CHAPTER-II

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIONS IN INDIA WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO KARNATAKA
Indeed religion is a creation of man which he fashioned for his own solace. It developed in course of time in several ways in several regions and climes, touching new horizons with the birth of new leaders, new thinkers and new saints from time to time. No other force has made more impact on human community than religion. This is more true of India than any other part of the world.

India has been a land of various religions. Some of them are born on this soil and some came from outside but have taken roots here. There have been mutual influences and give and take. Thus the religions here have not remained static but have grown imbibing new elements, new thoughts and new influences. Perhaps the best example of this phenomena is what has come to be called to-day Hinduism.
The beginning of Indian religion, can be traced back to the early Śākta or Ṛgvedic period. The Śākta seer venerated several forces of nature; sang the glory and benevolences of those forces which were gradually defied and offered oblations in gratitude. Thus came into being the novel concept of Yajña for offering their best to their gods who showered them bounties and protected them from evils.

Agni, the fire, the harbinger of civilization described by the Śākta seer in a highly imaginative way as sakha or the friend of human beings who stood as a liason between the human beings and the heavenly gods like Indra, Varuṇa, Soma & others. Indra was the god of heroic fighter who release water from the clouds which was so essential for the life of the human beings and plants. There was Varuṇa the keeper of the world order. The Rita, which held the people together within the bounds of the moral order and protected them from going astray. Several other gods were also propitiated who contributed to the happy and prosperous life of the people.

The religion of the early Śākta man consisted of more of prayer and the simple offerings at the individual level. But in course of time it developed
complexities and Yajna which was conceived as a simple offering developed into a big institution involving intricate rituals and technicalities. It became a huge and elaborate affair not only involving lot of time and materials but called for expertise of specialists in the art and craft of the ritual.

It has normally been thought that the Harappan people had earlier inhabited on the Indian soil and the Vedic people, the so called Aryans, replaced them in this region. It has also been thought that the religious practices of these people were different from the Vedic Aryans who were not habituated to idol worship. Some of the artefacts found in the original excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa have been identified as the objects of worship such as the Mother Goddess, Paśupati and the like. But there has been a rethinking about this in the recent times. Thanks to the discovery of more and more so called Harappan sites in the interior of India and the more vigorous attempts in the decipherment of the Indus script in the recent times, looking to the activities of the so called Harappan and the Vedic people, suggestions are also made that the Vedic and the Harappan people were in no way different from each other. On the other hand
they could be one and the same people, prophecying one and the same religion and speaking one and the same language.

The Vedic religion gradually underwent changes yielding place to new ideas and thoughts. Owing to the growth of too many technicalities of form, the Yajña lost its significance. Thinkers of the subsequent period laid more stress on understanding the secrets of nature and its guiding principles rather than outward grandiose performance of the Yajñas. Philosophical speculations commenced to know the nature of the highest principle which governed the world order. The Upanishads are the best representatives of new line of thinking which provided a firm foundation for the different schools of philosophy which developed in due course in our country. But the needs of the common man to whom the philosophical speculations were above reach yet to be met. This lead to the further development of the Vedic religion involving idol worship and the cult of Bhakti. This was indeed a land mark in the development of Vedic religion. The purāṇas, the Mahākāvyas, the Dharmāstāras, and most of other literature popularised this religion and its new form spread throughout the country and it continues to
hold prime position inspite of vicissitudes through the centuries.

No vestiges of either the Indus civilization or the early Vedic period have been so far discovered in Karnataka region. But it is well known that the Vedic religion in its new form spread here as well. The ruling monarchs and the people from the earliest known times sponsored and followed this religion in its divergent forms like the Vaishnava and Saiva with their numerous sects and subsects. In the period under study this religion was the most popular one finding patrons in the royal families and the laity. Construction of temples providing for worship and various services in the temples and performance of various charitable deeds were the common features of the practising of this religion.

In the earliest period of the political history of Karnataka viz., the Nanda and the Maurya period, we practically know nothing about the Vedic or the Brahminical religion. The Ashokan edicts mention the Brahmanas, who must have been protagonists of the Vedic religion. One of the edicts also mentions the sacrifice. In the subsequent period of Stavahanas the religion flourished well with the patronage of the rulers, who are reported to have
performed several vēdic sacrifices. One of the Sātavāhana Kings is called Ekbrāhmaṇa. The contemporary Ikṣvāku rulers in the coastal Andhra region are also credited with the performers of the Yajnas. In the subsequent period of the 4th century onwards the Kadambas of Banavasi were the followers of this religion. Mayūraśarma the founder of this dynasty was the Śudet of the Vēda and he is known to have hailed from the family of learned Brāhmaṇas. The subsequent rulers also were the worshipers of Vishnu or Śiva in different forms. The next rulers the Chālukayas of Badami were also protagonists of this religion. They were the worshippers of Kārtikeśa and the Saptamātrikas. They were responsible for the construction of numerous temples for the deities of the Śalva and the Vaishnava pantheon and patronised the teachers of this religion. They adopted Varāha as their emblem for being the devotees of Vishnu and for claiming to protect the world from disaster as did Vishnu in his Varāha avatāra. Their successors Rāṣṭrakūṭas also followed the same religion. They adopted Garuḍa the Vāhana of Vishnu as their emblem. The Daśāvatāra cave at Ellora during their period and the famous Kailāsa temple in the same place came to be carved out by Kṛishṇa II of this family.
It was also popular in other parts of contemporary India both in the south and the north. The rise and the growth of this religion with its divergent form in the period under study will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.

From its birth in the Sarasvati valley around 3,000 years B.C. till about the middle of the 6th century this was the only religion which pervaded the country through the centuries. It underwent several changes, Yajna or sacrifice being the most important feature. In the middle of the 6th century arose on the Indian sky a new luminary, the Buddha Goutama, who brought a new stream of thinking, which on the one hand resulted in the foundation of a new religion called the Bouddha Dharma and on the other hand influenced the existing vedic religion, by invigorating with its new thoughts and ideas pushing to the back the out-moded elaborateness of the Yajna. The magnetic personality of the Buddha attracted the attention of thousands of people who came under his refuge.

Having seen the misery and the suffering of the people and having experienced the futility of life, he advocated Sanvasa or renunciation as a means for freeing
oneself from the miseries of life'. Full of compassion for the living beings, he propagated Ahimsa and naturally this disapproved the performance of the Yajña. He did not also give any credence to the existing Varna system which created a hierarchy in the society. The fundamental principles of his teachings are represented by the four noble truths: (a) The world is full of sufferings (b) Suffering is created in the world due to selfish desires of human being (c) Thirst can be stopped by the destruction of thirst and (d) That in order to do this one must know the right way.

One important feature of the spread of Buddhism is the formation of the Bikshu Sanchas and the movement of the disciples throughout the country spreading the message of their master. This religion maintained its impact long after the Nirvana of the Buddha. In the 3rd century B.C. Maurya Asoka was greatly attracted by the teachings of the Buddha. He adopted many of the teachings, in formulating his own Dharma which was based on good conduct, tolerance, understanding and co-operation. He is said to have been greatly responsible for the spread of this religion far and wide even outside the country. He is said to have constructed several stupas in memory
of the Buddha and also convened a Buddhist council to codify the teachings of the Buddha.

One feature of Buddhism was its struggle for survival as against the Vedic or the Brahminical religion, which was constantly undergoing changes and reformation to suit the new requirements. <i>Ahimsā</i> or noninjury to living beings was accepted as a virtue and even the Buddha was absorbed in the pantheon as one of the <i>avatāras</i> of the God. With the growing popularity of the <i>Bhakti</i> cult, which appeal to the sentiments of the people, the <i>Yaśña</i> cult receded to the back ground. These new elements were greatly responsible for the growing popularity of the Brahminical or the Hindu religion.

Yet Buddhism not only survived but also flourished with the <i>patronage</i> of the royal family by the Kushāṇas in the early years of the Christian era. A most significant event which took place in this period was the bifurcation of the religion into two schools <i>Hinayāna</i> and <i>Mahāyāna</i>. Mahāyāna signifying the onward march, opted for reformation, imbibing even some of the practices of the Vedic religion. The most important being the image worship. The Buddha came to be worshipped in the human form and several hierarchical stages were created on the way to reach
Nirvāṇa. Hinayāṇa remained as the old orthodox school. The Mahāyāṇa sect caught the imagination of the people and became popular even outside the country. In the later days it branched off into another sect called the Vajrayāṇa which tended even to adopt tāntricism.

The growing popularity of the Brahminical religion and the wide support it received by the ruling class as well as the common people on the one hand, and the inherent difficulty such as negative approach to life on the other were detrimental to the survival of this religion. Though off and on in the history of the country it did receive fresh impetus.

In Karnataka Buddhism entered probably through the Buddhist monks in the days of Aśoka. Banavāsi (North Kanara district) is said to be one of the most ancient centres of Buddhism where the Buddhist monks reached at the behest of Aśoka. The prevalence of Aśokan edicts in good number in Karnataka is no direct evidence for the spread of this religion in this region. But it can be inferred that Buddhism spread itself here through the influence of Aśoka. Buddhism has never been prominent in Karnataka but it has not been altogether absent. The Chutu inscription at Banavāsi is the direct evidence for
the existence of this religion in the early centuries of the Christian era. An extensive site at Sannati in Gulbarga district which is yet to be studied fully is another good evidence of spread of Buddhism in Karnataka in the early centuries of the Christian era. A Sātavāhana inscription at Banavasi mentioning a chāya stambha set up in memory of a Sātavāhana queen is a clear evidence for the existence of this religion in the Sātavāhana period.

Buddhism received a set back in subsequent kingdoms of the Kadambas, Chālukyas of Badami and the Rāṣṭrakūtas, in which periods the two most prominent Vedic religious sects Śaiva and Vaishnava were most popular along with Jainism. However, a few Buddhist vestiges are found here and there. A natural Buddhist cave is supposed to be existing along side the famous caves at Badami. The Hiregutti plates of Āśinkūta Varma (6th C.A.D) contain invocation to Buddha. An image of the Buddha (8th C.A.D.) at Kandhāra in Nanded district Maharashtra speaks of the existence of this religion in the Rāstrakūta period or 8th - 10th century A.D. The situation was not much different in the period under study viz., the days of the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa a detailed
account of this will be given in subsequent pages.

**Jainism:**

It is generally held that Mahāvīra is the founder of Jaina religion, but according to the orthodox Jaina faith, Mahāvīra is only the last of a long series of illustrious teachers to whom the religious sect owes its origin and development. These teachers are called Tīrthāṅkaras. They are twenty-four in number but it is however difficult to establish the historicity of these personages. The twenty third tīrthāṅkara Pārvāṇāṭha, is generally believed to be a historical person but very little is known about his life. Vardhamāna Mahāvīra is said to have come after two hundred fifty years after Pārvāṇāṭha. He was born in a Kṣatriya family in the famous city of Vaiśāḷī about the year 540 B.C. He was married and had a child but left home and wandered about 12 years till he attained the supreme knowledge after rigorous asceticism. Like the Buddha, Mahāvīra also preached that jñāna or knowledge as the means of final deliverance from the sufferings of the mortal life. He was called Mahāvīra or a great hero, because he successfully conquered and reached beyond the cycle of birth and death & thus became the Jīna or the Victor.
Mahāvīra dedicated his whole time in preaching this new doctrine. He preached total Ahimsā to the extent of refraining from injury even to the insects and he advocated even the giving up of clothes. Self-control, and austere penance were the cardinal principles of the Jaina way of life. Satya (truthfulness), Asthēya (not stealing any thing), Ahimsā (non-injury to living beings) and Aparigraha (not receiving any thing from any body) were the four principles of conduct.

The Jaina religion received considerable popularity and spread soon throughout the country. Like Buddhism, the Jaina doctrine also grew and huge mass of religious literature came to be produced. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism held fast to the land of its origin and spread throughout the country and continued to stay in a strong position till very late in history. Infact even today unlike Buddhism it has continued to have large number of followers in different parts of the country. Unlike Buddhism again the Jaina religion has not crossed the border of the land of its origin. The secret of the survival and growing popularity of this religion is for its adoption of the new line of thinking and the several practices of the Hindu religion, which appealed to the
popular sentiments, for example the worship of the idol its pomp and Pageantry, the construction of the temples and fostering the art.

Extreme austerity and nudity became optional only for those who would be able to resign from worldly enjoyments. Others could attend to the worldly chore and yet be the followers of Jina practising to the minimum, the basic principles of Satya, Ahimsā, etc. Thus it gets strength in the form of following to face more boldly the adverse effects of the growing popularity of the Hindu religion. Throughout history, Jainism lived and flourished side by side with Hinduism while nudity became optional even among those who followed the ascetic order, it became a difficult thing to follow. Then came into existence a reformist school in the same pantheon called the Śvetāmbara, where the ascetics adopted the wearing of white clothes.

Jainism was born in the 6th century B.C. but we hear very little about it in the succeeding centuries. The Śramaṇa mentioned in the Asoka edicts obviously refers to be Jaina monastic order. The Hātigumpha inscription of Kharavela testify to its existence in the beginning of the Christian era. Though the Kushāṇas of the subsequent centuries are said to be protagonists of
Buddhism, the Jaina religion did not suffer much. The Guptas of the 4th-6th century are well known for the bias for the vedic religion and the Vaishnava sect. But the Vidīśā inscriptions of Rāngupta are a standing testimony to the continuance of Jainism in that period also. There are many other Jaina vestiges available in this subsequent period.

Coming to Karnataka, Jainism entered this part of the country almost along with Buddhism. There is a tradition recorded in Kannada inscriptions of 11th-12th century A.D. that Chandragupta Maurya migrated from Magadha to Shrāvaṇabelgola with his Jaina teacher Bhadrabāhu. According to the statement of Haribhadra, the region of Malkhed was inhabited by the followers of the śvetāmbara doctrine when Padalipatāchārya, an eminent divine of North India, visited the place. This was about the first century A.D. However, it is to be noted that the śvetāmbara sect of Jainism did not become popular in Karnataka. There is almost no trace of this sect here, on the other hand Dīgambara school flourished most till the very late period. All the Jaina vestiges in Karnataka found today belong to this school.

Apart from this, Jainism flourished here in the
early centuries of the Sātavāhana rule and also in the subsequent Kadamba period. The first Sātavāhana king Simuka is said to have been a follower of the Jainism. He is supposed to have built many Jaina basadis in capital city of Pratishthānapura according to the Jaina account. A Copper plate charter of the Kadamba ruler Mrigēśāvarma dated in his fourth regnal year, registers the grant of an entire village for the benefit of the Jaina Gods and the Jaina recluses. The Gudnapur inscription of Ravivarman also points to the existence of a Jainālāya during his period. Halsi, now a small village in Belgaum district was also a famous Jaina centre in the days of the early Kadambas.

The Chālukyas of Badami were the patrons of all religions. The Jaina caves at Badami alongside the Saiva and Vaishnava are a testimony to the flourishing of this religion in this period i.e., 6-8 century A.D. The well known Megūṭi temple on one of the hills of the Aihole is a Jaina temple built by a devout Jaina and a noted poet Raviṅkīrti who was in the service of Pulakēśī II. He is also the author of the famous Aihole praśasti of Pulakēśī II. Kuṅkumamahādevi daughter of Vinayāditya was a devout Jaina, built a Jaina temple at Lakṣmekāvarah. The Šāhkhā
basadi at Lakshmesvara was very famous during this period and received magnificent grants from the members of the royal family.

The Rastrakutas, the successors of the Chalukyas in this region, followed the same policy, though they were avowed protagonists of Vaishnava religion. The Jaina religion flourished considerably in this period. Nrapatunga Amoghavarsha I is well known as a devout Jaina. Several Jaina authors prospered during this period and Jaina basadis such as the one at Mulgund in Dharwad district came to be constructed during this period. This was indeed the beginning of the Jaina ascendency in Karnataka. Indra IV, a devout Jaina, spent his last days in religious pursuits and expired by the vow of sallekhana. Jainism flourished for it was patronised by the members of the royal family and zealous support of the officials of the state and elite sections of the society.

Jainism flourished under the Gahgas. Among the early rulers of Karnataka, the Gangas of Talakad in the southern part of Karnataka were the most zealous patron of Jainism. The earlier sources narrate that the Ganga Kingdom was established with the help and blessings of the Jaina teacher Simhanandi. Many of the members of this
family constructed several basadis at Sravanabelgola viz., Rachamalla basadi, Gangakandarpa Chaityalaya, Gangapermadi Chaityalaya, were the creation of this period. Gang Marasimha II spent his last days at Sravanabelgola where he died by the vow of sallekhana. Several Gang Kings like Nitimarga, Btuga and Marasimha were not only well known for their learning and scholarship in Jaina Philosophy but were also remarkable for their great acts of piety. Chavundaraya, a Gang minister, was the author of Chavundaraya purana, a history of the tirthankaras, constructed the chavundaraya basadi and the colossal image of Gommatesvara at Sravanabelgola.

In the next period of Chalukyas of Kalyana (10th - 12th century A.D.), Jainism reached its zenith of glory and made invaluable impact on the minds of the people through its profound philosophy, compassionate religion, magnificent literary and artistic creations. These will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.
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