

## CHAPTER II

### PRINCE MAHAVIRA

#### 1. The Land and the Parent:

India in the 6th Century B. C. was not under the political control of one single power. There was no Empire at that time which could bring all religions of the country under one administration. Instead India was divided and sub-divided into a number of large and small Kingdoms and principalities. Among such major Kingdoms those of Magadha, Anga, Kashi, Kosala, Vatsa, Panchala, Kalinga, Avanti, Gandhara, and Kamboja were more prominent in the northern and eastern Regions of India. Even among these Kingdoms, the Kingdom of Magadha in the east corresponding to the modern Bihar, enjoyed a very pre-eminent position and hence it was often described as the Empire of Magadha. This empire was ruled by the monarchs belonging to the Shishunaga Dynasty and its capital Rajagraha was the most leading city of the times. Naturally Magadha exerted much influence over the lives of the people in eastern India.

Along with the major Kingdoms there flourished a number of Ganarajyas or republics formed by different Kshatriya clans. The

**Ganarajyas were established mainly for securing protection against external attacks from the adjoining Kingdoms. These Ganarajyas were based on democratic traditions and were governed by the representatives of Kshatriya Clans. Such a representative was given the appellation of 'Raja' i.e. the King.**

**Among the Ganarajyas of the time, the Ganarajya of Videha was very famous. Videha corresponds to mostly with the modern Tirhut Division of Bihar State. In ancient times the region from the bank of the river Gandaka to the forest of Champaranya was called Videha or Tirabhukti. It was bounded on the East, West and South by three big rivers, the Kosi, the Gandaka and the Ganga, while the Nepal Tarairregions formed its northern boundary. This area comprises the present Districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran, Munger and Purnia of Bihar State. The capital of Videha was Vaishaii, the modern Basadh in Hajipur Sub-Division of Muzaffarpur District. This Videha Ganarajya was constituted by eight Rajas representing eight major Kshatriya clans, viz.**

- 1. Lichchhavi,**
- 2. Vrji.**
- 3. Jnatrika.**
- 4. Videhi.**
- 5. Ugra.**
- 6. Bhoga.**
- 7. Ikshvaku, and**
- 8. Kaurava.**

Among these eight Kshatriya clans, the Lichchhavi clan was very powerful and enjoyed the most respectable position. The Lichchhavis were known for their bravery, wealth, education, beauty and other accomplishments. They always valued freedom and self-respect. They consistently opposed the attacks on their territory and preferred to lead an independent life. They were religious-minded persons and for a long time they were the devout followers of Jainism. In view of this dominant position wielded by the Lichchhavis in the Videha Ganarajya, the latter was often referred to as the Lichchhavi Ganarajya. Similarly, Chetaka, the Raja or the representative of the Lichchhavi clan on the Videha Ganarajya or republic, was known as Ganarajya-pramukha, i.e., the main Raja of Videha Ganarajya.

Vaishali' the capital of Videha and of the Lichchhavis was a very prosperous, beautiful and rich city. Hiuen-tsang, the famous Chinese pilgrim, has described Vaishali as a great, extensive city abounding in palaces, temples, parks and lakes. It is stated that the population of Vaishali at that time was 1,68,000 and that there were about 8,000 big houses in the city. These big houses were just like palaces and to each such house was invariably attached a garden and a lake. It is further mentioned that the city was divided into three distinct areas, such as the Rich class areas, the Middle Class area and the Low Class area. These areas could be easily identified from the metal used in the construction of Domes in the area. It is also reported that in Vaishali city there were 7,000 Gold Domes, 14,000 Silver Domes and 21,000 Copper Domes. The city was always busy in varied political, religious, educational and cultural activities

carried out through the agencies of Parishads or Councils. It is mentioned that eight such Parishads viz.

- 1.Kshatriya Parishad,
- 1.Shramana Parishad,
- 2.Brahmana Parishad (or Vidvat Parishad),
- 3.Grihapati Parishad
- 4.Chaturmaharajika Parishad
- 5.Trayamtrimsa Parishad,
- 6.Mara Parishad and.
- 7.Brahma Parishad,

were.usually working in the city.

Vaishali city was surrounded by 'Upanagaras' i.e. suburbs like Kundalapura, Vaniyagrama etc. Among these suburbs, Kundalapura was very adjacent to Vaishali and was known asan important centre of the Jnatrika Kshatria. Kundalapura is now known as Vasukunda or Vasukunda. Kundalapura has been referred to in Prakrit and Sanskrit books by different names like Kundaggama, Kundagrama, Kshatriya Kundagrama, Kundalipura, Kundapura, Sirikundagama, Kundala and Kundanagara. Vaishali and Kundalapura had not only close geographical ties but had very intimate political, social and religious ties. This intimacy could be gauged by the family and clan relationships between Chetaka, the GanarajaPramukha of Vaishali and Siddhartha, the Ganaraja of Kundalapura (Vaishali).

**Chetaka, the Ganaraja-Pramukha of Videha republic was renowned as the great Lichchhavi King of Vaishali. In Jaina books he is referred to as the Kshatriya Prince belonging to Ikshvaku Vansha and Vasishtha Gotra. Chetaka was married to Bhadra or Subhadra. Both Chetaka and Subhadra were great devotees of Parshvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankar as the Lichchhavis were the devout followers of Jainism. They had ten princes and seven princesses. The names of ten princes were as follows :-**

- (1) Simha or Simhabhadra, (2) Dhana,**
- (3) Dantabhadra, (4) Upendra,**
- (5) Sudatta, (6) Sukumbhoja,**
- (7) Akampana (8) Supatanga,**
- (9) Prabhanjana and (10) Prabhasa.**

**All these princes were valiant and helped their father, King Chetaka in the defence of their territory. In fact, the eldest prince Simhabhadra was the Senapati, i.e. the Chief of the Army of Videha republic.**

**King Chetaka and Queen Subhadra were blessed with seven daughters, viz. (1) Trishala, (2) Mrugavati or Priyavati, (3) Suprabha, (4) Prabhavati, (5) Chelana or Chelani, (6) Jyeshtha (7) Chandana. The second princess Mrugavati was married to King Shataniki of Kaushambi. The famous King Vatsarja Udayana was their son. The third princess Suprabha was given in marriage to King Dasharatha of Dasharna State. The fourth Princess Prabhavati became the Queen of King Udayana of**

**Sindha-Sauvira or Cutch in in Gujarata. The fifth princess Chelana was given in marriage to the Emperor Shrenika or Bimbisara of Magadha and became his senior queen. Both Emperor Shrenika and Queen Chelana were the great patrons of Jaina religion and were constantly referred to in Jaina literature as the devout followers of Mahavira. The sixth princess Jyeshtha and the seventh princess Chandana remained unmarried throughout their lives and devoted their energies in the propagation of Jaina religion. In fact Chandana entered the ascetic order formed by Mahavira and eventually became the head of the female ascetics of the order.**

**The first princess Trishala\* was married to King Siddhartha, the Ganaraja of Kundhapura (Vaishali), who belonged to the Kshatriya clan of the Jnatrikas. King Siddhartha hailed from Kashyapa Gotra and was the son of King Sarvartha and Queen**

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**\* According to another version, Trishala was sister of King Chetaka and not daughter of King Chetaka. -**

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Shrimati. King Siddhartha Was also known as Shreyamsa and Yashamsa. King, Sidartha and Queen Trishala, in course of time, gave birth to Mahavira and earned the extraordinary reverence and respect as the parents of the 24th Tirthankara of the Jainas. In this way Mahavira, through his parents, was closely related to the powerful royal families of Videha, Magadha, Kaushambi and other important Kingdoms of the time.**

## **2. The Birth and the Childhood:**

**King Siddhartha and Queen Trishaladevi were leading a religious and peaceful life in the seven storeyed Palace, known as Nandyvarta Rajaprasada situated in Kundalapur, the suburb of Vaishali which was the capital city of Videha republic. As Trishaladevi belonged to Videha republic, she was termed as Videhi (i.e. of Videha) or Videhadatta (i.e. given by Videha). Due to her amiable and kind acts towards others, Trishala was: popularly known as Priyakarini, i.e. the doer of good acts. Trishala was also famous as an ideal lady and queen since she possessed in a great measure all the essential attributes of a faithful wife and a devoted queen. Naturally Trishala was very dear to King Siddhartha and was immensely loved and respected by her subjects.**

**When Siddhartha and Trishala were passing their days in happiness, a pleasant and unusual event occurred in the life of Trishala. it so happened that on the last part of the night of the sixth day of the bright half of the month of Ashadha when Moon was in Hasta Nakshatra; Queen Trishala in her sound and calm sleep saw sixteen beautiful dreams. In these 16 auspicious dreams she witnessed the following 16 objects in succession.**

- 1. Gaja, i.e. an elephant,**
- 2.Vrishabha, i.e. a bull,**
- 3.Simha, i.e. a lion,**
- 4.Lakshmi, i.e. goddess Lakshmi, ,**

- 5.Mala-Yugma, i.e. pair of garlands,**
- 6.Shashi, i.e. the Moon,**
- 7.Surya, i.e. the Sun,**
- 8.Jhasha-yugala, i.e. a pair of fishes.**
- 9.Kalasha-Yugala, i.e. a pair of pitchers,**
- 10.Sarovara, i.e. a lake.**
- 11.Samudra, i.e. an ocean,**
- 12.Simhasana, i.e. a throne,**
- 13.Deva-Vimana, i.e. a divine aerial car,**
- 14.Nagendra-bhavana i.e. a house of Nagendra,**
- 15.Ratna-rashi, i.e. a heap of jewels, and**
- 16.Nirdhuma-agni, i.e., a smokeless fire.**

**Queen Trishala got up immediately after witnessing these dreams and began to contemplate over them. Indeed she was extremely eager to know the meaning and indication of the succession of the special objects seen in these sixteen dreams. Soon after finishing her bath and worship, she hurriedly went with high expectations to meet King Siddhartha in the Palace. It was really a pleasant surprise for King Siddhartha to find Queen Trishla entering the Palace in great eagerness at an early hour of the day. King Siddhartha received her with great love, made her to seat near him on the left side of his throne and anxiously enquired the reason**



of her morning visit. Queen Trishala communicated to him the succession of sixteen dreams seen by her in the very early hours of the morning and respectfully asked the purport of these dreams. The King was extremely happy to know about these dreams as he was an expert in the art of interpretation of dreams. The King predicted that the queen would give birth to an illustrious son destined to be a Tirthankara in this very life and while explaining in detail the meanings of these dreams, he narrated the good things and qualities suggested by them.

Realising the special significance attached to these dreams that only the mothers of would-be Tirthankaras get such a succession of sixteen dreams, both King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala felt extreme happiness and eagerly awaited to see the auspicious face of their son. They had not to wait for long. On the conclusion of nine months, seven days and twelve hours of the period of pregnancy after the day of conception when she saw those sixteen dreams (i.e. Friday, 17th June 599 B.C.) Queen Trishala gave birth to a son at Kunda pura (Vaishali) during the last hours of the night on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the month Chaitra. Thus Mahavira saw the light of the day on Monday, the, 27th March 598 B.C. At the time of his birth the Nakshatra (i.e. constellation) was Lftara Phalguni, the Rashi (i.e. a sign of the Zodiac) was Kanya, the Samvatsara (i.e. the the name of the year) was Siddhartha, the Chinha (i.e. the emblem) was Lion, and the Varna (i.e. the colour was Svarnabha (i.e. golden);

The happy tidings of the birth of the Prince to King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala was received with great joy by all residents of

Vaishali (Kundalapur) city and the Videha republic and the entire region wore a festive appearance. King Siddhartha and his relatives celebrated the occasion with royal pomp and glory. Common people also participated in the celebrations with great enthusiasm and love. They bedecked their houses with lamps, flowers, buntings, and flags, adorned their bodies with new garments and ornaments, decorated the streets with arches and auspicious symbols, performed worships in the temples, sang eulogistic songs, staged dance and drama performances and thus gave expression to their joy and mirth in innumerable ways. In memory of this great event King Siddhartha made special arrangements to give presents of different kinds to the needy and poor people of his republic. These festivities continued unabated for ten days and on the twelfth day the auspicious naming ceremony of the Prince was accomplished in the presence of the persons specially assembled for the purpose. While addressing the gathering King Siddhartha declared that "Since the conception of their child nine months ago we have witnessed every prosperity in Vidaha republic, in Vaishali capital, in Kundaipur suburb and in our family, we have decided to name the Prince as 'Vardhamana' (i.e. the Prosperous One): The declaration was highly appreciated by the public with great applause.

The child-prince Vardhamana was not only extremely beautiful but also possessed various physical traits of an unusual nature: His limbs were greatly proportionate and without defects of any kind. His body-structure was strong and his body-odour was pleasant. His speech was soft and melodious. His body possessed 1008 auspicious physical attributes like Shankha (Conch), Chakra (circle), Kamala (lotus),

**Dhanusha (bow), etc. He also showed superb intelligence and developed grasping capacity.**

The news about the most beautiful and talented child-prince Vardhamana did spread far and wide and many persons of authority were eager to see the child-prince. Once a couple of sages, named Sanjaya (or Sanjayanta) and Vijaya (or Vijayanta), who had heard about the greatness of this baby-prince, came to see him. At his very glance they felt so much exhilarated that they exclaimed: "How beautiful he looks!" Not only this much; they also felt that their philosophical doubts, which were troubling their mind since long, had disappeared. They went their way duly satisfied after bestowing the name of 'Sanmati' (i.e. Good Intellect), and proclaimed a great future for him.

As Prince Vardhamana entered boyhood, people soon realised that he possessed in great measure the rare qualities like bravery, self-control, fearlessness, helping-nature, courage etc. Many events gave eloquent testimony of the attributes of his gifted personality. Once while Prince Vardhamana was engrossed in play with his friends in the courtyard of his Palace, he was suddenly disturbed to hear a loud noise of screams in :fear and helplessness from the streets of Kundalapura. Instantly, he came out of the Palace and ran towards the site of the noise. There he saw that one royal elephant had gone amok and that the citizens were running frightfully in different directions in a frantic bid to escape from the onslaught of the mad elephant. This dangerous sight did not create any fear in his mind. On the contrary he immediately showed his presence of mind and staring straight at the elephant he

loudly ordered the elephant to remain calm. To the great surprise of the frightened persons the elephant instantly became peaceful. After pacifying the elephant, Prince Vardhamana personally mounted the elephant and in a cool manner directed the elephant towards its resting place. People were tremendously impressed by this rare feat of courage and bravery and from that time began to address him by the name "Vira" i.e. the Hero.

On another occasion when Prince Vardhamana was out in the royal gardens playing with his companions the game of hide and seek, he and his playmates were surprised to hear clearly a hissing sound. When the sound came quite close, they found a large poisonous cobra coming towards them. The boys immediately scattered away in all directions, screaming with fear, but the Prince did not budge an inch and stood calm and quiet at his place. When the cobra came almost near him hissing out poisonous sparks vehemently and tried to attack him, the Prince caught hold of its tail, lifted it and threw it away easily. The playmates witnessed this unusual feat of great courage with awe and surprise. But their curiosity became highly increased when they saw the transformation of the cobra into a semi-god of the heavens. The real fact was that the cobra was the form assumed by one god named 'Sangama' to test the power and fearlessness of Prince Vardhamana. After realising the strength and courage of Prince Vardhamana, Sangama-deva revealed his real identity and in praise said to him that he is indeed a Mahavira, i.e. a Great Hero. Sangama-deva was so much overjoyed that he placed the boy-prince on his

shoulder and began to dance along with Chaladhara, Kakadhara and Pakshadhara, the three close companions of Prince Vardhamana.

After this incident Prince Vardhamana was known as Prince Mahavira and eventually 'Mahavira' became his popular name so much that later on Vardhamana was always referred to as Mahavira. Other synonymous terms like 'Ativira', 'Viranatha' and 'Mahativira' were also commonly used to denote him. Because of his intimate connections with Vaishali city and Videha republic, the names like 'Vaishalika', 'Vaishaliya (i.e. belonging to Vaishali), 'Videhadatta' (i.e. given by Videha) and Videhasukumara' (i.e. tender prince of Videha) are freely assigned to him. Since Vardhamana hailed from the Jnatr or Jnatrika clan of the Kshatriyas, he was also referred to as 'Jnataputra',. or Jnatrpufra' (i.e. the Son of the JnatrClan). As the terms 'Nata' or 'Natha' are derived from the word 'Jnatr' many a time Vardhamana was mentioned as 'Nataputta' (i.e. the son of the Jnatr clan) in Pali literature and 'Natha-kulanandana' or 'Nathanvaya' (i.e. hailing from the Jnatr clan or family) in Sanskrit literature.

Prince Mahavira's regular education started at the age of eight. Soon his teachers realised the extraordinary talents possessed by him. He rapidly began to imbibe knowledge imparted to him and even to show proficiency in the acquired knowledge. He had the rare capacity to grasp easily any new subject and to express effectively the learned subjects. His teachers always used to appreciate the learned way in which he usually gave answers to various questions.

### **3. The Youth and the Aspirations:**

**Gradually Prince Mahavira passed the stage of adolescence and entered adulthood. The advent of youth bestowed additional charm and dignity on his natural beautiful personality. His physical strength increased to a great extent and his knowledge developed beyond measure. His intelligence became more acute and his beauty surpassed the usual limits. Thus different facets of his personality sufficiently bloomed as he became a young man. Further, being a Prince, all comforts and luxuries of the royal life were at his disposal. He was very well connected to several important royal families of the time through his father and especially through his mother.**

**In this way young Prince Mahavira possessed various accomplishments and developed a handsome personality. He had all opportunities and different facilities to build a political career for himself. But he never showed any inclination towards harbouring political ambitions and securing more and more worldly pleasure. In fact, he never aspired for acquisition of material wealth and political power. On the contrary Mahavira never took any interest in family affairs and in political matters. He did not indulge in extravagance of any kind. Instead he always valued the virtue of self-control and invariably attached great importance to the actual practice of giving help to others. He firmly believed in the principles of right conduct and of equality towards all living beings. That is why it is stated that right from his eighth-year Mahavira used to observe five Anu-Vratas (i. e. small vows) prescribed by Jaina religion. These facts clearly reveal**

that aspirations of young Prince Mahavira were not towards leading a life of worldly pleasures but were in the directions to lead a life of self-control and to help others in securing ultimate happiness.

King Sidhartha and Queen Trishala had an idea about these spiritual and religious inclinations of their son, Mahavira. They were aware that he did not belong to the category of ordinary Princess who are deeply interested in building their political careers: They were equally conscious of Mahavira's aversion to increase worldly attachments and his intense desire to concentrate on thinking and self-contemplation. They were also sure that Mahavira would eventually follow the path of asceticism prescribed by Jaina religion and would achieve the highest - position as the promulgator of Jaina religion.

Even though these facts were weighing very heavily on the minds of King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala, their parental affection goaded them to see that Mahavira leads a married life before he embark on his path of spiritual progress. They did not feel anything wrong in planning this householder's stage, in the religion-oriented career of Mahavira because they knew that Lord Rishabhadeva, the first Tirthankara entered the ascetic order after leading a contented married life. They really thought that in deference to their ardent desires Mahavira would adopt this course of life.

Accordingly King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala gave to their relatives the indication of their mind to arrange soon the marriage

ceremony of their son, Mahavira. As many Kings of the time became aware of this intention to get Mahavira married, they hastened to make their proposals. Naturally different Kings vied with each other to have a matrimonial alliance with this scion of the Jnatrka clan. Among these marriage proposals King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala finally gave approval to the proposal of Princess I,'asllasla, the daughter of King Jitashatru and- Queen Yashodaya of Kalinga State. This proposal was given highest preference because Princess Yashoda was most superb in beauty and other accomplishments among-the Princesses of the time. There was another consideration also in the proposal of Princess Yashoda and that was she happened to be the daughter of Yashodaya, who was younger sister of King Siddhartha. Hence King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala finally decided to get Prince Mahavira 'married to Princess Yashoda.

When Prince Mahavira came to know of the negotiations going on about his marriage, he felt extreme grief about these developments. He never harboured any idea to indulge in sensual pleasure and did not even think of the gratification of sex-desire. In fact he had already made up his mind not to get himself entangled in any 'kind of worldly activity which would detract him from his path of spiritual progress. That is, why Mahavira outright rejected the marriage\_proposal and in a polite manner conveyed to his parents his firm resolve to observe strict celibacy throughout his life and to devote his energies in future to conquer the worldly desires and passions. He further made clear that he aspired to emulate the examples of four earlier Tirthankaras, viz. Vasupujya,



**Mallinatha, Neminatha and Parshvanath, who remained celibate and revealed the path of liberation to the people.**

**This well thought out and planned decision of Prince Mahavira made King Siddlxartha and Queen Trishala to reconsider their proposal of Mahavira's marriage with Yashoda. The parents were completely convinced of his firm reso3ve and hence did not wish to come in his way of realising his goal of life. The parents, therefore, did not press the matter further and accordingly communicated their decision, to allow Mahavira to lead a celibate life, to King Jitashatru of Kalinga. Thus Prince Mahavira “was ft free to realise his aspirations in life. Naturally Mahavir felt a great relief and began to plan to take definite step in the desired direction.**