

Gems from past issues:

Meeting of Minds (July 1991):

TEERTHANKAR MAHAVEER'S TEERTH (Religious Order) - III.
The Age of Acharyas: Part 1
Jainism: Interaction With Other Religious Systems

By Dr. Chandrakant P. Shah, Omaha NE

In this article, Dr. Chandrakant Shah and I have taken great care to present the views expressed by various scholars of Jainism. Nevertheless, no claim is made of completeness and definiteness of the facts and opinions presented in the article. Further, it is not our intention to establish the superiority of beliefs of one scholar or of one group of scholars over those of another individual or group.

I have also taken the liberty of including a few details and references.

- D. C. J.

Q: The following points have been presented in the earlier articles of this series:¹

1. TEERTHANKAR Mahaveer was omniscient (KEVALI) and thus he knew the absolute truth. Based on his teachings, his interpreters (GANADHARS) composed the scriptures consisting of 12 main texts (ANGAS) and 14 prior texts (PURVAS).
2. After Bhagwaan Mahaveer's NIRVANA, there were three more omniscient KEVALIS, Gautam Swami, Sudharm Swami and Jambu Swami.
3. For a few centuries, the scriptural knowledge was handed down from one generation of Acharyas to the next by word of mouth. Later, the scriptures were put into writing. In this process, the scriptures were subjected to rewriting and interpretations. (Note that the scriptures of other religions have gone through similar processes.)
4. Many Acharyas (scholarly monks) reorganized the scriptural knowledge and composed new scriptures, commentaries and expositions.

¹ Jain Study Circular, October 1989, pages 11-14 and Jain Study Circular, April 1990, pages 12-17.

Obviously, the Jain system underwent some metamorphosis in this process. What are some of these variations?

A: It should be emphasized that, in this process, the basic principles of the Jain religion have remained unchanged. As the scriptures were rewritten and subjected to various interpretations, different groups of Jain community (SANGH) developed somewhat different preferences as far as scriptures, modes of worship and life style of monks are concerned. For most part, these differences are cosmetic. (In fact, we should not allow them to affect our practice of religion because Jainism emphasizes purity of thoughts and feelings rather than external symbols and rites.²) The Jain doctrine followed by all members of Jain SANGH is even today identical to what was preached by Bhagwaan Mahaveer.³ About Digambara and Shwetambara, Dasgupta writes,⁴ "There is practically no difference about the main creed." This doctrine comprises our belief in nonviolence, in the theory of karma, in the Godless philosophy of Jainism,⁵ and, in the doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints (ANEKAANTAVAAD or SYAADAVAAD). In recent times, the great visionary, Shrimad Rajchandra, has stressed right conduct in life. He enjoined Jains not to pay attention to sectarian practices. Here are two quotes from Shrimad Rajchandra's writings:

"People with little or no knowledge create differences on small matters. There is no spiritual progress on being inflexible about a dot on forehead or a piece of cloth on mouth. Ignorant individuals can create differences quickly."⁶

"Due to some decrease in physical strength, not all human beings can function as monks without wearing clothes. So knowledgeable people in present times have granted permission within certain limits for monks to wear clothes and that permission (to wear clothes) should not be banned. In the same way, to insist on wearing clothes and

² "An individual, whether a VAISHNAV (follower of Vishnu, an aspect of Supreme in Hinduism), a Buddhist, a Shwetambar, a DHUNDHIA (STHAANAKAVAASI, who does not believe in idol-worship), a Digambar or any non-Jain, can reduce the covering of karma and achieve spiritual progress by giving up inflexible attitude and by contemplating about soul." Writings of Shrimad Rajchandra, page 709.

³ The Genesis of the Digambara-Svetambara Split by Dr. Buddha Prakash, in 'Mahavira and His Teachings', published by Bhagwan Mahavira 2500th Nirvan Mahotsava Samiti, Bombay, 1970, pages 284-285.

⁴ Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, i, Cambridge 1922, page 170.

⁵ T. U. Mehta, Jain Study Circular, April 1991, pages 8-12.

⁶ Shrimad Rajchandra (Gujarati), page 708.

prohibiting nudity is not proper because preoccupation with clothes weakens right conduct."⁷

Q: What are some other factors which influenced Jainism after Bhagwaan Mahaveer's NIRVANA?

A: In fact, the features of Jainism and the dedication of its followers are, for most part, responsible for later developments. Moreover, the Jain community did have interaction with the rest of the society that led to the following:

- a. Exchange of ideas and customs with the followers of other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism
- b. Concern of monks and householders for Jainism
- c. Royal patronage
- d. Commitment to basic doctrines, which gave rise to various reform movements in Jainism.

Q: Jainism emphasizes asceticism, nonviolence (AHIMSA) and non-possessiveness (APARIGRAH). How does royal patronage come in the picture?

A: It is the duty of a Jain householder to play his/her role in society and contribute to its progress for the good of all. Thus, in principle, there is no conflict between Jainism and the affairs of society. Throughout history, many kings have supported Jainism. Some kings adopted Jainism,⁸ others, even though non-Jains, favored the Jain religion. It should be pointed out that kings and emperors belonged to the warrior (KSHATRIYA) class. Both Parshva and Mahaveer were born into KSHATRIYA families. They renounced the ideas and rituals being propagated by Brahmins. Thus Jainism gained some favor of the ruling class. Many rulers came in contact with Jain monks and were influenced by their knowledge and conduct. Many Jain businessmen impressed the kings by their competence, character and conduct. They were given positions as ministers and treasurers.

Q: How did the makeup of the Jain community (SANGH) contribute to the development of Jainism?

⁷ Shrimad Rajchandra (Gujarati), page 612.

We should understand that this is just one line of thought. Some scholars believe that the monks among the followers of PARSHVA could wear clothes. See 'A History of the Jainas' by A. K. Roy, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, page 21.

⁸ The example of Jain kings and their rule is an enviable record, which shows no tyranny on others, as testified by historians. - Dr. A. N. Upahye, Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975, page 25.

A: The Jain SANGH consists of ascetics (monks and nuns) and of householders (laymen and laywomen). In some ways, the two components complement each other. For most part, on account of their knowledge and conduct, monks serve as models of spiritualism for the householders. It is the responsibility of the monks to maintain the pristine character of the TEERTH of Bhagwaan Mahaveer. The monks do not compromise the principles of religion and set an example for the rest of the society to follow. It was this kind of impression on the leaders of society which led to many glorious events in the history of India. Remember the influence of Shrimad Rajchandra's character on Mahatma Gandhi.

The monks in turn depend on the householders for their limited material needs such as food, water and shelter. The two groups keep in close contact. This is one of the reasons why Jainism has been able to maintain its distinct character throughout history.

Many scholarly monks (acharyas) have written scriptures. In ancient past, the authors did not even include their names in their works. Many acharyas have written expositions and commentaries on scriptures. Thus Indian literature has been greatly enriched by Jainism.

Q: What about idol-worship in Jainism?

A: In one form or the other, idol-worship was prevalent in the days of Mahaveer. According to Jain sources, in the days of Mahaveer, Bhagwaan Parshvanath was worshiped by his father and by the Jain SANGH of those days. Many scholars agree that there was a Jain temple in Mathura before 150 B.C.⁹

Jains build images of TEERTHANKARS as symbols of VEETARAAG (beyond attachment and aversion) character. Most images are in the PADMAASAN form, sitting in lotus position with open palms, placed one on the other, resting on the lap, and eyes concentrated in meditation. Images in KAAAYOTSARG form (standing erect, arms and hands pointing downwards, and in meditation) are also made. The image of each TEERTHANKAR is identified by an emblem.¹⁰ The earliest Jain images were made in PADMAASAN form. The images of Kushaan period of Indian history are both in PADMAASAN and KAAAYOTSARG form but without any emblem or the attendant YAKSHA (demigod) and YAKSHANI (demigoddess). Later, the emblem, a pair of YAKSHA and YAKSHANI, and other decorations such as triple umbrella (KSHATRA), flying angels

⁹ Jainism In North India by Chimanlal J. Shah, A. Sagar Book House, New Delhi, 1989, page 252.

¹⁰ See Studies In Jainism: Reader 1 for the emblems of various TEERTHANKARS.

offering garlands and figures of planets became regular features of Jain images.¹¹ A large number of magnificent temples have been built. In this respect, Jainism has made invaluable contribution to Indian art and architecture.

Q: In the light of the fact that Jainism denounces all rituals, how can Jains indulge in idol-worship?

A: As stated above, Jains worship the virtue of being beyond attachment and aversion (VEETARAAG). Thus the worship has the dual purpose of understanding the attributes of a pure soul and of purifying one's thoughts and feelings. The concept of pleasing God or demigods is nonexistent in Jainism. Further, a Jain worship is not performed with the desires of material comforts. In this sense, a Jain worship is not a ritual.

Jain worships are of two types:

1. Worship with offerings (DRAVYA POOJA)
2. Worship by mental concentration (BHAAV POOJA)

Worship with offerings is performed exclusively by householders. Among Digambaras, generally, this worship consists of three steps: (a) Bathing (cleaning) the image(s) of TEERTHANKARS; (b) making offerings of water, sandalwood paste, uncooked rice, flowers, etc.; and, (c) prayer called JAYAMAAL. In general, no offerings, even the sandalwood paste, are directly applied to the image. Prayers are recited during the entire worship, which describe events in the lives of TEERTHANKARS, their pristine qualities, and aspects of reality according to Jain scriptures.

In Shwetambar tradition, the worship starts with the removal of previous offerings such as sandalwood paste and ornaments from the image. The image is bathed in five kinds of liquid (PANCHAMRIT) including clarified butter, curds, milk, water and sugarcane juice. Then the image is cleaned with pure water and dried with a piece of soft red cloth. The image is anointed with sandalwood paste and saffron paste. Then flowers are offered. This is followed by offerings of incense (DHOOP), lamp (DEEP, camphor light), uncooked rice (AKSHAT), sweets (CHARU), and fruit (PHAL). Prayers and songs are recited during the entire worship. Different scholars have given various lists of offerings and their significance. The Shwetambar worship also consists of three steps: (1) ANGA POOJA symbolized by flowers, clothes, ornaments,

¹¹ Art and Rituals: 2500 Years of Jainism in India by Eberhard Fischer and Jyotindra Jain, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, pages 10-11.

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unguents (sandalwood and saffron paste); (2) AGRA POOJA symbolized by AHAAR of fruits, sweets, rice, etc.; and (3) BHAAV POOJA symbolized by STUTI (prayer).¹² Evidently, there is a striking similarity between the worships in the two traditions.

Some people believe that offerings and activities performed during DRAVYA POOJA help them take their minds off worldly affairs. Thus they are better able to concentrate on the principles of religion and understand the nature of reality as described in the Jain scriptures. Others believe that offerings and activities performed during DRAVYA POOJA involve violence. So they prefer to perform worship by mental concentration (BHAAV POOJA) by reciting the prayers and songs employed in the above kinds of worships without making any offerings. Obviously, there is some merit in both points of view.

¹² Jaina Yoga by R. Williams, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, page 218.