



JAINA CAVE TEMPLES PAINTINGS

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Abstract

Considering the role and the importance of the Jainism, I have ventured to appraise it as the Central Philosophy of Jainism. Modern literature on the subject is neither too plentiful nor free from misunderstanding. Our standard text-books on Indian philosophy content themselves with a perfunctory treatment of the system. There is a tendency on the part of some critics and historians of thought to dismiss it as nihilism; many even identify it with the Vedanta. Such criticism is a uninformed as it is misleading.

I have approached my task not as a philologist or an antiquarian, but have tried to reconstruct and recapture the spirit of ethical Jaina philosophy. A history of philosophy is not an out-dated museum piece, but a living exposition of ideas; it is essentially a restatement and a reevaluation. It is possible that my critics may not always agree with me in my interpretation of the Philosophical, Socio Cultural values and incidentally of many aspects of Indian thought. In philosophy, different of interpretation of legitimate. I shall feel myself amply recompensed if my attempt helps in some measure, in understanding an important phase of Indian cultural systems.

Introduction

The designation Jaina, applied to the approximately four million members of one of India's most ancient *sramana* or non-Vedic religious traditions, literally means "follower of a *Jina*." The Jinas are "spiritual victors," human teachers said to have attained *kevalajanana* (infinite knowledge) and to have preached doctrine of *moksa* (salvation).

Such figures are also called *Tirthankaras* (Builders of the ford [which leads across the ocean of suffering]). It is believed that twenty-four of them appear in each half of a time cycle, have done so from beginningless time, and will continue to do so forever. Hence a Jina or Tirthankara is not the founder of a religion; he is rather the propagator of a truth and a path which have been taught in the same manner by all teachers of his ever present, imperishable tradition. Each Jina reanimates this tradition for the benefit of succeeding generations. The teachings

are neither received through divine revelation nor manifested through some inherent magical power (as, for instance, the Vedas are alleged to be). It is the individual human soul itself which, aided by the earlier teachings, comes to know the truth. Strictly speaking, then, worshipping or following the teachings of a *particular* Jina has no special significance; nothing new is taught, and the path remains always the same. Even so, it is natural that those teachers who most immediately precede the present age would be remembered more readily. Thus we find that the last few Jinas – Nemi, Parsva, and especially Mahavira, final teacher of the current time cycle – are often regarded as the teachers and taken as the objects of certain veneration. Recent activities in the Jaina community celebrating the 2,500th anniversary of Mahavira's *nirvana* (final death) attest to this phenomenon.

Key Words

Tirthankaras, Jina, Dravidian, God, Floral, Salvation, Worshipping, Patas Pattakas, Spiritual Victors.

Cave Temples

Caves are conducive to meditation. Hence, from early times, Jains built temples either in natural caves or by digging into rock and decorating it with pillars, and doors and carvings or decorating the inside of the cave walls. The most famous of them are in the hills of Girnar, Nagarjuna, Jogimira, Khandagiri, Tankagiri, the Sona cave near Vibharagiri, Badami, Madurai and, at Ellora, the smaller Kailasa, Indra Sabha and Jagannath Sabha. Jain cave temples continued to be built until the 10th century CE. Jain cave temples progressed from a simple plan and small dimensions, with a rectangular pillared verandah and a square pillared hall, to the magnificent temple at Ellora. At Ellora, a two-storied monolithic temple is cut out of a mountain slope, with a large pinnacle, a courtyard flanked by two-pillared pavilion or porch, and an upper story with a central pinnacle connected to two smaller shrines. Some temples contain highly sophisticated carvings, paintings, mirror work and other pieces of art depicting the five auspicious events in the life of *jina* or other religious themes.

Usually, Jains showed great taste in selecting the best views for their temples and caves. At Ellora they arrived when the Buddhists and the Saivas had already appropriated the best sites, but elsewhere, as Longhurst (quoted in Ghosh 1974: 39) says, 'unlike the Hindus, the Jains almost invariably selected picturesque sites for temples, value rightly the effect of the environment on architecture'. Good examples are Sravanbelgola, Mudabidre, sammeta Sikhara, Rajgir, Pavapuri, Mandargiri, Khandargiri, Udayagiri, Sonagiri, Deogarh, Abu, Girnar and Satrunjaya. The Jains also published works such as 'Treatise on civil engineering' (*Vastusastra*), 'Text on construction of buildings' (*Prasada-mondana*) and 'Handbook of houses, temples and iconography architecture' (*Vatthu-saara-payarana*) by Thakkar Pheru, a 14th century Jain engineer of Delhi. This work enumerates twenty-five different kinds of temple buildings and served as practical handbook for architects of Jain temples throughout the medieval period. Recently, much temple building work is being done by Sompuras, the architects (*silpis*), who have published two books on the subject.

Paintings

Jaina have a long tradition of carved or painted temple walls, ceilings, pillars, doors and interiors of shrines, but nothing has survived to illustrate the earliest periods. The Pallava King Mahendravarman I, is believed to have been responsible for the murals at Sittannavasal, near Tiruchchirapalli in southern India in the 7th century. The Pandya Kings are believed to have continued the tradition of Jain paintings. Surviving early mural paintings depict the auspicious events of a *jina's* life guardian deities, ascetics, royal couples, temple dancers or natural landscapes. In the Indra-Sabha cave temple at Ellora, the entire surface of the ceiling and the walls is covered with a wealth of detail. Ninth century Jain manuscripts are illustrated with topographical scenes and patterns of floral, animal and bird designs. The story of Bahubali, the areal celestials, flying demi-gods (*vidyaadharas*), and celestial musicians, episodes from the life of Risabhadeva, Neminatha and the story of Krishna were popular themes of paintings. Painted scenes also became fashionable in Jain manuscripts, and fortunately some of them are preserved in the ancient library at Mudabidre, in southern India. The paintings, usually on large palm-leaves, are important both for the beauty of the letters composing the text and the illustrations, that accompany it. Inspired by Jain ascetics in northern India, wealthy Jains commissioned paintings, which are referred to in the *Kuvalayamaala-Kaha*, a Prakrit work composed by the Jain ascetic-scholar-Udyotana Suri (8th century CE) at Jalor in Rajasthan. It notes a *samsaara-cakrapata*, evidently a painting on prepared cloth depicting the futilities and miseries of human life, as opposed to the joys of heaven. In the *Aadipurana*, *Jinasena I* (c.830 CE) mentions a 'school of painting' (*patta-salas*) in a Jain shrine. In the *Vaaraanga-carita* Jataasimhanandi (c.7th century) refers to a Jain temple and its 'small paintings' (*pattakas*), depicting the lives of the *Jinas*, famous Jain ascetics and 'universal emperors' (*cakravartis*). *Pattakas* are early precursors of the numerous Jain cloth *patas*. These *patas*, paintings on cloth, metal, mirror, marble or stone are found in most temples and are still produced. They depict the five auspicious events in the life of a *jina*; incidents from their lives and the lives of famous ascetics, female ascetics, laypersons and kings, places of pilgrimage; and Jain *mantra*, *stotras* and teachings. The most popular *pata* in the Svetambara tradition is that of the temples on Satrunjay hills, which is placed on display twice a year for devotees who cannot go on pilgrimage at the traditionally expected time. In 1985, the Jain Centre in Leicester had commissioned a large painting on cloth, measuring 7 x 3 metres, depicting Satrunjay. The Leicester Jain Centre also has series of ten stained glass windows (probably a unique arte-fact in the Jain world), depicting the main events of Mahavira's life, and mirrored ceilings, and walls, the colours, design and pattern of, which are considered a fine work of art. Such mosaic mirror work is found in some temples in India, the most famous of them being the temples at Calcutta, Indore and Kanpur. Ascetics encourage devoted Jains to make an embroidered velvet clothe (*choda*) at the conclusion of the ritual of fasting, meditation and devotion (*upadhaan*). These are often fine pieces of art and are hung behind the preaching ascetic of the image of the *jina* in small temples.

Other Works of Art

Jain Coins Evidence of Jain influence on south Indian coins comes from a coinage attributed to the early Pandya dynasty (between 3rd and 4th centuries AD). Jain influence can be traced on some rectangular copper coins, which depict on their obverse certain symbols, usually, seven or eight in number, including an elephant. The 'golden age' of Jainism in Karnataka was under the Gangas, who made Jainism their state religion (6th to 11th centuries CE). The famous Bahubali colossus at Sravanbelgola was created by Camundaraya, the famous Ganga General of the Hoysalas, whose kingdom was staunchly Jain. Hoysala kings also issued coins of gold and other metals inscribed with Jain symbols, and which are now considered works of art.

Gold, Silver and Metal Work On special occasions which attract many devotees, Jains, especially Svetambaras, adorn images of a *jina* with a gold or silver crown, and body decoration (*aangi*) of intricate beauty, depicting the *jina* as an emperor or prince, as he was before renunciation.

In most temples one finds three vertically stacked wooden tables, and on the topmost is a throne for the image of a *jina* (*tigadu*). These tables with fine artwork, are made of wood, clad with silver or 'german silver' (a silver like alloy) and are used as used as a replica of Mount Meru for ritual worship and *pujaas* and have fine artwork.

Religion comes out life and can never be divorced from it. The root meaning of religion is that which binds men together and which binds the loose ends of impulses, desires and various processes of each individual. Hence, it is an integrative experience of men collectively and individually. There are many forms of religion, but there is one underlying factor in all of them. They are all occupied with the task of living and adjustment to the various demands of life and society. The need for a successful adjustment requires an understanding of the world in which an individual lives. He lives in a physical and a social environment and the social environment consists of his fellowmen with their histories and prophecies that have evolved as a result of competitive and co-operative enterprise of numerous generations. Here the various strands of science, ethics, economics, history traditions and myths are all intermingled and each has an important claim on the individual and the society. But a general plan has to be drawn up first in which each individual and his impulses may be assigned a rightful place. From the time immemorial the master plan or the blue-print of life includes philosophy, ethics and religion. If any philosophical construction logic has to be used as its most reliable technique.

Philosophy draws up a conceptual framework of the world in which we live and quite naturally for constructing it, it has to rely on the information supplied by the science of the age. Hence, philosophy has to keep on revising its conceptual framework in the light of scientific advance from age to age. The present age with rapid rise in scientific advance, in theory and technology in numerous departments, make the task of philosophers extremely difficult. As the task of philosophers extremely difficult. As the task of building a framework of thought is becoming difficult, so philosophers are trying first to assimilate a large number of concepts which have gained currency in science and everyday life. Here also there is the painful realization of the fact that we think correctly

with concepts but not so clearly and precisely about concepts (G. Ryle). Hence, philosophers are more worried about the clarification of concepts than about building up of a blue-print of life.

Philosophy is not merely daring speculation: it has to issue out into actions, even though it may mean action for the sake of inaction, the example of which is found in some sectors of Indian thought and practices. Hence, ethics forms a natural corollary of philosophy. Here as a philosophical discipline ethics is less concerned with specific problems and is more concerned with general standards and norms of conduct. Just as in its intellectual construction philosophy draws upon the fund of information given out by sciences, so ethics too not only relies on the general conceptual framework, but also on the various codes of conduct in the multitudinous walks of life. At the moment ethics does not try to establish any one standard as the absolute norm. It recognized the plurality and relativity of ethical norms. Now norms may differ, but they have relevance with regard to intentions to act. At this stage a practical difficulty is experienced.

The performance of one's duty is a difficult thing: temptations and natural inclinations play havoc with our ethical intention to carry out the duty. Here, from the time of the Vedas, the Gita and the Bible, from the time of Kant up to Matthew Arnold, R.B. Braithwaite, philosophers recognize that religions are a great help to a moral man. His energies are boosted up and the inclinations standing in the way as obstacles in the performance of duties are brushed aside, if the moral man looks upon his duties as divine commands. Religion may be a myth, but is indispensable for any morality, open or closed, as Henri Bergson has so graphically brought out in 'The two sources of morality and religion'. But the question is: What is a religious myth?

A myth tries to integrate a man with the supernatural with the help of interrelated symbols. A symbol tries to express the inexpressible and deals with what the individual considers as his ultimate concern. Hence, religion deals with symbols which serve as so many windows to what is concerned as the ultimate reality. Quite naturally the 'ultimate concern' is very much akin to the pervasive features of the world with which philosophy is concerned. But the ultimate concern of religion is not merely conceptual: it deals with the inexpressible and the decisions of gifted men all down the ages with regard to what they have considered to be the ultimate destiny of men. Religions are not a purely intellectual affair for it is not limited to the conscious psyche of the individual, but is largely influenced by the stirrings in the depth of the unconscious. The unconscious is found in every human enterprise, even in his philosophical construction, ethical decisions and scientific pursuits. Not only the metaphysician of the past was dictated by his repressed-suppressed impulses in the unconscious, but the anti-metaphysician of contemporary time is no less guided by his unconscious. As I have already dealt with this topic in some other place, so I shall pass on to the next point.

Religion is not merely an unconscious reaction, but is rather a response and adjustment to the unconscious along with the adjustment to the world and society. A religious dawn as a result of much thinking about one's why and

whence. It is wrung out of the individual in the context of the intellectual reaches of the man with his lodging in a socio-economic environment. Naturally with the change in the intellectual equipment of the individual, the symbol too changes and the old ones may entirely fade away. A symbol is not true or false: it is either authentic or inauthentic, living or dead and so on.

But why should there be any symbol at all? Well, one reason which has been stated is that religion, to a large extent if not exclusively, is a matter of the Unconscious and the language of the unconscious is symbolical. However, there is another deeper reason. In the existential literature one hears a good deal of the power of being and the treat of non-being and the consequent states of dread, anguish, despair and self-alienation, on the one hand, and also the states of salvation, resignation, meaningfulness and authentic existence, on the other hand. One may try to escape from dread, anguish and the other allied states by self alienation. However, one cannot always succeed in escaping from one's own self. The threat of non-being, of being annihilated and of death will force a man to be aware of his existential problem that is, the problem of living in a hostile world which keeps on threatening his existence all the time. How can man establish himself, that is, can have a meaningful existence in the face of physical, moral and metaphysical threats? This problem refers to the Ultimate Concern of man with which he is ultimately concerned. In popular language of theism this ultimate concern is known as God. If it is so, then it means that man cannot live without religion. If a person acknowledges God as his ultimate concern then he is said to have an authentic existence.

However, if a person follows a tradition sheepishly or slavishly by participating in a collective norm, then he is said to be having an inauthentic existence. In either case man is said to be religious. This is known as the doctrine of religion a priori, i.e., man cannot live without religion; the religion may be genuine in toto. Some important thinkers in the west in the wake of God-is-deed movement are challenging this assumption of 'religion a priori'. In this took it has been assumed that man can live without accepting any of the traditional form of religion. To this extent it is true to hold that there cannot be religion a priori. But along with this it is also maintained that man cannot live up to his highest potential without some focal origination in relation to an object of devotion. And this state of mind is said to be religious. So in the final analysis it has been assumed that man cannot live without religion-without some object of devotion, whether this object be concrete or abstract.

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