Karnataka was concerned, Jainism, through its course of one thousand years, was the example of a religion which showed that religious tenets were practised without sacrificing the political exigencies when the question of rejuvenating life in the country was at stake. That is why in Karnataka we find that the Jain Acharyas were not merely exponents of dogmas, but turned themselves into creators of Kingdoms. It is well known that the Jain Acharyas were virtually responsible for the founding of the Ganga Kingdom in the 2nd century A.D. and of the Hoyosala Kingdom in the 11th century A.D.

2. CONTINUOUS EXISTENCE

In fact, the most creditable achievement of Jainas is survival from, ancient times up to the present day. The Jainas and the Buddhists were the main representatives of S'ramana culture in India and it is pertinent to note that while Buddhism disappeared from the land of its birth, though it survives in other parts of the world, Jainism is still a living faith in India though it never spread outside India with the

exception perhaps of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). There are many reasons responsible for the continuous survival of Jainas in India.

1. Excellent Organization

Perhaps the most important reason which contributed to the continued existence of the Jain community to the present day is the excellent organisation of the community. The significant part of the Jain organisation is the fact that the laity has been made an integral part of the community. The community has been traditionally divided into four groups, viz. *Sadhus* or male ascetics, *Sadhvis* or female ascetics, *Shravakas* or male laity and *Shravikas* or female laity, and these groups have been bound together by very close relations. The same Vratas or religious vows are prescribed for ascetics and laity with the only difference that the ascetics have to observe them more scrupulously while the laity is allowed to follow them in a less severe manner. The laity is made completely responsible for the livelihood of the ascetics and to that extent the latter are dependent on the former. From the beginning ascetics have controlled the religious life of the lay disciples and the lay disciples have kept a strict control over the character of the ascetics. That is why the ascetics are required to keep themselves entirely

aloof from worldly matters and to rigorously maintain their high standard of ascetic life. If they fall short of their requirements they are likely to be removed from their positions. In this connection, H. Jacobi rightly remarks as follows, “It is evident that the lay part of the community were not regarded as outsiders, or only as friends and patrons of the Order, as seems to have been the case in early Buddhism; their position was, from the beginning, well defined by religious duties and privileges; the bond which united them to the Order of monks was an effective one..... It cannot be doubted that this close union between laymen and monks brought about by the similarity of their religious duties, differing not in kind, but in degree, had enabled Jainism to avoid fundamental changes within, and to resist dangers from without for more than two thousand years, while Buddhism, being less exacting as regards the laymen, underwent the most extraordinary evolutions and finally disappeared in the country of its origin.”

2. Inflexible Conservatism

Another important reason for the survival of the Jaina community is its inflexible conservatism in holding fast to its original institutions and doctrines for the last so many centuries. The most important doctrines of the Jaina religion

have remained practically unaltered up to this day and, although a number of the less vital rules concerning the life and practices of monks and laymen may have fallen into disuse or oblivion, there is no reason to doubt that the religious life of the Jain community is now substantially the same as it was two thousand years ago. This strict adherence to religious prescriptions will also be evident from Jaina architecture and especially from Jaina sculpture, for the style of Jaina images has remained the same to such an extent that the Jaina images differing in age by a thousand years are almost indistinguishable in style. Thus an absolute refusal to admit changes has been considered as the strongest safeguard of the Jains.

3. Royal Patronage

The royal patronage which Jainism had received during the ancient and medieval periods in different parts of the country has undoubtedly helped the struggle of the Jain community for its survival. The Karnataka and Gujarat continued to remain as strongholds of Jains from the ancient times because many rulers, ministers and generals of renowned merit from Karnataka and Gujarat were of Jain religion. Apart from Jain rulers many non-Jain rulers also showed sympathetic attitude towards the Jain religion. From the edicts

of Rajputana it will be seen that in compliance with the doctrines of Jainism orders were issued in some towns to stop the slaying of animals throughout the year and to suspend the revolutions of oil-mill and potter's wheel during the four months of the rainy season every year. Several inscriptions from the South reveal the keen interest taken by non-Jain rulers in facilitating the Jains to observe their religion. Among these the most outstanding is the stone inscription dated 1368 A.D. of the Vijayangara monarch Bukka Raya I. When the Jains of all districts appealed in a body for protection against their persecution by the Vaishnavas, the king after summoning the leaders of both sects before him declared that no difference could be made between them and ordained that they should each pursue their own religious practices with equal freedom.

4. Work of Jaina Saints

The varied activities of a large number of eminent Jain saints contributed to the continuation of Jain community for a long period, because these activities produced a deep impression upon the general public regarding the sterling qualities of Jain saints. They were mainly responsible for the spread of Jainism all over India. The Chronicles of Ceylon attest that Jainism also spread in Ceylon: As regards the South India it can be maintained that the whole of it in ancient times

was strewn with small groups of learned Jain ascetics who were slowly but surely spreading their morals through ‘the medium of their sacred literature composed in the various vernaculars of the country. These literary and missionary activities of the Jain saints ultimately helped the Jains in South India to strengthen their position for a long time in the face of Hindu revival. Even in political matters the Jain saints were taking keen interest and guiding the people whenever required. It has already been noted that the Gangas and the Hoyasalas were inspired to establish new kingdoms by the Jain Acharyas. Along with the carrying of these scholastic, missionary and political activities, the Jain Acharyas tried to excel in their personal accomplishments also. Naturally princes and people alike had a great regard for the Jain saints in different parts of the country. Even the Muslim rulers of Delhi honoured and showed reverence to the learned Jain saints of North and South India. It is no wonder that the character and activities of such influential Jain saints created an atmosphere which helped to lengthen the life of Jain community.

5. Social Welfare Work

A minority community for its continued existence has always to depend on the goodwill of the other people and that goodwill could be persistently secured by performing some

benevolent activities. The Jains did follow and are still following this path of attaining the goodwill of all people by various means like educating the masses and alleviating the pain and misery of people by conducting several types of charitable institutions. From the beginning the Jains made it one of their cardinal principles to give the four gifts of food, protection, medicine and learning to the needy (*ahara-abhaya-bhaishajya-shastra-dana*) irrespective of caste and creed. According to some this was by far most potent factor in the propagation of the Jain religion. For this they established alms-houses, rest-houses, dispensaries and schools wherever they were concentrated in good numbers. It must be noted to the credit of the Jains that they took a leading part in the education of the masses. Various relics show that formerly Jain ascetics took a great share in teaching children in the Southern countries, viz. Andhra, Tamil, Karnataka and Maharashtra. In this connection Dr. Altekar rightly observes that before the beginning of the alphabet proper the children should be required to pay homage to Ganesha, by reciting the formula “Shri Ganeshaya Namah”, is natural in Hindu society, but that in the Deccan even today it should be followed by the Jain formula “Om Namah Siddham” shows that the Jain teachers of medieval age had so completely controlled the mass

education that the Hindus continued to teach their children this originally Jain formula; even after the decline of Jainism. Even now the Jains have rigorously maintained the tradition by giving freely these four types of gifts in all parts of India. In fact the Jains never lag behind in liberally contributing to any national or philanthropic cause.

6. Cordial Relations with Hindus

Another important factor which helped the continuation of the Jain community is the cordial and intimate relations maintained by the Jains with the Hindus. Formerly it was thought that Jainism was a branch either of Buddhism or of Hinduism. But now it is generally accepted that Jainism is a distinct religion and that it is older than the Vedic religion of the Hindus. As Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism, the three important ancient religions of India, are living side by side for the last so many centuries, it is natural that they have influenced one another in many respects. In matters like theories of rebirth and salvation, descriptions of heaven, earth and hell, and belief in the fact that the prophets of religion take birth according to prescribed rule, we find similarities in the three religions. Since the disappearance of Buddhism from India the Jainas and Hindus came more close to each other and that is why *in* social and religious life the Jains on the whole do

not appear to be much different from the Hindus. From this it should not be considered that the Jains are a part of the Hindus or Jainism is a branch of Hinduism. In fact, if we compare Jainism and Hinduism, we find that the differences between them are very great and their agreement is in respect of a few particulars only concerning the ordinary mode of living. Even the ceremonies which appear to be similar are in reality different in respect of their purport if carefully studied.

It is evident that there are several items of social and religious practices on which there are basic differences between the Jains and Hindus. It is pertinent to note that these differences are persisting even up to the present day. At the same time it will have to be admitted that there had been an infiltration of non-Jain elements into Jain social and religious usage's. It is not that the Jains blindly accepted these non-Jain elements. Perhaps the Jains had to allow the infiltration of non-Jain element as an adjustment to changed circumstances. Thus the Jains, as a policy for survival, willingly accepted the infiltration of non-Jain elements in Jain practices. But in doing so they made every attempt to maintain the purity of religious practices as far as possible. The Jain Acharyas, mainly with a view to maintain the continuity of the Jain community in troubled times, did not oppose but on the contrary gave tacit

sanction to the observance of local customs and manners by the Jains. In this connection Somadeva, the most learned Jain Acharya of medieval age in the South, observes in his Yashastilaka-Champu that the religion of Jain householders is of

द्वौ हि धर्मौ गृहस्थानां लौकिकः पारलौकिकः^६

लोकाश्रयो भवेदाद्यः परः स्यादागमाश्रयः^६

सर्व एव हि जैनानां प्रमाणं लौकिको विधिः^६

यत्र सम्यक्त्वहानिर्न यत्र न व्रतदूषणम्^६

two varieties, *Laukika*, i.e. this worldly, and *Paralaukika*, i.e. the otherworldly; the former is based upon popular usage and the latter on the scriptures. Further, it is legitimate for the Jains to follow any custom or practice sanctioned by popular usage so long as it does not come into conflict with the fundamental principles of the Jain faith or the moral and disciplinary vows enjoined by the religion. It thus means that by showing the leniency to the Jains in observing the well established local practices, provided they do not harm the highest principles of Jainism, a conscious effort was made by the Jains to adjust to the adverse circumstances. This wise adjustment ultimately created cordial and intimate relations with Hindus and it appears that due to this policy the Jains were saved from complete extinction at the hands of

perfectionists and they could keep their existence for the last so many centuries. In fact, the Jains had made determined efforts to maintain good relations not only with the Hindus, but with the members of other communities also. Even though for Jainas were in power for a long time they hardly indulged in the prosecution of non-Jains, whereas we find innumerable instances where Jains were severely persecuted by non-Jains.

3. WANING OF INFLUENCE

It is true that the Jainas have managed to maintain their existence as a separate community for the last so many centuries and that in this long period they have made noteworthy contributions to the cultural progress of India. But the achievement of Jains in various fields of activities pertain to the ancient and medieval period. Since the middle ages the Jainas are declining day by day in number and their influence is continuously waning. If the same process continues it is likely that the Jaina community will have to face total extinction Within a period of few centuries. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the causes mainly responsible for the downfall of the Jain community.

The spread of a religion to a large extent depends on the amount of royal patronage it receives and the conviction with

which it is propounded by its monks and followers. In the ancient and medieval period the numerical strength of the Jaina community was quite good because Jainism was actively supported by the ruling chiefs in different parts of the country and it was propagated by some of the intellectual gems of the time. It is estimated that during the Rashtrakuta period (i.e, from 750 to 1000 A.D.) at least one third of the total population of the Deccan was following the gospel of Mahavira. That the Jaina religion was one of the popular religions of India in the past could be seen from the large number of Jaina relics found all over India. But with the advent of Muslims in North India and the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in South India Jainism completely lost the royal support. When the days of royal patronage were gone, never to return, the ascetic order of the community not only fell in number but became very slack in its duties. The ascetics in the later period -never showed any enthusiasm in their ordinary activities like preaching and proselytising. There were no intellectual giants, unselfish workers and renowned saints like Bhadrabahu, Kundakunda, Samantabhadra, Akalanka, Haribhadra, Jinasena, Umasvati, Hemachandra and Siddhasena Divakara. Naturally they could not influence the people by their actions and bring them into the Jaina community. Thus with the lapse of royal support and

the stoppage of converting people to Jainisan due to slackness of its teachers, there was no hope for the Jaina religion to increase the number of its followers.

When the Jaina community was in such a position that it could not augment the number of its members, it was faced with a calamity of severe persecution of its members by the other religionists. After gaining ascendancy the Brahmins reduced the Jainas to the lowest depths of subjection. They threw out the idols in Jaina temples and converted them into Brahmanic ones, destroyed the objects of the cult, deprived the Jainas of all freedom, both religious and civil, banished them from public employment and all positions of trust: in fact, they persecuted them to such an extent that they succeeded in removing nearly all traces of these Jainas in several provinces where formerly they had been most flourishing. Traces of this old hostility between Jainas and Hindus survive in the following Hindu saying,

हस्तिना ताडयमानोऽपि न गच्छेज्जैनमन्दिरम्^६

One should not take refuge in a Temple, even to escape from a mad elephant.

The position of the Jaina religion in the South was much shaken through persecution. King Sundara of the Pandya, dynasty, in the middle of the seventh century, at the instigation of the famous saint Tirujnanasambandara, the arch-enemy of Jainism, persecuted the Jainas with the most savage cruelty and inflicted on no less than eight thousand innocent persons a horrible death by implement. In the Vijayanagara Empire the Jaina people known as Pantchur his, were destroyed by the Brahmanas in the times of Adondai, and some were forced to embrace the Brahmanical system. Such persecutions were largely responsible for the final overthrow of Jainism in South India. In Karnataka the Jainas were persecuted by the Virasaivas and in Gujarat and Maravad they were persecuted by the Brahmins. It is reported that the Brahmins were actively aggressive against the Jainas even in the 19th century and -used to take forcible possession of their temples and convert them into Hindu temples. In the Central India the best Jaina temples are found in very remote spots and it is suggested that they were built at times when the Jainas had to hide in such places to avoid Hindu persecution. In North India from time to time fanatic kings indulged in savage outbursts of cruelty and committed genuine acts of persecution directed against Jainas arid Buddhists as such. Thus the persecution of

the Jainas in different parts of India hastened their decline which had already gained some momentum due to the loss of royal patronage and slackness of the monastic order.

The strength of the Jaina community was further weakened when various religious and social divisions arose in the community. It has already been noted that the Jaina Church was one and undivided upto 81 A.D., but from that year it was divided into two major divisions, viz. the Digambara and the Shvetambara. These sects were further divided into small sub-sects and groups like Gana and Gachchha and strangely enough these groups came into existence solely due to the trivial differences between the ascetics. Some of the divisions were no doubt revolutionary in the sense that they completely renounced idol-worship and took to the worship of the scripture only. As the underlying philosophy is common to all sects and sub-sects, really speaking there is no reason why animosity should arise among them. But actually the sectarian feelings have gained such an -upper hand that the various sects and sub-sects not only ham one another, but try to grab what the others have got. Naturally the Jainas think always of their sub-sect or sect and scarcely of Jainism as a whole. In these circumstances it is obvious that there is no powerful common religious bond which can bring all Jainas together. What is true of religious divisions

is equally true of social divisions. The Jaina system of social organisation was, in the beginning, based on the distinction of function. Birth was not considered as a criterion for determining the status of a person in society. But later on a large number of castes and sub-castes arose in the small Jaina community and to-day the Jainas are as caste-ridden as the Hindus are. Naturally the castes have fostered separatist tendencies, have created cultural gulfs between the castes, and have stood in the way of social unity in the Jaina community.

