

Gems from past issues:

Meeting of Minds (October 1991):

TEERTHANKAR MAHAVEER'S TEERTH (Religious Order) - III.
The Age of Acharyas: Part 2
Jain Temples, Idols And Worship

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Before reading this article, please read its first part that was published in the Jain Study Circular of July 1991 and reproduced in this issue.

Q: In UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA, according to Herman Jacobi's translation, idolatry (idol-worship) has been labeled a heresy (misbelief).¹ Should we renounce idol-worship in view of this observation?

A: Idol-worship, performed as a ritual, with desires of materials, comforts and higher status in this life and in the future, is indeed misbelief. All acharyas and scholars have emphasized purity of thoughts and feelings in worship. Many have stressed worship by mental concentration (BHAAV POOJA). Some people, however, find it easier to concentrate during worship with offerings (DRAVYA POOJA). The presence of the images of TEERTHANKARS instill the feelings of VEETARAAG leading us away from attachment and aversion for materialistic affairs.

It should be remarked that, in general, properly performed idol-worship is a form of religious meditation (DHARM DHYAAN). Our good thoughts and feelings lead to the influx of meritorious karma (PUNYA) and the transformation and/or shedding of demeritorious karma (PAAP). On the other hand, if we perform worship with desires for material gains or for satisfying our ego, it becomes sorrowful meditation (AARTA DHYAAN) or inclement meditation (RAUDRA DHYAAN).² It seems that on account of certain practices that reduced worships to rituals, many acharyas and scholars have renounced them. This may be one of the factors that has led to the formation of STHAANAKAVAASI and TAARANAPANTHI groups among Jains, as will be discussed later.

¹ Jaina Sutras, translated by Hermann Jacobi, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1968, Part Two, page 83.

² Our Jain institutions should ensure that worships and celebrations do not become vehicles of sorrowful or inclement meditation for members of Jain community. D. C. J.

Q: According to Williams,³ "The custom of puja is manifestly one of Jainism's earliest conscious imitations of the Hindu world around, a transference which was all the easier because the ceremony can be conceived as a simulacrum (likeness) of the SAMAVASHARAN, that gathering where the TEERTHANKAR preached to men and gods who rendered puja to him with all that was most priceless." Any comments?

A: Many researchers have made such observations. In ancient times, Indian society seems to have been quite open. People were tolerant of diverse ideas. The atmosphere was conducive to the exchange of customs and practices. Who adopted what from whom is the subject of research for scholars. Our pursuit of spiritualism can proceed without any concern for such matters.

Q: I agree, but the influence of the customs, scholars and monks of other religions cannot be discounted. The popularity of the devotional (BHAKTI) cult among the common people must have attracted the Jains as well. In view of the Jain belief that God does not help or dispense favors, it is quite natural for some Jain individuals to have indulged in Hindu rituals and customs to seek favors of Hindu gods for reasons such as peer pressure or psychological comfort. What steps did Jain acharyas take to deal with such situations?

A: The basic principles of the Jain religion tell us to avoid such irrationalism. However, there are events in our lives such as celebrations of birth, marriage and establishing a business or industry that are not directly related to spiritual pursuit. It seems that on these occasions, some followers of Jainism depended on Hinduism and on Hindu priests (Brahmins) and adopted the customs prevalent in the society at large. Many acharyas have endeavored to find reasonable solutions to this problem. Acharya Jinasen (second) who lived during the ninth century A.D., made a significant contribution in this matter. He described various rites (KRIYAS) in his ADI PURAAN. Williams writes,⁴ "The word KRIYA is vague and ambiguous and is applied in Jaina texts to practices of various kinds. Here it will be restricted to the rites which have been modelled on, and to some extent correspond to the Hindu SAMSKAARS (characteristics of culture). It is in the ADI PURAAN that the first description of these is to be found though whether Jinasen himself conceived the idea of giving to his co-religionists a

³ Jaina Yoga by R. Williams, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, page 216.

⁴ Jaina Yoga by R. Williams, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, pages 274-275.

framework of ceremonies similar to that which ruled the lives of their Hindu neighbors or whether he merely gave form to concepts which were already current is uncertain. The starting point for the elaboration of the KRIYAS may well have been laid in the narratives of the lives of the JINS and in the custom of commemorating the five KALYAANAKS (auspicious events of conception, birth, renunciation, attainment of omniscience and NIRVANA) associated with each of them but Hindu or pan-Indian elements dominate those rites which deal with the lay life." Some other researchers also hold this view.

Q: What is ADI PURAAN?

A: Bhagwaan Rishabhadev was the first TEERTHANKAR of Jains. Jains believe that he was the first person to organize the society in this era of human history. Later, he renounced worldly comforts, performed penance, attained omniscience and preached the principles of religion. Being the first one, Rishabhadev is also called Adinath or Adidev. ADI PURAAN describes the life of Bhagwaan Adinath. It also presents the rites and celebrations of various events in life as prescribed by Bhagwaan Rishabhadev.

Acharya Jinasen has described the five essential elements of the rites celebrating the important events of life such as birth and marriage. These are: the presence of a deity, the availability of a priest, the holy mantras, the offerings and the fire.⁵ Jinasen thus complemented the non-spiritual but important aspects of the life of a householder and integrated them with his/her endeavor for spiritual progress.

Jains believe that Adinath divided society into four groups based on their professions. The Brahmins indulged in scholarly pursuit and were responsible for education and spiritual guidance of the society. The KSHATRIYAS, members of the warrior class, were responsible for administration and for protection of the society from undesirable elements. The VAISHYAS, merchants and traders, were responsible for the prosperity of the society. The SHUDRAS were in charge of services. This division was based on the aptitude, interest and education of individuals and not on their birth. Hindus also believe that this was the origin of the caste system though later caste was determined by birth and the caste system assumed the present despicable form.

Q: How did Hindu gods and goddesses become part of Jainism?

⁵ Obviously, these provide a proper atmosphere. In my view, an image (idol or picture) of a TEERTHANKAR that reminds us of the basics of our religion, serves as 'deity'. For us, MANTRAS are sentences that remind us of our duties and commitments in the light of the principles of the Jain religion. - D. C. J.

A: Many of the popular Hindu gods and goddesses such as Indra (king of heaven), Saraswati (goddess of learning), Lakshmi (goddess of prosperity), Gandharvas (heavenly performers) and Apsaras (heavenly beauties) were included in the stories by various scholarly monks and writers in Jainism.⁶ This was due to the psychological and sociological needs of common man.

Q: What are SHAASAN DEVTAS?

A: SHAASAN DEVTAS or guardian spirits are mythological figures who attend each TEERTHANKAR and who are worshiped by some individuals for the fulfillment of mundane wishes. For example, Chakreshwari is associated with Rishabhadev, Ambika with Neminath and Padmavati with Parshvanath. Certain other demigods such as Kshetrapal and Manibhadra also exist in Jain mythology. The worship of these figures seems to have originated in the medieval period. In some temples, the images of these demigods and goddesses appear along with those of TEERTHANKARS. In other temples, the images are placed in separate sanctums.

Q: Is it appropriate for Jains to worship gods and goddesses?

A: All Jains believe that TEERTHANKARS, ARIHANTS and SIDDHAS do not interfere in the affairs of the universe and they do not dispense any favors. For this reason it seems that certain individuals introduced the worship of SHAASAN DEVTAS such as Padmavati and Chakreshwari.

Two modern Jain scholars have made interesting observations on this matter.

Commenting on the worship of SHAASAN DEVTAS and on the practices of MANTRA and TANTRA (occult rites), Dr. Kalghatgi writes,⁷ "Thus, we find the sociological influence of the practices of MANTRA and TANTRA are also to be found among the Jains. These forms of worship must have arisen out of the contact with other competing faiths and with the purpose of popularizing Jainism. ... YAKSHI (demigod or demigoddess) form of worship must have been introduced in order to attract the common men towards Jainism by appealing to the popular forms of worship."

The worship of TEERTHANKARS is performed with a view to ultimately attain the ideal state of SIDDHA. A Jain should not worship TEERTHANKARS to get a son or a daughter or some other favor. "To

⁶ Jainism in North India by Chimanlal J. Shah, A. Sagar Book House, New Delhi, 1989, page 252.

⁷ Jainism in Karnatak by T. G. Kalghatgi, published in Contribution to Jainism to Indian Culture, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975, page 239.

save TEERTHANKARS from compromise," writes Dr. A. N. Upadhye, "in certain places, there is current worship of YAKSHA and YAKSHANI, as in popular Hinduism. That is how the worships of Kshetrapal and Padmavati etc., have become popular in some parts. A YAKSHA carrying the image of JIN on his head is a pretty old idea, ... This is all a compromise due to the influence of the society round about, or a relic of worship brought in by families who accepted Jainism as a way of life at a later stage. This is all, in a way, conforming to the common Indian set up of things; and Jains, being a minority in the midst of a majority, could not escape the influence of the latter. A minority is subjected to such influences; but we should not mistake their practices for the basic principles of Jainism. Very often I find even the vegetarians are becoming in minority (in India); that is my experience. Those who follow some rigorously self-imposed rules are bound to be in a minority, but they need not feel any repentance on that count. It is better that the Jains stick to their religion, which teaches them a respectable, neat and worthy way of living. Sometimes today religion is used as a tool for some other end, such as political power, social prestige, etc. What is professed is much different from what is practised; this has no place in a truly religious life. Religion keeps our conscience alert and puts us on the path of virtues, giving us mental satisfaction and spiritual solace."⁸

Q: It is obvious from the above discussion that the Jain system has sustained some departures from the original teachings of the TEERTHANKARS. It seems that all Jains understand the basics of the Jain religion but human weaknesses lead us to deviate from the path shown by our TEERTHANKARS. This is quite reasonable in the case of householders. However, since the Jain community was wealthy, large sums of money were donated to the temples (CHAITYAS) and some monks started to enjoy comfortable living in the temples. Further, they indulged more in ritualistic practices through which more funds could be collected than in preaching and practicing Jainism. They exercised great power over their disciples and administered schools, libraries and extensive areas of land. In the ninth century, Haribhadra Suri wrote about these monks as follows:

These pseudo-monks live in temples, start worshiping there like laymen, enjoy the wealth dedicated to the worship of the JINS, take

⁸ Jain Contribution to Indian Heritage by A. N. Upadhye, published in Contribution to Jainism to Indian Culture, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975, page 24.

active part in erecting temples and residence halls, wear perfumed clothes of variegated colors, eat two or three times a day, and partake food brought by nuns. They engage themselves in astrology and predict the future for the lay disciples. They take baths, adorn their bodies with all sorts of powders and oil, and waste time in sleep, in buying and selling, and in gossip. To increase their support they buy young children and make them into their own disciples, and do business in buying and selling Jain images. They are clever in medicine, in YANTRA (mystical diagrams), in TANTRIC (occult) practices, and in other such techniques forbidden to monks. They prevent the lay disciples from going to those monks who lead a pure life, frightening them with curses, and they fight constantly to keep their disciples from being taken by others.⁹

Responsible acharyas like Haribhadra Suri had observed these differences between principles and practice. Did they take any steps to reform the system?

A: Certainly, there have been quite a few efforts to reform the Jain system and bring it closer to the teachings of the TEERTHANKARS. Also, our religious leaders took the necessary steps, without resorting to violence, to preserve the Jain system, including our scriptures, temples and images of TEERTHANKARS, when attacked by zealous followers of other religions. In 1017, some Shwetambar monks tried to break the hold of the temple dweller (CHAITYAVAASI) monks on the local Jain community in the capital of Saurashtra. They called themselves VANAVAASI (forest dwellers).¹⁰ In 1080, Muni Jineshvara Suri is said to have defeated the CHAITYAVAASIS in a religious debate. He was given the title of KHARATARA (one having impeccable character). The group called KHARATARA-GACHCHHA is quite popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan even today.

One of the most important movements was started in the middle of the fifteenth century by Lonka Shaha who was a householder. He once received the scripture DASHVAIKAALIK SUTRA for copying. He studied it and became interested in Jain scriptures. He found that the ritualistic worships are not described in the ancient scriptures. He became convinced that the rituals performed by CHAITYAVAASIS were not relevant to the path of salvation set forth in Jain scriptures. He

⁹ The Jaina Path of Purification by Padmanabh S. Jaini, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979, page 308.

¹⁰ The Jaina Path of Purification by Padmanabh S. Jaini, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979, page 308.

was also shocked to discover that the monks did not follow the code of conduct prescribed in the scriptures. He expressed his views before his employer Yati Jnaanaji and other scholars. He gained many followers and the group LONKA-GACHCHHA started. A minister Lakhamsi who was a Jain also became his supporter. In 1652, Lavaji organized the STHAANAKAVAASI group that is an offshoot of LONKA-GACHCHHA. STHAANAKAVAASIS do not worship images and conduct their religious activities in a STHAANAK that serves as a residence for monks. Another offshoot of STHAANAKAVAASIS is the TERAAPANTHI group that emphasizes the thirteen virtues, five great vows (MAHAVRATAS of nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possessiveness), five SAMITIS (rules of conduct including extreme care in walking, talking, eating, accepting and placing objects, and disposing waste) and three GUPTIS (control over body, speech and mind).

A movement similar to STHAANAKAVAASI was started among Digambara by Taran Swami in the sixteenth century. Taran Swami wrote 14 scriptural books based on his knowledge of scriptures. His followers are called Taranapanthi.

The great scholar and poet, Pandit Ashadhar, born in the thirteenth century, wrote 20 scriptural books. Through his works, he delivered a powerful message to the Jain community to go back to the original teachings of the TEERTHANKARS. Similar efforts were made by Kavi Banarasi Das in the seventeenth century who was a prolific writer and poet in a dialect of Hindi. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Pandit Todarmal wrote 4 scriptural books including MOKSHAMAARG PRAKAASHAK that convey a message of pure spiritualism. Shrimad Rajchandra has mentioned this text in his writings. Pandit Todarmal also wrote expositions on ancient scriptures in Hindi.

In recent times, Shrimad Rajchandra has emphasized right conduct in life. He did not favor rituals. He has indicated that we should forget the differences between the various groups such as Digambar, Shwetambar and Sthaanakavaasi. We should concentrate on the basic teachings of Bhagwaan Mahaveer and adopt rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct. He said that it is the knowledge of soul and other aspects of reality, coupled with proper conduct that can help us make spiritual progress. This is the way to attain happiness and peace in life.

Q: It is observed that some of the reform movements have led to formations of new groups such as Sthanakavaasi, Taranapanthi and Teraapanthi. In some cases, the religious leaders of the groups are

indulging in the very same practices that were renounced by their originators. Further, they have introduced variations such as the length of a piece of cloth or the dates of celebrations so that their followers will remain distinct from those of other groups. Even at present, individuals are establishing new Acharya SANGHS, new kinds of temples and images, and new practices. Some are propagating new fads for the sole purpose of gaining a larger following. These do not make sense to educated and intelligent individuals of today. Our youngsters observe the widening gap between the teachings of Bhagwaan Mahaveer and the conduct of our institutions. We talk of our lofty ideals and glorious past but our conduct is different; the excuse that is given is that everybody is doing it. Any comments?

A: The Jain community has to do some soul-searching. Instead of pointing fingers at others, we have to look at ourselves. We have to realize that whether we were born and brought up into Digambar tradition or Shwetambar tradition or Sthaanakavaasi tradition or Teraapanthi tradition, our doctrine is identical regardless of cosmetic differences in our beliefs and practices. Whether a monk wears clothes or remains nude is his preference. We will only pay respect to him for his conduct. Whether an image is bare or decorated, it is the image of a TEERTHANKAR and it is a symbol of non-attachment and non-aversion. It is this sacred thread that has bound the Jain community through the ages. "The inflexible conservatism of the small Jain community in holding fast to its original institutions and doctrine has probably been the chief cause of its survival during periods of severe affliction; for, as Professor Jacobi has pointed out long time ago, there can be little doubt that the most important doctrines of the Jain religion have remained practically unaltered since the first great separation in the time of Bhadrabahu, about 300 B.C. And although a number of less vital rules concerning the life and practices of the monks and laymen, which we find recorded in the holy scriptures, may have fallen into oblivion or disuse, 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. It must be confessed from this that an absolute refusal to admit changes has been the strongest safeguard of the Jains."¹¹

¹¹ Jainism in North India by Chimanlal J. Shah, A. Sagar Book House, New Delhi, 1989, pages 77-78.