

A STUDY OF JAIN ACTIVITY IN WESTERN ORISSA (From c.B.C. 200–600A.D.)

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The Indian religions provide an exciting field for study. Because of the Pluralistic expression, it has some problems to be studied. If we peep into the background of the religious studies in Western Orissa, it is very complex situation requiring deep investigation. The main focal point of the Papers is to provide an in-depth information and analytic historical account of Jainism.

Jainism has been revealed now and then in every one of these endless succeeding periods of the world by innumerable Trithankaras. The first Tirthankara was Rsabhanatha and the last two were Parsva and Mahavira. In the Jaina literature¹, Mahavira, the last Tirthankara of the Jainas, is described as a supreme personality, who was acknowledged as a “great Brahman”, “a great guardian”, “a great preacher”, “a great pilot” and “a great recluse”.

Now-a-days, the perceptions of the social scientist, however, are trying to gain grip on the understanding of the complex phenomena of religion. Religion is viewed primarily as a part of the ideological system which itself emerged on the basis of the material conditions that exist in a particular situation. The religions are also supposed to reform themselves from time to time.

Early Development

In Ancient Orissa, Jainism played a very eminent role in religious and cultural life of the people. Since the days of the Nandas to the invasion of Ashoka over Kalinga, the political history of Orissa was called a dark period. But we have some reference that much earlier to the Mauryan period there was a great Jaina monarch in Kalinga, *called Karakandu*,² who was ruling before Mahavira and after Parsvanatha.

The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela (Khandagiri, Udayagiri)³ says that Mahavira visited Kalinga and from the Kumari-Parvata⁴, he preached and promulgated Jainism.

In the fourth and fifth century B.C. when the Nanda dynasty was in power in Magadha, Orissa was stronghold of Jainism. It has been mentioned in the inscription of Kharavela that the army, in the twelfth year of his reign had invaded Magadha and brought back the sacred *Kalinga-Jina*⁵ which had been taken from Kalinga by Nandaraja Mahapadma

Nanda⁶ as a symbol of victory over Kalinga, three hundred years back. Jainism must have suffered a temporary set back during the rule of Ashoka in 3rd century B.C.

After Ashoka's invasion of Kalinga in 261 B.C., Buddhism was ushered in and it gained much popularity in Orissa due to the missionary activities. However, it cannot be said that Ashoka's missionary activities adversely affected the ruin of the Jainism in Kalinga. Jainism continued to flourish as a major religion of Kalinga even after the Mauryas invasion. After the Mauryas, when Chedi ruler Kharavela was the king of Kalinga, Jainism was wellknown and popular.

Development in Western Orissa

There are insufficient archaeological findings of Jaina antiquity in South Kosala, particularly in Western Orissa. However, we have some important literary sources to prove that Jainism was there in concerned period, which was under review.

According to Bhagavati Sutra and Harivamsha Purana⁷, Mahavir started his earliest preaching of Dharma at Nalanda, Rajgriha, Paniya Bhumi, Siddharthagrama. According to some scholars, (D.C.Sircar) Punita Bhumi is a synonym of Paniya Bhumi as per Ardha Magadhi language. It is the same as Paniya Bhumi or Nagoloka, the present Nagpur, and it is further identified as Bhogapura, the modern Bastar, region of Chhattisgarh and Koraput, Kalahandi district of Orissa.

The Vagabati Sutra informs that Mahavir stayed at Paniya Bhumi for last six years with *Acharya Gosala*⁸. From there, they proceeded towards Kurmagrama and Sidharthagrama, which were identified with Erandapali⁹ and Sirkurman¹⁰ in Srikakullam district of Andhra Pradesh. The ancient tract through which Mahavir traveled from Paniya Bhumi to Kurmagrama and Sidharthagrama is the same road on which Samudragupta marched to Kalinga¹¹.

Western Orissa was incorporated in the Chedi Empire under the Kharavela, a great follower of Jainas. Here we can mention that Jainism was one of the major religious systems of South Kosala during the Chedi rule.

We have number of archaeological evidences including cult image of Jaina Tirthankara belonging to the 5th, 6th and 7th century A.D. The image of Parsvanatha found at *Pendra*¹² in Bilaspur district is important. The deity is represented engrossing in meditation. A seven headed snake from a canopy over the head of the deity.

The Jaina temple at *Bhanda*¹³ is supposed to be the most ancient Jaina monument of Daksina Kosala. Image of different Trithankaras found there and local people worship them in the name of Parganoadev.¹⁴

There are several other icons of Jaina Tirthankars discovered at *Adhabhar*,¹⁵ *Malhar*,¹⁶ the bronze image at *Sirpur*,¹⁷ two images preserved in the *Konthi* temple at *Ratanpur*, a Jaina goddess image at *Sarangarh*, image of Rsabhanath found at *Ratanpur* and *Malhar* which are preserved in the Raipur Museum.¹⁸

We also find Jaina temples at *Kurra*¹⁹ and *Sirpur*²⁰ in Raipur district. Another ten inches of Mahavir sculpture has been found at *Maraguda valley* and is preserved in modern Jaina temple of Khariar Road in Nawapara district. It is ten inches in height chiseled on four sides with its cognisance lion at the bottom and the Srivatsa symbol is found on the chest.²¹ Apart from the above sites, we found a Jain temple at Subei in Koraput district.

Subei - as a popular religious site

The researcher, himself visited the excavated place at Subei, which is located near-by Nandapur and 35 Kms. from Koraput district headquarter. In ancient period, the areas of the district formed part of the *Dandaka* forest. The tract was also remaining with the Attavika²² region. The next phase of political domination in the area is marked by the occupation of the Satavahana, the Matharas, and the Ikshvakus.

The Jaina monuments of the village are noticed at the foot of the *Panagiri* hill. The images are thickly covered with moss and lichen and attended very rarely by the local people. Government or NGOs has made no attempt for proper maintenance of these monuments. Of the ten shrines, only two are somewhat standing for at present.

All the figures of the Trithankara, one has been depicted in sitting position on the pedestals. The Tirthankaras flanked by chauri bearers are provided with *Kevala* tree, tri-linear umbrella, *Prabhamandala* and flying *Apsaras*. The hairs on the head of the figures are arranged in matted locks. One prominent figure of Rsabhanatha affixed to the outer wall, near the entrance to the premises, is carved in seated *Yogasana* pose along with other twenty-three Tirthankaras on the sides.

On the basis of the architectural features, *V. Dehejia* has traced this temple back to the formative phase that is before 700 A.D.²³ but from one of the basis of the iconographic features, the temple can be assigned to the ninth century A.D.

Excavated site found in South Kosala

District	Excavated site
Raipur (Chhattisgarh)	Kurra Sirpur Ratanpur Malhar
Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	Pendra
Nawapara (Orissa)	Maraguda Valley
Koraput (Orissa)	Subai

Influence in Society

Jainism has played a very significant role in the development of language, philosophy, architectural, sculpture and the way of the life of the people. From third century B.C. to fourth century A.D., according to *N. Pattnaik*,²⁴ the political organization and social structure might have been at the best at the level of chiefdom or, state of proto-state formation.

The earliest introduction and spread of Aryan religious practice in Western Orissa came with the initial incursion of the Jaina religion. It is anti-vedic and did not recognize Vedic metaphysics. The first acquaintance the tribal Kosali's had at Aryan was with Jainism. Here we can find the Jaina practices and tribal deities' influence on Western Orissan social life.

The ancient trade route linking the port of *Paloura* on the eastern coast of Bay of Bengal with the trade center of Deccan passed through this areas. The rulers gave patronage to Jainism to construct temples under the influence of monks who were travelling in these areas to spread their religion. The creed has had its impact on the life of Oriya and Kosali's peoples. Worship of the *Vata tree* (*Ficus*), *Kalpavata* social custom is drawn from Jainism. Many Jaina scholars were employed as astronomers and administrators of the court of various South Indian royal families as observed by D.C. Sircar.²⁵ These Jaina astronomers seem to have introduced the Saka Era in this region.

The Jainism also influences the medieval Oriya literature. The story of the Jagannath in the Oriya Mahabharata of Sarala Das appears to be a Jaina parable in a different form. The *Vishnu-garbha Purana* of *Chaitanya Das* is replete with version of Jaina philosophical discussion and practices.

Gopinath Mahanty (Gyanapitha awardee) referring to an account in the Sarala Mahabharata(Oriya) assumes that Janughanta was probably a very powerful king of Kalinga, who lived on begging alms, remained necked (Digambara) and followed the principle of Non-violence. These practices are quite in common with Jaina religious faith. The followers of this king are known as Janughantia in rural Orissa. They have *mathas* in Baramba, Narasingpur, Kendrapara areas of Cuttack and Puri district.

Hence we can conclude that it is difficult to accept that the Aryan people came in large numbers and subjugated the local tribes and superimposed their own culture and language on the Orissan people. The Orissan situation is principal case of regional variation.

Naga Culture in Association with Jainism

The worship of the Naga culture is found in the different parts of Orissa, especially of the tribal and low caste Hindus of the hilly tracts of Western Orissa. Naga is familiar and common that there is a peculiar place of Naga in their religious life, like the early

Egyptians worshipping the snake with totemistic rituals.²⁶ The people worship Snake after being initiated to a religious order (Nagabachcha) like the *Upanayana* of Brahman.

These Naga cultural traditions still worship in Western Orissa. But we have evidence that it was started since pre-Gupta period in Western Orissa. It is important to observe that there is no restriction of caste, creed or sect for selection of individuals for its ceremony. Generally, the leader of the (Nagabachcha) is called *Jhankar*, *Ojha* or *Pujhari*.

The Jaina Parsvanatha is represented either with a seven-hooded serpent expanding over his head or as sitting on the expanded hoods of a serpent with many heads.²⁷ According to Jain legend, when Parsvanatha was engaged in devotion, his enemy Kamatha or, Katha caused a great rain and thunder-stone to disturb him in his meditations. The serpent king *Dharanendra* or *Dharana* with his wife *Padmavati* came to protect the lord and shadowed his head with his seven hoods as an umbrella.²⁸ Such sculptures are found in the cave temples of *Badami* and *Ellora*²⁹ and it has been noticed in *Alakapuri-Gumpha*³⁰ of the Khandagiri and Udayagiri.

From the above literary and archaeological information, it can be assume that there may be more Jaina monuments and serpent image available in Western Orissa, and it seems that there is a lack of excavation in Western Orissa, while most of the informations and excavations regarding Jaina temple available in other part of Orissa in the period under review.

The present study which is trying to dictate the in-depth information regarding socio- religious cultural activities through proofs from the ancient monuments, where there is information regarding Western Orissa from the primary sources.

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