

SUMATI-JÑĀNA

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Jaina Tradition and Mathurā

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Mathurā enjoyed the rare distinction of being a prominent place in the history of all three major sects of ancient India. In the Jaina literary texts, Mathurā has been mentioned at many instances. One important fact in the history of Jaina canon available to us today follows the text of the Mathurā council¹ headed by Ārya Skandila in the fourth quarter of 4th century AD. Among all Jaina texts “Vividhatīrthakalpa” composed during 1307-40 AD by Jinaprabhasuri (a scholar during the reign of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq) provides us a detailed account of Mathurā in its chapter “Mathura Puri Kalpa”.² The important references which can be derived from it are—Mathurā was sacred because of seventh and twenty-third Tirthankaras—Supārśvanātha and Pārśvanātha respectively. There was a stupa built by some divine interference, of Supārśvanātha at a place Bhūtaraman Udyān³, the presiding deity of this place was Naravāhana Kuberādevī⁴. The iconographic feature of Supārśva resembled with Buddha and śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu as well as with Śiva upto some extent and that is why a conflict arose among various communities about the ownership of the stupa which was finally decided in favour of Supārśvanātha. This stupa was made of gold and stubbed with jewels, with images of devas surrounding it, equipped with a torana and a dhvaja, it was adorned with three mekhalās (railed-ways), flanked each, by images and topped by a triple chhatra. The central image of stupa was that of Supārśvanātha. Pārśvanātha arrived at the place in his Kaivalya stage and after that, stupa became a place of worship of Pārśvanātha, too, in the form of a sculpture. Śrī Bappibhatti Suri in 826 V. S. placed here an image of Mahāvīra for the worship.⁵ Mathurā has been described as a place where the next Tirthankara in line — Śrīkriṣṇa Vasudeva was born.

Besides, there were five sthalas—

1. Arka sthala,
2. Vira sthala,

3. Padma sthala,
4. kusa sthala and
5. Maha sthala.

and twelve Vanas-

1. Lohajanghavana⁶,
2. Madhuvana⁷,
3. Bilva vana⁸,
4. Tāla vana⁹,
5. Kumudvana¹⁰,
6. Vrindavana,
7. Bhāndir vana¹¹,
8. Khādir vana¹²,
9. Kāmika vana¹³,
10. Kola vana¹⁴,
11. Bahulavana¹⁵ and
12. Mahāvana¹⁶.

and there were five laukika tirthas-

1. Visrantika,
2. Asikunda,
3. Vaikuntha,
4. Kalinjar and
5. Chakratirtha.¹⁷

The author adds that the śramana Jinabhadrasuri obtained the deteriorated manuscript of Mahānīśīthasūtra and repaired the damaged folios of it; and that the God Śakra went to Bhūtagṛha¹⁸ near Mathurā for the elucidation of the nigoda by the Arya Rakṣitsūri whose successors Vatsapuṣyamitra, Ghṛtapuṣyamitra and Durbalikapuṣyamitra also visited Mathurā.

The description of Vividhatīrthakalpa as well as the excavated materials from Kankālī Tīlā already proves the Devanirmitta Thūpa to be identical with the one mentioned in Jaina literature on more than one occasion.¹⁹ This stupa was first dedicated to Supārśvanātha and later on, the due importance was provided to Pārśvanātha and Mahāvīra at the site. It also appears that there existed various udyānas in ancient times where a number of religious shrines were situated. This is corroborated by the nature of "Bhutaraman Udyāna" which can be identified with the present day Bhūteśwara-Kankālī area of Mathurā. Undoubtedly, there existed Jaina as well as Buddhist stupas in the area, as various archaeological findings like sculptures, railings, pillars etc. indicate. The Brahmanical association is still reflected in the continuing tradition at Bhūteśwara Mahādeva temple, one of the most revered Śiva temples at south-west corner of ancient Mathurā.²⁰

Jaina literature describes Mathurā, also called Uttara Mahurā²¹, as the capital city of Sūrasen, a country described as 'ariya' that is acceptable for sojourn by Jaina monks. According to Nīśīthasūtracūṇi, Mathurā was one of the capital cities where kings could be crowned. The Āvaśyakacūṇi cites Imdapura as another name for Mathura (mahurā e ceva bīyam nāma imdapura).²²

Somadevasūri in his Yaśastilakachampū of 10th century AD states of a legend according to which a Jaina stupa was erected by Vajrakumāra, son of Somadatta, during the reign of king Pūtikavahana. Elsewhere, he refers to Urvilā, queen of Mathurā, who on the occasion of Aṣṭahikamahotsava would send out the rathayātrā of Jina.²³

In Digambara Uttarapurāṇa (sarga 74), it's author Gunabhadra refers to Mahāvīra's previous birth as Viśwanandī, son of Viśwabhūti of Rājagrha, in connection with Mathurā.²⁴

In Brhatakathakośa (story 2), it's author Harisena describes Mathurā as adorned with lofty Jaina temples and abounding in cows (purigōdhanasamkulam). In story 12, he refers to the rathayātrā of Mathurā and the erection of fine Jaina stupas after the defeat of Buddhists.²⁵

In Āvaśyaka-vṛtti, a Jāuna (Yavana) king of Mathurā has been mentioned who murdered a monk Daṇḍa of Jaunāvāṇka garden and later on, himself became a monk.²⁶ Mathurā has also been associated with Jaina learned Āchāryas Mamgu whose greed for food resulted in his rebirth as a Yakṣa.²⁷ Mathurā was also the birthplace of prince Kalvesiya who later on became a Jaina monk whose body was eaten by Jackal at his sallekhanā on Mt. Muggasela.²⁸ This mount Muggasela might be identified with a hill near Mathurā which has been mentioned by Chinese traveller Fi-hien or it may be a hill like Govardhan etc.

Various Jaina texts like Āvaśyaka-cūṇi, Ācārāṅga-cūṇi etc. describes Mathurā as a great commercial centre and as a Sthalapattana which indicates towards the importance of Mathurā in the ancient trade links between Gandhāra and Tāmṛalīpti as well as Ujjain and Bharukachha. This association also reflects towards the popularity of Jaina religions with the urban life, mostly of traders.

Jaina Mythology, it's association with History and Mathurā

What is most important in considering the historicity and imaginary nature of Tīrthankaras is the fact that prior to Pārśvanātha (c. 8th century BC), the proto-historic period is not well known to us. Although, there might be some historic facts in Jaina mythology prior to Pārśvanātha, it is difficult to prove but there are certain evidences which indicates towards the co-existence of some of the characters mentioned in Jaina and Brahmanical texts. They might have drawn inspiration from a source. The first Tīrthankara Ṛṣabhanātha's similarities with Śiva Bholenātha are well known. One very important mention of characters of Ṛṣabha and Mahāpārśva is found in Yuddhakāṇḍ of Rāmāyana²⁹, although,

their Jaina association is not clear. But what is more important is, the fact, that 21st Tīrthankara Nemi onwards all the three Tīrthankaras have some mythological association with Brahmanism and some simple references indicating their historical character.

Nimi as a Mahātmā Ikṣvāku vaṁśī ruler has been mentioned in Uttarakāṇḍa of Vālmīki Rāmāyana.³⁰ That is in essence related with the theme of Kṣtriyas trying to equalize the power of Brahmanas (here sage Vaśiṣṭha). The character of Jaina Tīrthankara revolutionizing the practice of existing faith in slightly akin to it. Hence, Rāmāyana's Nimi slightly does not appear to be out of context of Jainism.

The next Jina, Ariṣṭanemi is much more important in such mythological associations. In Jaina tradition, Nemi is termed as the cousin of Krisna and Balarāma and these three are shown in sculptural representation from 1st century AD onwards. It means, by that time this association was very well popular in Jaina tradition.

Ariṣṭanemi shares the same dynastic traits as Kriṣṇa i. e. he was born to parents one belonging to Sūrya vaṁśa and the other to Candra vaṁśa. In the life saga of Ariṣṭanemi, he is also said to have migrated from Saurapura to Gujarat like the other members of Yādava clan. This often made reference of such migration certainly indicates to some historical event resulting in such a migration much before the Mahājanapada period. The birthplace of Ariṣṭanemi is said to be Soriyanagar or Saurapura.³¹ It is generally identified by Mathurā but U. P. Shah has tried to prove that Saurapura was different from Mathurā. I would like to put some new thoughts about the identification of Saurapura. In the local Braj tradition, a small town between Mathurā and Govardhana is said to be the place of the great demon Aristasura who was murdered here by child Kriṣṇa. To me this Aristasura seems to be a later deviation of Ariṣṭanemi who had deviated from the orthodox sect. The town of Aringa has an extensive mound of about 600 m X 500 m X 12 m under government protection and from here in addition to well known P. G. W. finds, some O. C. P. and late Harappan finds have also been reported. So this takes back the antiquity of the site prior to 15th century BC. A number of sculptural remains ranging from Kuṣāṇa period to medieval times have been found from here and, in addition, of Hindu pantheon, some of them might be belonging to the followers of Jaina religion. I am of the opinion that by the name of a great warrior or ruler in Yadu clan, the whole region around Mathura was known as Sourasena janapada and Saurapura was the place where he was born or from where he ruled for some time. After the popularity of Ariṣṭanemi or his legend later on, this Saurapura started to be known as Ariṣṭapura which changed into Anhilapura and now the present day form Aringa. After the famous migration of Yadu clan from here, some new city in Gujarat also started to be called as Aristapura or Anhilwada.

Pāṇini in his Aṣṭādhyāyī has mentioned a city by the name Ariṣṭapura.³² V. S. Agrawal tried to identify it with a city by this name in the Buddhist literature which lied in Sibi janapada.³³ I think, this Ariṣṭapura might be the one in Surasena janpada which played an

important role in trade activities and was somehow associated with Indian mythology.

The 23rd Tirthankara Pārśvanātha is also associated with Mathurā by the fact that his iconography matches a lot with Balarāma, an incarnation of Śeṣa, the legends and iconography of whom originated from Mathurā. Besides, Nāga cult was well associated with Mathurā and Pārśvanātha is also associated with it in the form of Nāga Dharanendra. The stupa at Kankālī Tilā was earlier dedicated to Supārśva, the 7th Tirthankara and later on to Pārśva, the 23rd Tirthankara as the Jaina literature suggests it. Other references locate at Mathurā a park by the name Bhandīrvademsia (Bhandīravatamsaka) visited by Pārśvanātha.³⁴ Here, too, was the shrine of the Yakṣa, Sudamsana to which people made pilgrimage. This reference indicates toward to important points—one is the thriving cult of local deities and second is the location and the ancient route which Pārśvanātha followed. This Yakṣa has been identified as Yakṣa Sudarśana. I would not hesitate in reading it Sudamsana which mean well-hooded one or a great serpent. Whatever might have been the perfect reading, there is no denying that at Mathurā, especially in this area near Bhāndira Udyāna, there were ancient local cults of yakṣa and nāga which later on played an important role in the formation and propagation of Indian religions. I have identified this Bhāndira vana or udyāna by the same name, popular in Braj tradition. It is located about 25 kms from Mathurā, along river Yamuna, near Mānt (Māt). This Bhāndira vana with its village name Chhahri is regarded as the place of their origin by a large number of north Indian Brahmans (Bhārdwaj, Tiwāri etc.). This site lies on one of the ancient trade route between Mathurā and Sahet-Mahet. Before entering ancient Koil country (Aligarh district) it passed through Mathurā, Isāpur, Ghesanā, Rayā, Barnauli ki Dhai, Mānt (Māt), Bhandirvana, Bhadravana, Tentigaon, Ogāhā, Mīrpur, Naujheel etc. most of which are pre-Mauryan sites except a few Kusāna onwards sites. The antiquity of Bhāndira vana and Mānt sites date back to Kusāna times at least, the nearby Bhadra vana site along Yamuna dates back to P. G. W. (Painted Gray Ware) times (8th century BC). At Bhāndira vana, I observed few sculptural remains of 9th–10th century temple, which seems to be of Vaisnava cult but their Jaina link can not be out rightly rejected. When considering about Bhāndira udyāna, we should also keep in mind the fact that it served as a garden for rest and enjoyment on the highway and the settlement near it should be at a distance of few hundred meters from it as is the case of Bhadravana and Māt sites.

The last 24th Tirthankara Mahāvīra is also said to have arrived at Mathurā during the reign of king Sridamana.³⁵ He is also said to have born at Mathruā in his previous birth.

After all this analysis, we can draw the conclusion that Mathura served as a very significant city in the history and development of Jaina religion and tradition. All the three indigenous texts of India draw inspiration from a common source which indicates towards some historicity in their tradition. At least for the last three Tirthankara, their historicity cannot be denied with confirm proofs. In this paper, a humble attempt has been made by

me to identify some of the ancient places mentioned in Jaina literary texts with their modern counterparts. I apologise to the scholars and readers if these are not found correct.

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1. *Kalpāsūtra-vṛtti* (by Samayasundara), Bombay and Surat, 1939, p. 107; *Nandisūtra-cūrṇi*, Banaras, 1933, p. 9; *Nandisūtra vṛtti* (by Malaygiri), Bombay, 1924, p. 51; U. P. Shah, *Studies in Jaina Art*, Banaras, 1955, pp. 110-11.
2. *Śrī Jinaprabhasuri Rachita Vividhāfirṭhakalpa*, translated by Agarchand Bhanwar Lal Nahta (in Hindi), Balotra, Rajasthan, 1976, pp. 36-43.
3. It appears to be the modern day Bhuteswara area of Mathura.
4. It refers to an earlier existing folk cult at the site in the form of Yakṣa Kuberadevi.
5. It indicates towards the increasing popularity of Mahavira during medieval times in this area.
6. It seems to be Lohavana.
7. It seems to be Maholi.
8. It seems to be Biharavana.
9. It seems to be Tarsi.
10. It seems to be Kota.
11. It seems to be Bhāṇḍira vana (Chharai).
12. It seems to be Khāyara.
13. It seems to be Kaman (Bharatpur district).
14. It seems to be Koyla.
15. It seems to be Bachhavana, sehi.
16. It seems to be Mahavana (near Gokul).
17. All five are more or less known by similar names in Hindu religious cult.
18. It may be a reference to the underground shrine at Bhuteswara Mahadeva temple.
19. *Brhtakalpāsūtra Bhāṣya* also mentions it by this name as well as Haribhadrasūri, c. 7th century AD. That there were five stupas at Mathurā can be inferred from Digambara tradition of *Pancāstūpānvaya*.
20. The other three saiva temples were Rangeswara, Gokarneswara and Pipaleswara.
21. *Āvaśyaka cūrṇi*, Ratlam, 1928-29, pp. 192-93.
22. *Ibid.*
23. K. K. Haindiqui, *Yāśastilaka campū and Indian Culture*, Sholapur, 1949, pp. 416-17; *Yāśastilaka campū of Somadeva*, Bombay, 1901-03, II, p. 315, VI, 17-18.
24. *Uttarpurāṇa*, Banaras, 1954, Indore, V. S. 1975.
25. *Brhtakathākośa of Harisena*, ed. by A. N. Upadhye, Sindhi Series No. 13, Bombay.
26. *Āvaśyaka vṛtti* (by Haribhadra), Bombay, 1916-17, p. 667.
27. *Niśīthasūtra bhāṣya*, Agra, 1957-60, 3200.
28. *Uttarādhyana cūrṇi*, p. 77; *Ācārāṅga cūrṇi*, Ratlam, 1941, p. 112.
29. *Rāmāyana (Vālmiki) II*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, p. 414.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 735.
31. *Āvaśyaka cūrṇi*, Ratlam, 1928-29, pp. 192-93; *Vasudevahindī*, Bhavnagar, 1930-31, Vol. I, pp. 10-11.
32. *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (Pāṇini), 6/2/100.
33. V. S. Agrawal, *Pāṇini Kālina Bhāratavarsa*, Varanasi, 1955, p. 86.
34. *Jnātādharma-kathā*, Bombay, 1980, p. 156.
35. *Vipākasūtra*, Bombay, 1920, p. 26.