Chapter VI

Syncretism between Jainism and Brahmanism

I

Jainism emerged as a protest against the ritualism with many a trait of the non-Vedic origin. And it was thus a heterodox system like Buddhism in relation to the Vedic and the subsequent Brahmanical or Romanic religion. There are differences, conceptual and otherwise, between Jainism and Buddhism on the one hand and Jainism and the Brahmanical religion on the other, details whereof cannot be taken up on this occasion. However, the broad fact that needs underlining is that with the passage of time the differences between Jainism and Brahmanism were reduced to the minimum. During the period under review Jainism came much closer to the Brahmanical religion than Buddhism. While Tantrayana Buddhism conceived of deities like Trailokyavijaya and Hari-Hari-Hari-VinaSodhava-Lokesvara of a highly sectarian rancour, Jainism never did so. Rather it was respectful to the Brahmanical religion and was not reluctant to accommodate any of its deity to its own pantheon. Indeed, though Jainism started with the denial of the existence of any Supreme Being or Godhead and the opposition of the caste system, two characteristic features of the Vedic-Brahmanical religion it ultimately leaned on the idea of a galaxy of deified men who had been spiritually great, whom they designated as Tirthankaras ('ford-makers across the stream of existence') and they believed further that the practice
of worshipping these Tirthaṅkaras was as old as the foundation of their
religion. Besides, Jainism in the course of time much softened their
attitude to the caste system. Philosophically, too, Jainism was less
dogmatic, declaring, as it were: 'When all knowledge is only probable
and relative, your opponent's view is as likely to be true as yours'.
It was this spirit of accommodation for which 'Jainism has survived in
India till to-day, whereas Buddhism, its twin sister, had to look for
habitation elsewhere'.¹ Both Jainism and Buddhism are now minor reli-
gions in India, although the adherents of the former, mostly living in
western India, are numerically superior to the Buddhists. Unlike the
religion of the Buddha Jainism has failed to attain the status of the
world religion.²

II

Jainism shares many things in common with Brahmānism in the realms
of doctrines, beliefs and practices. On occasions it exhibits similarities
also with Buddhism. For instance, the appearance of the Jaina Tirthaṅkaras
in the role of 'the saviour of the faith' can be paralleled by the concep-
tion of the Avatāras of Vishṇu, according to which the god saved dharma
(righteousness) from extinction and established it by eradicating its

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¹ R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker (ed.), HCIP, II ('Age of the Imperial
Unity'), p. 425.

² There is no evidence of the spread of Jainism outside India, although
there are casual references to the visit of some Jains in countries
like Sri-Lanka (cf. Mahānāma ed. N.K. Bhagat, p. 74). Indeed, no
material remains affiliated to this religion in Sri-Lanka and elsewhere. Some
have tried to trace Jain influence in the Siva temple at Pambanan
in Indonesia (e.g. Hirālal Jain Bharatiya Sanskriti mem Jaina-dharma kṣ
Yoga-dīna, p. 341), but their attempts do not bear scrutiny.
opposite (ādhārma) on various occasions. The transference of the embryo of Mahāvīra from the womb of the Bāhmani Devaraja to that of the Kshatriyānī Trīṣāla by Nāgamesha under the order of his master Devaraja Indra reminds us of the transference of the baby Krishna from the prison of Kansa by his father Vāsudeva to the house of Nanda, the cowherd leader. The festivals celebrated by the Jainas, such as Jñāna-Pāñchamī and the Dīpāvalī, are the same as the Śrī-Pāñchamī and the Dīpāvalī festivals of the Brahmanical religion. Similarly, the myth that the mother of Mahāvīra dreamt fourteen dreams has its parallel in the Buddhist myth that the mother of Siddhārtha saw a white elephant in dream on the eve of her conception.

At its developed stage, particularly during the period under study, Jainism betrays a strong influence of the faiths and practices of the Brahmanical religion. In early Jainism there was no place for the Supreme Being or God, but now Mahāvīra and his predecessors came to be looked upon as gods. Many hymns were composed in their honour and were used to be sung by his devotees in the same style and with the same ardour which marked the hymns of the writers devoted to Vishnu and Śiva, for example, the Āḻvārs and the Nīyāhrs of the South. Sometimes Jina was described

3. There is, however, an important difference. In the Vaishnava mythology Vishnu himself appeared as different Avatāras on different occasions for the perpetuation of the creation, whereas the Tirthaṅkaras who did the same job were different personalities.
as the Universal Spirit, same as Śiva, Dhātri, Sugata and Viṣṇu, and this may be regarded as one of the excellent examples of the accommodative spirit of medieval Jainism. It is also interesting to note that Haribhadra in his Shad-darsana-samuchchaya describes Jainism along with Buddhism as a theistic religion in the sense that it accepts God as a spiritual ideal though not as a Creator. The rituals observed by the Jains include, among others, anointing of images with milk and decorating them with flowers and these which are similar to the Brahmanical religion is further and more markedly discernible in the Jaina pantheon where the syncretistic force appears to have been quite active. Before we take up this issue for discussion, let us take note of the fact that the Brahmanical religion was also not unaffected by Jainism. The most permanent and tangible evidence of this influence may be seen in the stress given on the principle of Ahimsa (non-violence) by numerous Brahmanical sectaries and the consequent introduction of the vegetarian diet in a wide region of India. While the contributions of the Jaina intellectuals to the Tamil and Kanad languages and literatures can hardly be overestimated, the Śiva saints of the South emulated the Jaina ideology of sixty-three great saints (trihṣṭi-cāla-purusta) in instituting a similar hierarchy of sixty-three saints. And like the Jains they also

4. IA, VIII, 1879, p. 106; also B.L. Rice, Mysore and Coorg from Inscriptions, p. 203.

5. This spirit of accommodation of Jainism made B.A. Saletore enthusiastically remark: 'Jains fostered the principle of tolerance more sincerely and at the same time more successfully than any other community in India'. Medieval Jainism, p. 270.
composed hymns in honour of local godlings and thus sought to broaden their religion. The Śaiva mutt organization developed on the line of the Jaina monasticism.

III

The religious history of eastern India during the period under consideration eloquently speaks of the spirit of toleration displayed by the kings and the commonalty regardless of their own personal faiths and beliefs (Chapter III). And as a corollary to this is noticed the reciprocal influence of different religious sects upon one another, reference to which has been made above (Section II in the context of Jainism). The Jaina Tīrthankaras like Śāśvakṣa and Maññavīra were respected by different Brahmical creeds and by the end of the Gupta period Rishabhārtha came to be looked upon as one of the Avatāras of Vishnu. From the side of Jainism it had already imbibed many Brahmical ideas and also incorporated, not a few Brahmical deities and semi-divine beings in its pantheon. From the Gupta period onwards it started developing theistic tendencies on the analogy of Saivism and Vaishnavism, and with the acceptance of the idea of Supreme Being or the God head there appeared as a corollary, sometime in the eighth century, an elaborate pantheon, more systematic than its Brahmical and the Buddhist counterparts. The

6. The Bhāgavata-Purāṇa contains three lists of the Avatāras (I.3.6-22; II. 7. 1 ff; XI. 4. 3 ff). In all these lists Rishabhā (i.e., Śishabhārtha or Śidhinatha) appears along with Buddha as an avatāra of Vishnu. R.C. Hazra dates the present Bhāgavata-Purāṇa to the sixth century, su, I, pp. 239-40.

Jaina pantheon, which betrays the influence of contemporary syncretism, deserves a discussion which is succinctly done below.

The full-fledged divine galaxy of the Jains, which comes on view during the period under study, was the outcome of the gradual development across the centuries. It centres round the Tirthankaras and their Upasakas and Sarnadavatās (also known as Yakshas and Yakshiṇīs), but also includes a number of subsidiary deities who have been grouped under four heads, viz., Jyotishī, Viśramavati, Bhavāpāti and Vyantara. Outside these groups are the deities and semi-divine beings Navagrahas, the Dikūlas, the Mātrīkās (seven or eight), the Siddhas, the Ācāryas and the Chakravartins. A perusal of the names and the iconographic features of these subsidiary deities will convince one of the fact that the Jains borrowed them from the Brahmanical sects as well as from the folk-tribal source and duly adapted them according to their own ideological system. As examples of syncretism between Jainism and Brahmanism in the Jaina texts. Some of the important texts which mention the above-noted nomenclatures are the Ācāravratas, Uttaradharmasūtra and Abhidhāna-chintāmāni. The last-mentioned text mentions all the twenty-four Tirthankaras along with their Upasakas and Sarnadavatās, respective cognizances, colours, trees etc. and thus supplies clues for identification of the Tirthankaras. See CHIRK, pp. 935-37.

The Abhidhāna-chintāmāni presents the Jaina iconography relating to the Svetāmbaras as well as the Digambaras by and large, but there are differences between the Svetāmbaras and the Digambaras iconographic traditions as well. For example, in the Digambara list the Upāsaka of the eleventh Tirthankara called Śrīśvarārtha isĪśvara, apparently the Brahmanical Īśvara or Śiva, and the Sarnadavatā is Gaurī, quite in keeping with the corresponding Upāsaka, Īśvara or Śiva, who happens to be the spouse of Gaurī in the Brahmanical pantheon. Similarly, the emblem of the eighteenth Jina, Aparātha, is fish in the Digambara tradition, while it is mango in the Svetāmbara list.

8. The classification of these deities under four heads is not uniform in the Jain texts. Some of the important texts which mention the above-noted nomenclatures are the Ācāravratas, Uttaradharmasūtra and Abhidhāna-chintāmāni. The last-mentioned text mentions all the twenty-four Tirthankaras along with their Upasakas and Sarnadavatās, respective cognizances, colours, trees etc. and thus supplies clues for identification of the Tirthankaras. See CHIRK, pp. 935-37.
terms of the deities and their icons mention may be made of a few Yaksha- 
Upāsakas of the Tīrthaṅkaras. Take for instance, the cases of Gomukha, 
Brahma, Shag Mukha, Kuvera and Varuna, the respective Upāsakas of 
Rishabhaṇātha, Śītalarātha, Vimalaṇātha, Mallinātha and Munisuvrata.

Gomukha (bull-faced) is the therianthropomorphic representation of the 
Brahmanical god Śiva, Brahm with his characteristic four faces and one of 
his attributes like rudrāksha is the member of the well-known Brahmanical 
triad; Shagmukha is the same the six-faced Brahmanical god Subrahmanya-
Kārttikeya who in both systems rides on a peacock and holds a śakti, and 
Kuvera and Varuna are respectively the guardians of the northern and the 
western quarters of the Brahmanical pantheon. Among the Śasanadevatās or 
Yakshiṣis having connections with the Brahmanical pantheon are Kāli, Māhā-
Kāli, Ambikā and Pāndavatī, of whom the first two appear also in the list 
of Śrūta-devis. They also share the characteristics of their namesakes 
of the Brahmanical pantheon and of them Ambikā needs a special mention on 
account of her popularity and independent representation in art. Also 
known as Kushmāṇḍini, she is the Śasanadevā of the twenty-second Tīrthaṅ-
kara Neminātha and is the consort of the corresponding Upāsaka named Gomeda.

All these deities, including the Upāsakas and Śasanadevatās, are 
depicted in the Jaina literature 'as devoted adherents of the Tīrthaṅ-
karaśas' and hence the Jains 'perform certain pūjās in honour of them'. 

9. Other attributes of Brahmā are mātulunga, pīkā and gada, which are 
however, not seen in the hands of his Brahmanical counterpart.
Ambika appears as riding on a lion and carrying in her four hands a bunch of mangoes, a noose, a child and an elephant-goad and these features make her the Jaina counterpart of the Brahmanical Durga, who is also known as Ambika and Kushmanda; and thus she appears to be a good exemplar of the syncretism between Jainism and Brahmanism. Though she is figured generally as the Śarana-devatā of Neminath, she is also depicted independently, as instanced by the images from Alaurā (Dhanbad district, Bihar) and Nalgoda (24 Berganās, West Bengal). Radhāvatī, who originally happened to be the Śarana-devatā of Marasā, was also popular particularly for her alleged power to cure snake-bite and in this respect she is the Jaina counterpart of the Brahmanical Marasā. Her separate representations are also known and one such example from Nalanda and assignable to the tenth century, shows her with four hands displaying a sword and an axe in the back right and left hands and a mātuliniśa and the simhakarpa-mudrā in the lower right and left hands; she is seated under the canopy of a five-hooded serpent.¹⁰

She has also been separately described in texts like the Bhairava-Radhaśvātī-kalpa of Mallishema and the Radhāvatī-stotram of an anonymous writer.¹¹

Among other deities who are members of all the three pantheons, Jaina, Buddhist and Brahmanical, are Śrī-Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. In some Jaina texts, such as the Āchāra-Dīrakāra and Uttarācāyana-Sūtra, they have been

10. U.P. Shah, op. cit., fig. 41. The identification is, however, not absolutely certain.

described as *Vyantara devās* ('intermediate divinities'). Iconographically, they are identical with their Brahmanical counterparts, but the Jaina Sarasvatī is occasionally depicted as riding on a peacock instead of a swan. The Dikpālas and the Navagrahas in the Jaina application are also more or less identical with their namesakes of the Brahmanical fold. Narinegameshi, the goat-headed deity of the Jaina pantheon, is another instance. He is reminiscent either of the goat-headed Daksha-Prajapati or the goat-faced companion of Śrīnanda-Vārttikeya of the Brahmanical mythology.

Before we conclude reference is to be made of an interesting image type and a motif of the Jaina affiliation. In the former a Tīrthankara, generally Rishabhendra, is seen seated in *dhyānasana* on a lotus, placed on the outspread foliage of a tree below; on the pedestal, on two sides of the tree, are depicted a male and a female, apparently a couple, seated at ease, each with a halo round the head. Sculptures belonging to this type have been found in different parts of Bengal, such as Somamukhi (Bankura district, West Bengal) and Deopara (Rajshahi district, Bangladesh). In some reliefs, now preserved in the Varendra Research Museum (Rajshahi), a child is seen, one each in the lap of the male and the female. The type seems to have been peculiar to Bengal Jainism. The other iconic (or rather architectural-cum-iconic) type is provided by square blocks of four-fold

12. Mention may be made in this connection of a set of figures of dancing Navagrahas carved on the pedestal of an image of Śrīnātha, now preserved in the Fyzabad Museum (U.P.), may be noted.
age-old divinities were selected as members of their pantheons. On most occasions the names of the deities remain unaltered, as evidenced by the deities just mentioned. Radhāvatī and Śīngulī have an apparent sectarian affiliation, but the former appears as a name of the great Brahmanical goddess Durgā and as a divinity play the role of the primordial goddess in Jaina theology and mythology, while the latter, though primarily a Buddhist deity curing the snake-bite, is undoubtedly the Buddhist counterpart of the Jaina Radhāvatī and the Brahmanical Manasa, and also on occasions figures in the Jaina pantheon as a serpent-goddess under the same name. The other deities, Śrī-Śakṣamī, Sarasvatī, Dikṣālas and Nāvagrabhas, as already indicated above, were common to all three pantheons with negligible conceptual and iconographical variations. The image type showing a couple under a tree, as noted above, reminds us of the representations of Pañchika and Hīrīti, the progeny-divinities of the Mahāyāna-Tantrayāna pantheon and thus they may be described as the Jaina adaptations of the same, though the idea of the eternal parent which underlies both the types was not exclusive to them either. In a word, many divinities in the Jaina and Buddhist pantheons in India in ancient and early medieval times were of considerable antiquity and in spite of their Brahmanical affiliations appeared without hesitation in the heterodox pantheons in their mature stages.
Jainas were never as hostile to the members of different Brahmanical sects as a group of Tantrayàna Buddhists were. This perhaps accounts for the fact as to why kings and common men of the Brahmanical faith did not hesitate to affix images of Jaina deities to the walls of their temples like Muktesvara at Bhubaneswar (on the outer face of its octagonal compound wall), the Jagannatha shrine at Baripada (Orissa) and the temples at Dhamapat and Bahulara (both in the Bankura district, West-Bengal). A common danger, generally external, accelerates, the forces of syncretism among the religions facing it. This universal phenomenon was on view towards the end of our period when all these religions faced the grave menace of the alien Islam. The one-time hostile Tantrayanists appreciated the situation and conceived Śrī-kālachakra as the unifying symbol. The Jainas, ever-friendly towards Brahmanism which meanwhile developed an all pervasive attitude towards various sects, came still closer to the Brahmanical sects, who were equally warm to them. Hence in many parts of India, particularly in eastern India from the twelfth-thirteenth century onwards, the line of demarcation between the Jaina and Brahmanical divinities was steadily becoming eliminated. The surviving examples are not rare which show रिषभरात्र as भारत (in one case even as मणि with his sex-mark hidden), रिषभरात्र as Śiva and अंबिका as Durgā. Syncretism between Jainism and Brahmanism reached the culmination in the truest sense of the term.