

DIGAMBARA JAINA TĪRTHĀNKARAS FROM MAHESHWAR AND NEVĀSĀ

DR. H. D. SANKALIA, M.A., Ph.D. (LONDON)

Maheshwar is a well-known town situated on the northern bank of the Narmadā in the present State of Madhya Bhārat. It is about 50 miles south of Indore. Here, just overlooking the river, and adjoining the temple of Viṭṭhala, is a place called the "Gufā (Cave of Bharṭhari)". There is no rock in the vicinity, and I wondered how a cave could exist in the area. On examining the so-called "Gufā", it was noticed that it was a submerged temple, situated on an old mound, going back to the 3rd century B.C. and even earlier. Further study showed that the temple might have been built during the Paramāra period, about 1100 A.D. This is particularly suggested by the *prabhāvali*, (Fig. 1) which is carved in the form of a *torana*. Similar *torana* is seen in the *toranas* at Sidhpur, Vadnagar and Kapadvanj in Gujarat which were erected in the time of Siddharāja Jayasimha and his successor.¹

In one of the niches of this temple there is a huge, large, nude, standing male figure (Fig. 2), with arms thrown on its sides, now partly broken. The head and the face were broken anciently and are now replaced by a different one. The figure is worshipped as Rājā Bharṭhari, but in fact it is a Jaina Tirthānkara standing in Kāyotsarga pose. Since the *lāñchana* and the *vāhana* as well as the attendant Jaina Yakṣas and Yakṣis are no longer present, it is not possible to identify the image as of a particular Tirthānkara. But its presence indicates that once a large Jaina temple stood on the bank of the Narmadā, probably in the 12th century.

Nevāsā is also a holy town, and equally old as Maheshwar, though its recorded antiquity does not go beyond the time of Śrī Jñāneśvara, that is A. D. 1290. It lies on both the banks of the Pravara river; the older town on the northern side is called Nevāsā Budruk, and that on the southern side is known as Nevāsā Khūrd. It is also a taluka town, and situated at a distance of about 36 miles north of Ahmadnagar.

Pillars, capitals, door-frames, and images of the mediaeval period are found scattered about, completely uncared for, on both the sides of the town. Among these we found, lying right on the river bank, on the

1. See Sankalia, H. D., *The Archaeology of Gujarat*, Figs. 55-57.

northern side, that is Nevāsā Budruk, two stone images of Jaina Tīrthāṅkaras (Fig. 3). The lower parts of both the images are broken, but since the upper part of one, with a canopy of seven cobra hoods survives, it is possible to identify it as the figure of the 23rd Tīrthāṅkara Pārśvanātha. Both stood in Kāyotsarga pose.

It is interesting to note that the Maheshwar as well as the Nevāsā images are Digambara. It is well known that Digambara Jainism was patronized by the Western Chālukyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the Hoysalas and the Yādavas. Since no structural monuments of the first two dynasties are hitherto known from the Deccan, it is likely that the images in question belong to the mediaeval period, that is after 1,000 A. D. From the existence of the Jaina caves belonging to the Digambara School at Triṅgalvāḍi² and at Chāndor² in the Nasik district of the early (?) Yādava period, it is possible to say that Digambara Jainism was in a flourishing state at this period in the Deccan. And the Nevāsā figures should belong to this period.

2. Cousens, Henry, *Mediaeval Temples of the Dakhan*, ASI, Imperial Series, Vol. XLVIII, (Calcutta, 1931), pp. 48-50, pl. LXV.