

Jain Literature and Kundakunda

(8 B.C.- 44 A.D.)

*Dr. T.V.G. Sastri,
Director of Archeology, Kunda Kunda Jnanapith, Indoor*

The Jain Literature is remarkable for its variety and vastness and chronological sequence of events, not merely confined not merely to religious tradition, but also to other branches such as geography, history, science and socio-political studies. Only in the last 50 years, there began research into this literature.

Since the nirvana of Mahavira in 527 B.C., Jain literature has contributed to the overall progress of the religious and cultural mosaic of India. Historically speaking, several works like Tailoyapannati, Harivamsapurana, Avashyaka Vrtti, Parisistaparya, and Prabandhahintamamni, exhibit a consistent treatment of internal history of India from 6th century B.C. to the founding of Maurya empire in the 4th century B.C. Further, they give details of eras like Mahavira era, Saka era, Vikrama era etc. Jacobi, Buhler and other have proved that Mahavira, the last of Chauvimsi (24) Tirthankaras was not only a senior contemporary of Buddha, but Jainism, was a well established religious tradition at the time of Parsva in 8th century B.C.

The Jain texts record the succession of different pontiffs, the gradual decline of canonical knowledge and the meeting of three synods at different periods for its redaction. Again, the Pattavalis and Guruvavalis give a list of ascetic congregations - sanghas, ganas gachhas, genealogical achievements of important teachers, names of royal patrons like Bimbisara and Ajatasatru. They also give interesting information of Bhadrabahu I, the 1st of the strakevalin. His southern migration from Bihar, along with the Mauryan king Chandragupta is recorded in Srisailamahatmyam of Mallikharjuna temple.

Story literature, the Brhat Kathakosa of Harisena consists of several commentaries on Mularadhana written in metrical Prakrit which is assigned to 1st century A.D. The popular Panchatantra containing the stories of morals and truths is a Jain recension that find place in Aesops Fables and Arabian Nights. Works like Kuvalaya Mala, Samaraditya Katha, Dharmapratista, tilaka Manjari, Rambhamanjari, Sukasaptati. etc. with fiction, romance, adventure, folklore animal and birds stories.

The puranic literature consists both of big and small epics. Prathamamanuyoga speaks of Puranas of 24 Tirthankaras, 12 Chakravartins, 9 Bala Bhadras, 9 Narayanas, 9 Prati Narayanas and they constitute the Trisasti Salakapurushas It also gives the account of the families of Jinas, Vidyadharas, Cakravarthins, Charanas, Kings etc.

Yativrsabhas, Tailoyapannati, and works of Jayadeva show that their varna and mantra vrttas have a bearing on the present day mathematical treatment of permutations and combinations, binomial theorem and co-efficients etc. Suryapranjapti, a Jain work on astronomy, gives practical approach in estimating a small unit of time measuring its shadow lenth known as 'samayas'. Another work Panchastikaya of Kundakunda identifies samaya as the minutest movement of light as paramanu prachalanayatah. This forms the basis for the present day theories: the 'seattering of light' and the 'Raman effect'. In this context, it has to be stated that Kundakunda was a versatile genius and a celebrated literary figure, who lived between the closing years and the first half of the Christian period.

According to the Jain tradition, Kundakunda succeeded to the pontificate seat in Vikrama Samvat 49 (8 B.C.)

at the age of 33. He lived as the pontiff of the mulasangha up to 52 years and passed away in 44 A.D. when he was 85 years of old. He was a contemporary of Bhadrabahu II and Arhadbali. Jinasena a commentator of Kundakunda, has observed that he was disciple of Kumaranandi. According to Pattavalies, he was the student of Meghanandi Whose teacher was Arhatbali. But in his own work of Bodhapahuda, Kundakunda calls himself as nayam sisenaya bhaddabahussa-sisya of Bhadrabahu who lived between 37 to 14 B.C. This Bhadrabahu was a later person and not the earlier Bhadrabahu, a Contemporary of Chandragupta Maurya.

According to epigraphical records his name is Kundakunda. Devasena (10th cent A.D.) and Jayasena (12th cent.) refer him as 'Padmanandi'. In the later works, he is known as vattekera, grudhapichha and Elacharya.

From a reference in Bodhapahuda, he hailed from the Krishna region of Andhra Pradesh. As regards his nativity at Konakondla in Anantapur district, its antiquity may not be placed earlier than 7th cent. A.D. Through exploration in the area has not yielded any archaeological material datable to the period of Kundakunda.

Another possible association can be attributed to the village Kolanukonda, opposite the sprawling city of Vijayawada across river Krishna. The place had a Jain basadi on the hill top ste up by the Bhoga Sangha of Bihar. Its possible association may be attributed to the period of Kundakundacharya based on the archacological remains found on the hill slopes. Incidentally, it may be stated that on the original Jain establishment a Siva temple was built on the hill top at Kolanukonda with the name of Bhogalingeswara. The name is not found in Saiva tradition.

Kundakundecharya as the leader of the mulasangha was the most eminent among the ascetics. This is clear from a popular sloka found in the following Jain inscription.

Mangalam Bhagavan viro, mangalam gautami gani,

Mangalam kundakundadya jaina dharmostu mangalam.

Kundakundacharya was a leading light even in Tamil literature. His tradition is attributed to Tirukkural, a work which was given to Tiruvalluver who introduced it to the Sangam proceedings at Madurai. He had devised a format for South Indian dialects with common letters of reading and writing. It was subsequently made popular by another Jain saint Kumudendu. As stated earlier, Kundakunda was Vattkera, whose name is possibly remembered even today in the south for archaic script known as under the name Vatte (kerae) luttu.

It was Kundakunda who established the devotional prayer of 'Panchaparamestins prayer, a daily ritual recitation of invoking Arthats Siddhas, Ayyas, Uvajjhas, and Sahus compulsory in the Jain dharma.

It is generally attributed that Kundakunda instituted Om Namassivaya siddham namah, during the aksarabhyas, the intiation learning. This practice has its Jain origins especially in Andhra Pradesh.

Through his writings, Kundakunda has made it clear that he had full knowledge of atamatatva or atmavidya - the knowledge of the soul and advocated the path of vitaraga, non-vitaraga, non-attachment, either for good or bad. One should develop a state of mind through - 'sravanasakti, strength from austeric practices that lead one to enlightenment.

At a time when Christ had just appeared in the near east horizon, Andhra Pradesh had already Kundakunda, the brightest literary luminary. Although he played an active role in transferring the hither to oral teachings, into a well documented Sarasvat movement, he was a flood of, Santirasapravaha 'peace and tranquillity' as found in some inscription. He demonstrated that the Jain precepts of austeric life, ahimsa, aparigrapha and anekanta have for reaching importance in removing the karmie entanglements of the 'soul' that lead to enlightenment.

