

CHAPTER I

JAINA TRADITION UPTO MAHAVIRA

1. Tradition of Tirthankaras :

Jainism is the ancient religion of India and during its long and unbroken existence it is promulgated by 24 Great Preachers known as 'Jinas' i.e. 'Conquerors' or 'Tirthankaras' i.e. 'Fordmakers across the stream of existence'. These 24 Tirthankaras are :

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| 1. Rishabh-natha
or Adinatha | 2. Ajita-natha |
| 3. Sambhava-natha | 4. Abhinandana-natha |
| 5. Sumati-natha | 6. Padmaprabha |
| 7. Suparshva-natha | 8. Chandraprabha |
| 9. Pushpadanta
or Suvidhi-natha | 10. Shital-natha |
| 11. Shreyamsa-natha | 12. Vasupujya |
| 13. Vimala-natha | 14. Ananta natha |
| 15. Dharma-natha | 16. Shanti-natha |
| 17. Kunthu-natha | 18. Ara-natha |
| 19. Malli-natha | 20. Muni-suvrata |

21. Nami-natha

22. Nemi-natha

23. Parshva-natha

24. Mahavira

or Vardhamana.

Thus the tradition of Tirthankaras begins with Rishabha, the first Tirthankara, and ends with Mahavira, the twentyfourth Tirthankara. Naturally, there is a continuous link among these twenty-four Tirthankaras who flourished in different periods of history in India . It therefore means that the religion first preached by Rishabha in the remote past was preached by the succession of remaining twenty-three Tirthankaras during their life-time for the benefit of living beings. In view of this succession of twenty-four Tirthankaras a well-knit continuity is maintained both in the tenets and practices of Jaina religion. Since Mahavira is the twenty-fourth Tirthankara in this line of Tirthankaras, he, by no means, could be considered as the founder of Jaina religion. Hence Mahavira is not the founder but the promulgator and great preacher of Jaina religion during the sixth century B.C. As Mahavira happens to be the last Tirthankara, he is regarded by the common people as the founder of Jaina religion. It is obvious that this is a misconception. Now it has been an accepted fact by the historians that Mahavira did not found Jaina religion but he preached the religion which was in existence from the remote past.

2.Historicity of the Jaina Tradition:

The Historicity of this Jaina tradition is amply borne one both by literary and archaeological evidences. By the beginning of the 20th century many writers were under the impression that Maiaavira was an

imaginary or a legendary figure. Soon they realised that Mahavira was a historical figure but they believed that Mahavira and Gautama Buddha are the two names of the same person, viz. Gautama Buddha. Early researches in the 20th century dispelled this confusion about Mahavira and Gautama Buddha and established a separate and different identity of Mahavira. In this way though Mahavira's real and independent existence was accepted, still he was regarded as the founder of Jaina religion and as the champion of non-violence who revolted against the violent practices of Brahmanism. The recent researches in historical and indological studies carried out by Western and Oriental Scholars have removed beyond doubt the ideas of former writers about the role of Mahavira and have now conclusively established the fact that Mahavira is not the founder of Jaina religion but the promulgator of Jaina religion which was in prevalence in India, especially in Eastern India from the ancient past. This view is clearly stated by P. C. Roy Chaudhury in his book 'Jainism in Bihar' in the following terms: "A common mistake has been made by some of the recent writers in holding that Jainism was born because of discontent against Brahmanism. This wrong theory originates because these writers have taken Vardhamana Mahavira as the founder of Jainism. This is not a fact..... The creed had already originated and spread and Mahavira propagated it within historic times."

Thus it is now an accepted fact that Mahavira is the Tirthankara or prophet of Jaina religion and that he preached the religion which was promulgated in the 8th Century B.C. by his predecessor Parshvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara. The historicity of

Parshvanatha (877-777 B.C.) has been clearly established. Parshvanatha, the son of King Vishvasena and Queen Vamadevi of Kingdom of Kashi, led the life of an ascetic, practised severe penance, obtained omniscience, became a Tirthankara, propagated Jaina religion and attained Nirvana or salvation when he was 100 years of age at Sammet Shikhara, i.e. Parasnatha hill in Hazaribag District of Bihar State. Parshavanatha often gets the epithet 'a lovable or genial personality'. His pupils like Kesikumara lived at the time of Mahavira and held minor differences in dogmatic details though the basic religious ideology was fundamentally the same as that of Mahavira. Eminent historians like Vincent Smith, R.C. Majumdar, and R.K. Mookarji regard Parshvanatha as a historical personage and a great preacher of Jaina religion.

The predecessor of Parshvanatha was Nemi-natha or Arishtanemi, the 22nd Tirthankara and the historicity of Nemi-natha like that of Parshvanatha, could be easily established. Nemi-natha was the real cousin of the famous Lord Krishna of Mahabharata as Samudravijaya, the father of Nemi-natha, and Vasudeva, the father of Krishna, were brothers. Nemi-natha possessed a unique personality due to his great compassion towards animals. This is clearly revealed by a significant incident in his life. While Nemi-natha was proceeding at the head of his wedding procession to the house of his bride, Princess Rajulakumari, the daughter of King Ugrasena, he heard the moans and groans of animals placed in an enclosure for some meat-eaters and instantly decided not to marry at all as his marriage would involve such a slaughter of so many innocent animals. Immediately Nemi-natha renounced his royal title and became an ascetic. Leaving

this renunciation of Nemi-natha, the betrothed princess Rajulakumari or Rajamati also became a nun and entered the ascetic order. Nemi-natha preached religion for several years and finally attained Nirvana on the Mount Girnar, in Junagadha District of Gujrat State. As Nemi-natha renounced the world, he did not take part in the fraternal struggle of Malaabharata like his cousin brother Lord Krishna. Since this Great War of Mahabharata has to be assumed as an historical event and Krishna to be an historical personage, then his cousin brother Nemi-natha is also entitled to have a place in this historical picture There is also an inscriptional evidence to prove the historicity of Nemi-natha. Dr. Pran Nath published in the "Times of India" (dated 19th March 1935) a copperplate grant of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnazzar I (1140 B. C.) found at Prabhaspattan in Gujrat State, which, according to his reading, refers to the Babylonian King having come to Mount Revet to pay homage to Lord Nemi-rlatha.. Dr. Fuherer also declared on the basis of Mathura Jaina antiquities that Nemiriatha was an historical personage (vide Epigraphia Indica, I , a n d II, 208-210). Further, we find Nemi-natha's images of the Indo-Scythian period bearing inscriptions mentioning his name. These and many other inscriptions corroborate the historicity of 22nd Tirthankara Nemi-natha.

Among the remaining 21 Tirth,ankaras of the Jaina tradition, there are several references from different sources to the first Tirthankara Rishabhanatha or Adinatha. Thus the tradition of twenty-four Tirthankaras is firmly established among the Jainas and what is really remarkable about this Jaina tradition is the confirmation of it from non-Jaina sources, especially Buddhist and Hindu sources.

3. Jaina Tradition and Buddhism:

As Mahavira was the senior contemporary of Gautama Buddha the founder of Buddhism, it is natural that in the Buddhist literature there are several references of a personal nature of Mahavira. But it is very significant to note that in Buddhist books Mahavira is always described as Nigantha Nataputta (Nirgrantha Jnatriputra, i.e., the naked ascetic of the Jnatr clan) and never as the founder of Jainism. Further in the Buddhist literature Jainism is not shown as a new religion but is referred to as an ancient religion. There are ample references in Buddhist books to Jaina naked ascetics, to worship of Arhats in Jaina Chaityas or temples and to the Chaturyama Dharma (i.e. fourfold religion) of 23rd Tirthankara Parshvanatha.

Moreover it is very pertinent to find that the Buddhist literature refers to the Jaina tradition of Tirthankaras and specifically mentions the names of Jaina Tirthankaras like Rishabhadeva, Padmaprabha, Chandrabha, Pushpadanta, Vimala-natha, Dharma-natha and Nemi-natha. The 'Dharmottarapradipa', the well-known Buddhist book, mentions Rishabhadeva along with the name of Mahavira or Vardhamana as an Apta or Tirthankara. The 'Dhammikasutta' of the 'Anguttra Nikaya' speaks of Arishtanemi or nemi-natha as one of the six Tirthankaras. The Buddhist book 'Manoratha-Purani", mentions the names of many lay men and women as followers of Parshvanatha tradition and among them is the name of Vappa, the uncle of Gautama Buddha. In fact it is mentioned that Gautama Buddha himself practised penance according to the Jaina system before he propounded his new religion.

Further, it is significant to note that the names and numbers of Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas in Buddhism appear to have been influenced by those of the Jaina Tirthankaras. For instance, Ajita, the name of the 2nd Jaina Tirthankaras, has been given to one Paccekabuddha. Padma, the 6th Jaina Tirthankara, is the name of the 8th of the 24 Buddhas. Vimala, a Paccekabuddha, has been named after Vimala-Natha, the 13th Jaina Tirthankara.

4. Jaina Tradition and Hinduism:

The Jaina tradition of 24 Tirthankaras seems to have been accepted by the Hindus, like the Buddhists, as could be seen from their ancient scriptures. The Hindus, indeed, never disputed the fact that Jainism was founded by Rishabhadeva and placed his time almost at what they conceived to be the commencement of the world. They acknowledged him as a divine person and counted him amongst their Avatars i.e. various incarnations of Lord Vishnu. They give the same parentage (-father Nabhiraja and mother Marudevi) of Rishabhadeva as the Jainas do and they even agree that after the name of Rishabhadeva's eldest son Bharata this country is known as Bharata-Varsha.

So far as the oldest Vedic literature is concerned we find that in the Rig-Veda there are clear references to Rishabha, the 1st Tirthankara, and to Arishtanemi, the 22nd Tirthankara. The Yajur-Veda also mentions the names of three Tirthankaras, viz. Rishabha, Ajitanatha and Arishtanemi. Further, the AtharvaVeda specifically mentions the sect of Vratyas and this sect signifies jainas on the ground that the term 'Vratya' means the

observer of vratas or vows as distinguished from the performer of sacrifices, which applied to the Hindus at the times. Similarly in the Atharva-Veda the term Maha-Vratya occurs and it is supposed that this term refers to Rishabhadeva, who could be considered as the great leader of the Vratyas.

In the later Puranic literature of the Hindus also there are ample references to Rishabhadeva. The story of Rishabha occurs in the Vishnupurana and Bhagavata-Purana, where he figures as an Avatara i.e. incarnation of Narayana, in an age prior to that of ten avataras of Vishnu. The story is exactly identical with the life-history of Rishabhadeva as given in the Jaina sacred literature. In this way Rishabhadeva's life and significant importance narrated in the Jaina literature get confirmed by the account of Rishabha given in the Hindu Puranas.

Thus from the fact that Hindu tradition regards Rishabhadeva and not Mahavira along with Gautama Buddha as an incarnation of God, it can be said that the Hindu tradition also accepts Rishabhadeva as the founder of Jainism.

5. Jaina Tradition and Archaeological Evidence:

From some historical references it can be regarded that Rishabhadeva, must be the real founder of Jainism. In this connection Dr. Jacobi writes thus, "There is nothing to prove that Parshva was the founder of Jainism. Jaina tradition is unanimous in making Rishabha, the first Tirthankara as its founder and there may be

something historical in the tradition which makes him the first Tirthankara". There is evidence to show that so far back as the first century B.C. there were people who were worshipping Rishabhadeva. It has been recorded that King of Kalinga in his second invasion of Magadha in 161 B.C. brought back treasures from Magadha and in these treasures there was the statue of the first Jaina (Rishabhadeva) which had been carried away from Kalinga three centuries earlier by King Nanda I. This means that in the 5th Century B.C. Rishabhadeva was worshipped and his statue was highly valued by his followers. From this it is argued that if Mahavira or Parshvanatha were the founders of Jainism, then their statues would have been worshipped by their followers in the 5th Century B.C, i.e. immediately after their time. But as we get in ancient inscriptions authentic historical references to the statues of Rishabhadeva it can be asserted that he must have been the founder of Jainism.

Other archaeological evidences belonging to the Indus Valley Civilization of the Bronze Age in India also lend support to the hoary antiquity of the Jaina tradition and suggest the prevalence of the practice of worship of Rishabhadeva, the 1st Tirthankara, along with the worship of other deities. The recent excavations at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa have revealed the real existence of a very well developed Pre-Vedic and non-Aryan Civilization known as the Indus Valley Civilization. As a result, history of India can now be traced back to the Indus Valley Period (i.e. about 3500 to E.C.)_and not upto the Vedic period (i.e. about 1500 to 1000 B.C.) only as was being done formerly . In fact the recent researches have shown that there is an organic relationship between the Indus

Valley Culture and the present day Indian Culture. It is very pertinent to note that many relics from the Indus Valley excavations suggest the prevalence of Jaina religion in that most ancient period .

(1)It is observed that in the Indus Valley Civilization there is a great preponderance of pottery figures of female deities over these of male deities and that the figures of male deities are shown naked .In this regard Dr. Earnest Mackay, the renowned Archaeologist intimately connected with the Indus Valley excavations, mentions that “For some reason which it is difficult to understand, figures of male deities in pottery are distinctly rare: They are entirely nude, in contrast with the female figures, which invariably wear a little clothing; necklaces and bangles, may be worn, but this is by no means always the case” . `This fact clearly reveals the traces of Jaina religion among the Indus Valley people as the worship of nude male deities is a very well established practice in Jaina religion .

(ii) Further, the figures engraved on the seals found in the excavations also suggest the same thing. For example, we find that the figures of six male deities in nude form, are engraved on one seal (Vide Sir John Marshall: Mohanjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization, Vol. I (I, Plate No. 118, Picture No. B. 426) and that each figure is shown naked and standing erect in a contemplating mood with both the hands keeping close to the body. Since this `Kayotsarga' way (i.e. in standing posture) practising penance is peculiar only to the Jainas and the figures are of naked ascetics, it can be maintained that these figures represent the Jaina Tirthankaras .

(iii) Again, the figures of male deities in contemplating mood and in sitting posture engraved on the seals (Vide Sir John Marshall: Mohanjo-

Daro and the Indus Civilization, Vol. III, (a), Plate No. 116, Picture No. 29 and (b) Plate No. 118, Picture No. 11) resemble the figures of Jaina Tirthankaras because in these, the male deities are depicted as having one face only while the figures of male deities, supposed to be the prototypes of Lord Shiva, are generally depicted as having three faces, three eyes and three horns (vide Sir John Marshall: Mohanjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization, Vol. I, Plate No. 12, Picture No. 17) .

(iv) Moreover, on some seals we find the figure of a bull engraved below the figure of a nude male deity practising penance in the 'Kayotsarga' way i.e. in a standing posture. These figures appear to be the representations of Rishabhadeva, the 1 st Jaina Tirthankara, because of the facts that among the 'Jainas there is an established practice of depicting the *Lanchhana* i.e. the emblem of each Tirthankara below his idol and that the emblem of Rishabhadeva is bull.

(v) In addition, the sacred signs of *Swastika* are found engraved on a number of seals (vide Sir John Marshall: MohanjoDaro and the Indus Civilization, Vol. III, Plate No. 14, Picture Nos. 500 to 515). It is pertinent to note that the *Swastika* signs engraved on Seals Nos. 502, 503, 506 and 514 exactly resemble the established Jaina practise of drawing *Swastika* signs .

(vi) Further, there are some motifs on the seals found in Mohanjo-Daro and it is suggested that these motifs are identical with those found in the ancient Jaina art of Mathura.

From these archaeological evidence it can be stated that there are traces of worship of Jaina deities and that there was the prevalence of worship of Jaina Tirthankara Rishabhadeva alongwith the worship of Hindu God who is considered to be the prototype of Lord Shiva in the Indus Valley Civilization. This presence of Jaina tradition in the most early period of Indian history is supported by many scholars like Dr. Radha Kumud Mookarji, Gustav Roth, Prof. A. Chakravarti, Prof. Ram Prasad Whanda, T.N. Ramchandran, Champat Rai Jain, Kamta Prasad Jain and Dr. Pran Nath.

Regarding the antiquity of Jaina tradition of Tirthankaras Major J.G.R. Forlong (in his books 'Short-studies in the Science of Comparative Religion') writes that from unknown times there existed in India a highly organized Jaina religion from which later on developed Brahmanism and Buddhism and that Jainism was preached by twenty-two Tirthankaras before the Aryans reached the Ganges. Dr nmmerman also strongly supports the antiquity of Jaina tradition in the following terms. "There is truth in the Jaina idea that their religion goes back to remote antiquity, the antiquity in question being that of the Pre-Aryan." (Vide Zimmerman: The Philosophies of India, p. 60).

6. Jaina and Vedic Religions Traditions:

The antiquity of Jaina religious tradition can thus be traced back to the earliest period of Indian history. This Jaina tradition is not only Pre-Vedic but non-Aryan also. It is obvious that the Jaina religion was flourishing in India, especially in the eastern regions of India, where the Aryans came

and settled in India. Hence from the advent of Aryans in India, we find the prevalence of two distinct religious traditions in India, viz. the Vedic and the Jaina religious traditions. It is true that because of their basic differences in tenets and practices of religion, these two traditions were opposed to each other and that each tradition did try to dominate the other. In spite of this struggle we notice that both the traditions did run parallel in India, sometimes one becoming dominant and sometimes the other.

In the Vedic tradition the priest had a pre-eminent position as he was the champion of ritualism. He vigorously claimed that the welfare and indeed the very existence of the world, including even the Gods, depended upon the maintenance of their systems of sacrifice, which grew to immense size and complexity. The cults popularised by him were polytheistic; the deities were very often the forces of nature; and man was put, at their utter mercy, the priest alone being capable of saving him by seeking the favour of the deities through sacrificial rites. This school of thought was more prominent first in North-West India as the Aryans coming from outside settled first in that region; but later on it did spread towards the Eastern and Southern regions of India.

On the other hand in the Jaina tradition prominent position was assigned to the ascetic. In the Eastern region of India, and especially along the fertile banks of the Ganges and the Jamuna, there flourished a succession of ascetic Teachers, who, hailing from rich families, had enough leisure for high thinking and religious meditation. For them, the

spirit in man and also in all animate beings, was the focus of religious meditation as well as an object of investigation in relation to all that is inanimate in the universe. This brought them face to face with the problem of life here and elsewhere, since both spirit and matter were real for them-real, and therefore essentially eternal, though passing through the flux of change. Life here and hereafter was the result of the beginningless connection between spirit and matter, which was the source of all the misery in this world; and the aim of religion was to separate matter from spirit, so that the latter might achieve a state of liberation in which it would exist in a plenitude of purity, bliss and knowledge. Man is his own master; his thoughts, words and the acts have made him, and continue to make him, what he is; it is in his hands to make or mar his present or future; the great Teachers of the past are his ideals to inspire him along the path of religion; and he has to struggle with hope, on the well-trodden path of spiritual progress, following a code of moral and ascetic discipline, till he reaches the goal of spiritual emancipation or perfection.

In view of this ideology there is no place, in the Jaina religious thought, either for a Deity who shape the universe and meddles in its matters, or for a priest invested with mysterious powers to propitiate that Deity. This line of thought is continuously and forcefully represented by Jaina Tirthankaras right from Rishabhadeva to Mahavira. Later on a similar line of thought was adopted by Ajivika Teachers like Gosala, by Sankhya Philosophers like Kapila and promulgators of Buddhism like Buddha. As these ascetic Teachers of different religions and sects represent virtually the same line of thought; they are said to belong to one comprehensive tradition known as Shramana Tradition. Naturally

the Jainas are the oldest representatives of Shramana tradition and Mahavira was the last among the Jaina Tirthankaras who expounded the tradition for the benefit of living beings.