



## Jains: Ancient entrepreneurs

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### Abstract

History of Jainism begins from an invisible point. But, solely and steadily, it has made its circles wider and its flights swifter to shoot like a flaming comet star to star, reaching with every turn almost to infinity. Prof. Nagarajiah, Hampa.

**Keywords:** jainism, entrepreneurs

### 1. Introduction

It is true that Jainism goes back to a remote antiquity. The antiquity in question being that of the pre - Aryan, so called Dravidian illuminated by the discovery of a series of great perhaps even fourth millennium BC. The latest research and excavation at Mehenjodaro and Harappa has shown that Jainism existed before five thousand year ago with the Avatara of Rishabha. The traditional history of Jainism from the earliest times to the age of the last Tirthankara Mahāvīra (6<sup>th</sup> c BC) can be consistently traced from the facts maintained by Jain religion. Archaeological research from time to time also added the facts.

Jainism as an ancient religion has under gone many phases of growth and decline during its long history. The history of Jainism in India has evolved from the eastern states of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and spread to northern states, west, central part of India and even the southern peninsular states. Since Jainism spread all over India in ancient times, it enjoyed high status under the patronage of important Jaina political personalities like rulers, ministers, generals in different parts of India during ancient and medieval times. The Jaina Saints play an important role in the political history of various dynasties, who guided the rulers, kings in all administrative matters and merchants, traders by adopting Jaina philosophy for the benefit of the society. Even now a small, but enterprising member of devotees spread over the whole India and abroad and quite a considerable influence on account of their education, Scholars, entrepreneurship, social status, richness and their social service to the community as a Philanthropists.

### 2. Lord Rishabha's Occupational Structure

The economic life of Jains was started with occupational structure provided by lord Rishabhadēva, the first Tirthankara. He focused his attention towards six main Means of Living that is Asi (self-defence), Masi (Writing or script of that period), Krishi (cultivation), vidya (Education), Vānījya (Trade and commerce) and Vāstushilpa-Art and architecture. Lord Rishabha was a highly endowed, for sighted and industrious icon and credited with introducing Karmabhūmi. He looked at the needs of the society and he evolved numerous arts, crafts, and trade and taught them with right

aptitude and physical and mental capacities to enable householders to sustain themselves. In total Lord Rishabha have taught seventy-two disciplines for men and sixty-four disciplines for women, that enriched the human society in the field of knowledge, art, literature, trade and commerce, agriculture entertainment and administration. The scholars are of opinion that, it is a land mark for the beginning of social and economic life of the people in this cosmic aeon. Paul Dundas is of the opinion that, Lord Rishabha in Jain mythology is not merely a spiritual teacher but also culture hero for the current cosmic cycle. Rishabhadēva is considered as the Harbinger (father) of human civilization, because he inaugurated the Karma bhūmi, the age of action. (Dr. Vilas Sangave, 2006).

Lord Rishabha and his son Bharata established the social and economic institutions based on their occupations such as agriculturists (ordinary workers), Traders (Vaishyas), soldiers (Kshatriyas) and Brahmins (intellectual) prospered social and economic life of the people without leaving them as an idle during early civilization period. Such occupational structure of Lord Ādinātha led to emergence of entrepreneurial community in India.

Hemachandra, the great Jaina leader of the Shvethambara sect stressed the point that lord Rishabha introduced vocation (occupation) concerning food, clothing and shelter, three fundamental needs of human life. From that time the first artisans, the potters arose. For the sake of houses for the people, the lord appointed carpenters, painters for the painting of the houses for the diversity of peoples' pleasure, established weavers for people's cloths, established grass gathering, wood carrying, ploughing, barbers and trade-these business for the sake of the people's livelihood. (Debendra Chandra Das Gupta, 1999).

Though the Jaina scriptures have mentioned all kinds of occupation prevalent in ancient period, the restrictions were put chiefly on those occupations for the Jains due to the principle of non-violence. These restricted occupations have invited only few Jains and most of them have adopted trade and commerce. Apart from this related to commerce and trade, one more profession that the Jains are fairly known for the services in the capacity of money lenders, known as

indigenous bankers. The Jaina texts and the monks have always blessed the business man because he is able to observe all the vows and rituals of Jainism.

### **3. Guild: Trade Association**

The Jain lay followers were largely engaged in trade, commerce, moneylenders, good entrepreneurs and innovators, which fostered brotherhood among themselves, gave rise to guild system known as Shrenis (a type of association). Hence, the ancient merchants, tradesmen, artisans, agriculturist and other businessmen have associations or guilds of their own. The president of the guild should be from a noble family, well-versed in Vedas, Angas, should be dutiful, energetic, good moral character and be skilled in different phases of industry. According to the Abhijnana-Chintamani of Hemachandra, Shrenika, the king of Magadha established so many guilds. The Buddhist texts, Vinaya-pitaka mentioned that Bhimbasa was put in charge of 18 guilds and also he was head of them and he came to be known as Shrenika. As it is mentioned in Buddhist text there were five hundred merchants in India who had an association with Maitri as its president. The merchants took free counsel from this association regarding their overseas trade and ocean navigation. At present Jain International Trade Organization (JITO) is a type of guild play a very important role both nationally and internationally.

Another young Jain entrepreneur of ancient India as mentioned in Upasankanga Sutra, a Jaina Canonical text composed between 500-300BC. Saddalputra, A Gathapati possessed three crore Hiranya (gold coins) and invested one crore gold coins in his business of manufacture of earthenware vessels and owned 500 work sheds outside the town of Polaspur (current Patna). It shows establishment of factories in outskirts region is common during ancient period also. He commanded with huge wealth, artistic buildings, gold and jewelry, chariots, cattle and other animals, labours, food materials, necessary and luxury items. (Rithesh Kumar Gupta, 2013)

### **4. Ancient International Trade Links**

The basic profession of Jainas in the ancient period had been local and international trade. The Greeks came into contact with Jainas during the period of Alexander the Great who was defeated by Chandragupta Maurya. Then Chandragupta Maurya married to the daughter of Selucus to set up a policy of friendship with them. Other trade links of India were Indus valley initiated maritime trading contact with Mesopotamia, Roman Empire all this pushed up India's trade with western world during that period. With the development of trade both locally and internationally the community has become economically more affluent.

### **5. Ancient Trade Centers**

The Jain Entrepreneurs also made remarkable contributions in the economic sphere from time to time and it led to the prosperity of the country. The followers of Jainism were mostly bankers, merchants, traders and enjoyed high level economic and social status from early period and influence of philosophy they were in favour of self-reliance, humanism and social welfare. As the kings were also influenced by Jaina

philosophy and their objective was to protect the interest of their subjects and state development. The economic affluent and fame of the Jaina traders made them closer to state ruling class. Such co-operation between them brought establishment of strong central administration during that period and made economy very strong and brought stability in the society. As it is said that, king Chetaka, president of the Licchavi Republics comprising eighteen gana-rajyas and nine Licchavi Republics located near the foothill of the Himalayas, contributed to the efficiency and solidarity of the Republic with three classes of guilds namely- Bankers, Traders and Artisans. These guilds also issued seals of Vaishali, the City of Commercial Capital. Vaishali enjoyed prestige during the time of Mahaveera, the 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankara and it was matter of pride to be a citizen of Vaishali. Buddha himself compared the Jnatra-Kshatriyas who lived in Vaishali with Gods and they had quite a respectable position in the Licchavi-gana. When Fa-Hein, Chinese traveler visited India (399-414AD), it was an important religious, political and commercial center. (Dr.Hiralal Jain and Dr. A N Upadhaye, 2000). Like Vaishali, Champaka, Rajagraha, Bharavai (Dwarka), Mathura and Polasapura cities were developed as a Centre of Commerce and commercial activities with road network and plenty of vehicles such as chariot and palanquins, lifters, carriages, which were used for the purpose of transportation. In Karnataka, the followers of Jainism were landlords; Banajigas (Surendrapal), Bunts and Setti merchants became prosperous because of inter-regional and international trade and commerce and also contributed to the growth of trade Centre's. Hence, Aihole, Banavasi, Dorasamudra (Halēbīdu), Bānavāra, ēnugrama (Belagavi), Kanawati, Belligave were important trade centers in Karnataka.

### **6. Religion and Ethical Economic Behaviour**

From ancient period strict observance of different vows like Ahimsa, (Non-violence), satya (truthfulness), Achourya (non-stealing) and Aparigraha or parigraha parimanu (non-attachment or less- possessiveness) made Jainas psychologically very strong and they are ready to take any kind of risk. Quite naturally business is full of risk and uncertainty. As it is said by Hawtrey in his Risk theory of profit, those who take more risk can get more profit. That positive and optimistic attitude of Jainas as a trader, moneylender, merchant community and entrepreneur makes them economically more affluent from the time immemorial. These principles and philosophies also promote work ethics and prohibit all types of dishonesty in the profession among entrepreneurs. The vows encouraged honest, faith, confidence, trustworthiness, creditworthiness of Jain traders in their profession. Max Weber, A Social Economist has mentioned about honesty of Jainas and said that the honesty of Jain traders was famous, their wealth was also famous. Formerly it has been maintained that more than half of the trade of India passed through their hands. Hence, it is observed that from the ancient period till today both in India and Karnataka Jainas are well established as a trader, merchant community, and entrepreneurs because of their honesty. Even in medieval period, under Muslim rulers and British colonies, Muslims and British rulers had good trade relations with Jain traders and more than 50 percent of the trade transactions were under

the control of Jains Hence, this risk bearing capacity, work-ethics, hard -working nature of Jains makes them to withstand even today, though they are minority community. Even today Jains are richest community in India and 6<sup>th</sup> richest community in the world.

## 7. Conclusion

As an ethnic trading community the Jains have been an integral part of Indian society and culture since the time immemorial in terms of social and economic aspects. According to Christi L. Wiley in her book “The A to Z of Jainism”, the important thing about a religion is not in its size, but the contributions it has made in the past and continues to make at present. The Jains are rather a small community not even one percent of the Indian population, but their contribution is immense in all spheres and they proved themselves in this regard. Hence concluded with India is always will be a Land of Entrepreneurs and producing entrepreneurs from past, present and even future also.

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