

1.1 Antiquity / Ancientness of Jainism

Jainism is considered to be an ancient religion with a history of many centuries. However the written record of ancient Indian people is very scarce. Therefore, we have to depend more on secondary sources such as traditional lore, religious literature, archeological works and anthropological research.

Recent archeological research in Afghanistan, Pakistan and North - West India provide a much clearer picture of early Jain history. During this course of historical past, Jainism has gone through several changes and reforms and has also been divided into several sects.

The traditions and philosophy that Jains follow to-day or even those Mahavir followed in his own day, are very ancient. In fact, Jains claim that Jainism is an ETERNAL religion. The *Kāl Chakrā* (The Time Circle) devised by Jainism try to prove that Jainism is an eternal religion. There have been several innumerable such cycles throughout eternal time. Many western and eastern historians have attempted studying Jainism and they could realise that the Jainism has deep roots in history.

In Jain literature, we have detailed account of life and work of *Lord Rishabh*. It transpires from the study that during his days, the dawn of civilisation was yet to start. He was a pioneer of civilisation. He taught people to produce food grains, he helped the nomadic culture to habitat. He founded a social order, he taught the people about the institution of marriage and family, the system of law, order and justice.

He gave up his kingdom, he renounced all worldly possessions, and lived a life of austerity. He taught a way of self-purification means of meditation, penance and austerity. *Lord Rikhav* lived several centuries ago.

The Indus valley civilisation is considered to be of 6500 B.C. period. It is found that during that period too Jainism was much present. But Jains' claim that it is an eternal religion needs yet to be proved historically.

There have been several references both in *Vedas* and *Upanishads* which also support the claim of ancientness of Jainism.

Before Aryans came to India, the original people (*Dravidians*) of India followed 'RIKHAVITE' practices (Practices taught by *Rishabh*, the first Tirthankara). They followed practices like meditation, penance etc., which are prevalent among Jains even To-day. *Lord Munisuvrat* the 20th Tirthankara seems to be contemporary of *Ramayana* period.

In *Upanishad* also, there are references related to 'RIKHAVITES' and they are described as '*Arhant dharmis*' (following the religion of Arihant/ Jain). In *Upanishad*, even *Lord Parshva* (the 23rd Tirthankara has been referred to as '*Arhant Dharmi*' same is the reference about *Lord Nemi* (The 22nd Tirthankara) cousin of *Lord Krishna*, in *Upanishad*.

Besides stray references about *Parshva* and *Nemi*; during *Upanishad* period, we find the influence of Jain principles on Hindu practices. The system of Sacrifice, which

was a Hindu religious ritual is for the first time rather finds a sharp reaction in *Upanishad*, possibly under Jain influence.

The *Pramān* Philosophy of *KARMĀ* and *SANSAR* as well as that of *ATMĀ* and *PARMATMĀ* found place in *Upanishad* and became part of Hindu religious practices. *Mundaka Upanishad* talks about futility of sacrificial rituals and they talk about spiritual liberation, almost the language used in Jain scriptures.

It can thus be concluded that Jainism is as old as *Lord Rikhav* or even much older. *Mahavir* simply reformed and refined a '*Shraman*' Philosophy of Purification of Soul- A philosophy which goes back, to all the way to *Rikhava*,