

# The Teachings of Arhat Pārśva And The Distinctness of His Sect

Among the Nirgrantha Tirthankaras, the historicity of Arhat Pārśva as well as of Jina Vardhamāna Mahāvira has been fully established. Inscriptional and literary evidences play an important role in establishing the historicity of a person. The earliest inscription relating to Pārśva, of the 2nd or 3rd century A.D.,<sup>1</sup> has been found from the Kaṅkālī Tīlā, Mathurā. It is inscribed on an image of Pārśva, installed by Ghoṣaka, a disciple of Gaṇi Aggahiniya of the Sthāniya-kula of the Koṭṭiya-gaṇa, a sub-order of friars and nuns also noticed in the hagiological list (earlier part, c. A.D. 100) of the *Paryuṣaṇā-kalpa* (compiled c. A.D. 503/516).<sup>2</sup> Though uninscribed, a more than life size sculpture of Pārśva (upper part mutilated)<sup>3</sup> and a tiny figure of Pārśva as the central focus of an *āyāgapāṭṭa*, both stylistically datable to the period of the Śaka king Ṣoḍās (c. early 2nd cent. A.D.),<sup>4</sup> prove that Arhat Pārśva was venerated in, and arguably before, that period. A metal image of Pārśva in the Prince of Wales Museum, variously dated between the 2nd-1st cent. B.C. to c. 2nd cent. A.D., is one more early piece in evidence.<sup>5</sup>

The inscriptional as well as the literary references to the Nirgranthas, however, are met with from c. third century B.C. The term "Niggantha" is mentioned in the inscription of Maurya Aśoka<sup>6</sup> and is fairly frequently met with in the Pāli *Tripitaka*<sup>7</sup> (usually, of course, in hateful and denegatory terms) though this cannot be taken as a conclusive evidence for the earlier church of Pārśva because the term Niggantha by then also had included the sect of Mahāvira. In point of fact, the Pāli canon confounded a few views and teachings of these two historical Tirthankaras. As demonstrated in the early days of the Nirgranthic researches by Jacobi,<sup>8</sup> in the *Tripitaka* it is said that Niggantha Nātaputta (Mahāvira) preached *cāturyāma-saṃvara*, while in point of fact the preacher of the *cāturyāma-dharma* was Arhat Pārśva and not Mahāvira according to the Ardhamāgadhi canon of the Nirgranthas themselves.<sup>9</sup> Mahāvira preached five-fold great vows (*pañca-mahāvratas*) and not the *cāturyāma-saṃvara*.

What we today can know about the teachings of Arhat Pārśva and the distinctness of his sect from that of Jina Vardhamāna is only through the available Ardhamāgadhi canon preserved in the Northern Church of Mahāvira, because the ancient church of Pārśva was later progressively

absorbed in the former and the records and texts relating to its hagiology and history are long lost.

Nirgranthologists like Pt. Sukhlal Sanghvi and others were of the opinion that the *Pūrva* literature (so often mentioned in the canonical literature from the late Kuṣāṇa period onward) had belonged to Pārśva's tradition.<sup>10</sup> At present, however, no texts of that category of specification exists. Today, in so far as our knowledge of Pārśva's teachings and traditions goes, we are dependent on the canonical literature of Mahāvira's tradition, and, to a very small extent, on the Pāli canon of the Buddhists as well.

In the Ardhamāgadhi canon, the *Isibhāsiyāñ* (*Rṣibhāṣitani*)<sup>11</sup> the *Ācārāṅga*,<sup>12</sup> the second book, the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*,<sup>13</sup> the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*,<sup>14</sup> the *Jñātādharma-kathā*,<sup>15</sup> the *Uttarādhyaṇa*<sup>16</sup> and the *Rāja-Pradesiya*,<sup>17</sup> the *Narakāvalikā*,<sup>18</sup> and the *Sthānāṅga*<sup>19</sup> reveal some significant references to Pārśva, his teachings as well as traditions. In the *Uttarādhyaṇa*,<sup>20</sup> the *Samavāyāṅga*,<sup>21</sup> the *Āvaśyakaniryukti*,<sup>22</sup> the *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya* of Jinabhadraṇi kṣamāśra-maṇa,<sup>23</sup> the *Āvaśyakacūmī*<sup>24</sup> and in the *Paryuṣaṇā-kalpa*<sup>25</sup> as well as in the *Mūlācāra*<sup>26</sup> of the Yāpaniya Church there are references to some distinctive (and hence distinguishing) features of the sects of Pārśva and Mahāvira.

On Pārśva's life and the history of his times and of his sect, scanty material is traceable in these works; yet it is significant that they contain sufficient material pertaining to the ethical teachings and philosophical doctrines of Pārśva. They also firmly point toward the distinctness of Pārśva's sectarian tradition from that of Vardhamāna.<sup>27</sup>

## The Teachings of Pārśva in Isibhāsiyāñ

The earliest and authentic version of Pārśva's philosophy and teachings is encountered in the *Isibhāsiyāñ* (*Rṣibhāṣitani*),<sup>28</sup> a text compiled c. 1st cent. B.C. but often containing material that goes back to c. 4th century B.C., some even perhaps earlier. In a separate article,<sup>29</sup> I had suggested that the *Isibhāsiyāñ*, in terms of some of its content, is earlier than the whole of Pāli as well as the Ardhamāgadhi canonical literature excepting of course the first book of the *Ācārāṅga*. M.A. Dhaky opines that this text belongs to Pārśva's tradition. I, however, hold a different view. In my opinion the text, in earlier times, might have

been composed in Pārśva's tradition as an independent text, but later on it was assimilated in the *Praśnavyākaraṇasūtra*, considered to be one of the ten *Daśā* texts as well as the tenth work among the 11 *Aṅga*-books of Mahāvira's tradition.

The *Isibhāsiyāiṅ* has an independent chapter on Pārśva's doctrines and teachings.<sup>30</sup> The authenticity of the Pārśva's view presented in this chapter cannot be doubted for various reasons. First, the *Isibhāsiyāiṅ* contains the teachings not only of Pārśva but also of Arhat Vardhamāna of the Nirgrantha Church, Maṅkhali Gośāla of the Ājīvaka sect; Vajjiyaputta, Mahākassapa, Indranāga and Sāriputta of the Buddhist Church, and Yājñavalkya, Asita-Devala, and Uddālaka-Āruṇi of the Vedic tradition. When we compare the views of the aforesaid saints mentioned in the *Isibhāsiyāiṅ* with the texts of their own traditions, we notice general similarity between them, which by and large proves the authenticity of the content of the *Isibhāsiyāiṅ*. If the author of the work in presenting had remained faithful to the original teachings of the ṛṣis or teachers of the other sects, we must conclude that he also was faithfully presenting the views of Pārśva. Second, we find that the teachings of Pārśva presented in the *Isibhāsiyāiṅ* corresponds to that which is stated of Pārśva's church in other canonical works like the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, the *Uttarādhyayana*, and the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*. Third, the authenticity as well as high antiquity of the Pārśva-chapter in the *Isibhāsiyāiṅ* can also be supported on the ground that this chapter is represented by its two separate versions. It is said that the second version of this book originally was found in the text named *Gati-vyākaraṇa* i.e. the *Praśnavyākaraṇa*. The reference thus runs:

गतिवागरणगंथाओ पमिति जाव सामित्तं इमं अज्झयणं ताव इमो बीओ पाढो दिस्सति

The views of these two versions of the same chapter fully correspond to each other with slight difference in content and to an extent in language, a few details figuring more in one than in the other. Thus, at a very early date, two versions (*vācanās*) of the same subject had existed. This chapter contains philosophical as well as ethical views of Arhat Pārśva. First of all, in this text, the views of Pārśva about the nature of the world are stated. To explain the nature of the world the following five questions were raised:

- (1) What is the nature of the world (*loka*)?
- (2) What are the different planes of the world?
- (3) To whom the world belongs?

- (4) What does one mean by (the term) "world"?
- (5) What is the meaning of the term *loka*?

Answering these five questions Arhat Pārśva said:

- (1) The world consists of the animate beings and the inanimate objects.
- (2) There are four different planes of the world:
  - (i) Material (*dravya*)
  - (ii) Spatial (*kṣetra*)
  - (iii) Temporal (*kāla*)
  - (iv) Existential (*bhāva*)
- (3) World inheres in selfhood. It exists by itself. In the perspective of commanding position the world belongs to animate beings but in the perspective of its constitution, it belongs to both animate and the inanimate.
- (4) As for the existence of the world, it is eternal, with neither the beginning nor the end but is ever changing and (thus) dynamic in nature.
- (5) While explaining the meaning of the term *loka*, it is said that this world is called *loka*, because, it is known or experienced or recognized. (The Sanskrit term *lokāyata* means to be known or to be recognized.) To explain the nature of motion the following four questions have been raised:
  - (a) What is motion or *gati*?
  - (b) Who meets this motion?
  - (c) What are the different forms of motion?
  - (d) Why is it called *gati*, motion?

Answering these questions about the motion Arhat Pārśva said:

- (a) Any motion or change in existence in animate and in the inanimate beings is called *gati*.
- (b) Animate and inanimate (substances) encounter motion or change. This change is of four types: substantial, spatial, temporal and existential.
- (c) The existence of movement or change is also perennial with no beginning or end.
- (d) It is called *gati* because it has motion.

About the *karma* philosophy and the moral teachings of Arhat Pārśva, it is thus recorded:

1. The animate beings possess an upward motion by their inherent (abstract) nature, while the matter has a downward motion by its intrinsic nature (inertia).
2. The animate beings reap the fruits of their deeds according to their (good or bad) *karmas* or activities, while the changes in inanimate substances take place due to their dynamic nature.

The animate beings are activity-oriented, the inanimate substances are change-oriented or dynamic in nature.

The animate beings have two types of experience, of pain and pleasure. Only those who can get rid of violence and other evils including wrong viewpoint will have the feeling of bliss. A Nirgrantha, who eats only inanimate things, will meet emancipation and thus will end the transmigratory cycle.

In the second version of this chapter the following additional concepts are also mentioned:

- (1) The motion is of two types: (i) self-motivated and (ii) generated by external factors.
- (2) Whatsoever a person experiences, it is due to his own, and not due to other's deeds.
- (3) Those who observe the *cāturyāma* (the fourfold ethical code beginning with non-violence and ending with non-possession) will be free from the eight-fold *karmas* and will not be reborn in the four *yonis* or generic categories.

The essence of the doctrines and ethical teachings of Pārśva as embodied and expositioned in the *Isibhāsiyāñ* may be thus summarized:

- (i) The world is eternal with no creator behind it.
- (ii) Permanence in change is the essential nature of the world. World is dynamic in disposition. It consists of the five *astikāyas*, existentialities.
- (iii) Substances are of two kinds, animate and inanimate.
- (iv) The animate possesses an upward motion; the inanimate (by law of gravity), downward motion.
- (v) The motion is of two kinds: (a) self-motivated and (b) directed by external factors.
- (vi) The *gati* or transmigratory motion of animate beings is due to their own *karmas*, while the motion of matter is due to its own dynamic nature and inertia.
- (vii) The *karmas* are of eight types.
- (viii) Evil and non-restraint activities consequence in pain and in the cycle of births and deaths.
- (ix) Those who indulge in passions and violence cannot achieve the eternal peace and bliss.
- (x) Liberation can be achieved through the observance of four *yāmas*, self-restraints.

### Teachings of Pārśva in other Canonical Works

In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, the *Uttarādhyayana*, and the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*, we find some explanation of, or minute observations on, what is broadly stated in the *Isibhāsiyāñ*. In these texts the views of Pārśva are presented by the

followers of Pārśva and not by Pārśva himself. It is in the *Isibhāsiyāñ* alone that the original version of Pārśva's teachings is directly and implicitly present. Elsewhere we meet with Pārśva's views by proxy, through the discussions between the followers of Pārśva and that of Mahāvira or in a few instances by Mahāvira himself.

In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*,<sup>31</sup> for instance, is incorporated a conversation between Gautama and Udaka-Peḍhālaputra, the follower of Pārśva, on the nature and language of the *pratyākhyāna*-vow of non-violence. In this long discussion Udaka-Peḍhālaputra stressed on a technical point that, while taking the vow of non-violence, one must frame it in the language that "I shall not kill the being, who is presently in mobile-form (*trasa-bhūta*) instead of saying 'I shall not kill any mobile being.'" Similarly, in the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*<sup>32</sup> some observations relating to the difference in minutiae about the nature and meaning of the terms *sāmāyika*, the *pratyākhyāna*, the *saṁvara*, the *viveka* and the *vyutsarga* have been made during the discussion of Kālāsyaavaiśya-putra, the follower of Pārśva and some sthaviras of the Mahāvira's following.

In the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*<sup>33</sup> we come across a very interesting and pinpointed discussion between the lay-followers of Mahāvira and the *śramaṇas* of Pārśva's tradition on the outcome of restraint and penance. It had been questioned: If the outcome of restraint is to stop the influx of fresh *karmas* and of penance to liberate the soul from the karmic bondage, then why the souls are born as devas in the celestial regions? To this question different answers were given by the *śramaṇas* of the Pārśva's church. At last Kaśyapa said it is due to the adherence to pious deeds such as penance and restraint that the souls are born as devas in celestial quarters. In the *Uttarādhyayana*<sup>34</sup> we also come across an interesting dialogue between Gautama and Keśi on aspects relating to the monastic disciplines and spiritual practices; as a result, some distinctive features of Pārśva's teachings surface.

### Distinctness of Pārśva's Sect

Pārśva as well as Mahāvira belonged to the Nirgrantha section of the Śramaṇic traditions which had several similarities in doctrines, philosophy, and religious practices. So far as the philosophical aspect of their teachings is concerned, the traditions of Pārśva and Mahāvira have much in common. Scholars of Nirgranthology like Pt. Sukhlal Sanghvi and others are of the opinion that the Mahāvira's sect has considerably borrowed from that of

Pārśva in the field of metaphysics and karma philosophy.<sup>35</sup> The concepts, such as the world is eternal as well as dynamic, that it exists by itself and has no creator, are common to both traditions. The concept of permanence in change as the nature of Reality, which is the foundational tenet of the later Nirgrantha doctrine of *anekāntavāda* or non-absolutism is also met with in its embryonic form in, and in point of fact is central to, the teachings of Pārśva as well as Mahāvira. Similarly, the concept of the five *astikāyas* and the eight-fold *karmas* are found in the philosophy of Pārśva as well as Mahāvira. We encounter brief references to these concepts in the Pārśva-chapter of the *Īsibhāiyāñi* and more detailed ones in the standard canonical works of Mahāvira's tradition.

Similarly, the concepts of *āsrava*, *sañvara*, *nirjarā*, *sāmāyika*, *pratyākhyāna* and *pauṣadha* are also common to both traditions, though there were some differences in the minutiae of these concepts and observances. The difference in opinion about the nature of *pratyākhyāna* between Gautama and Udaka Peḍhālaputra in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* has been earlier noticed. Similarly, the differences in terms of detail on the practices are noticed in the relevant dialogues in the *Vyākhyāprajñapti* and in the *Uttarādhyāyana* also. However, these differences were related mostly to the code of conduct and not to the doctrines, philosophy, and principles of ethics as such. The distinctness of Pārśva's sect lies in its code of conduct, and not in dogma or philosophy, since it somewhat differed from that of Mahāvira. We shall notice and discuss at this point the distinctive features of the Pārśva's tradition.

(1) Pārśva propounded *cāturyāma-dharma*, while Mahāvira preached the *pañcayāma-dharma* or the five *mahāvratas*.<sup>36</sup> According to the Ardhamāgadhī canon, Mahāvira added celibacy as an independent vow to the *cāturyāma-dharma* of Pārśva. The *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* mentions that Mahāvira prohibited having woman, and eating during night hours.<sup>37</sup>

The question arises: Why did Mahāvira add celibacy as an independent vow? The answer to this question can be read in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*. In the times of Pārśva, woman was considered a property or possession and it was taken for granted that prohibition of possession implied the prohibition of sexual relationship, for no one can enjoy the woman without having her. But, as the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* informs, in the time of Mahāvira, there were some *pāsathā* (wayward) *śramaṇas*, who believed that the prohibition of possession did not imply (or include) the prohibition of sexual

enjoyment. "If any woman invited or offered herself for enjoyment to a *śramaṇa*, then the fulfillment of her sexual desire was no sin, just as the squeezing of a blister or boil (causes relief) for some time (and has no dangerous consequences); so it is with (the enjoyment of) attractive (woman). How could, then, there be sin due to that?"<sup>38</sup>

From this stanza it follows that some *śramaṇas* were interpreting the concept of non-possession in their own way. It only meant that, for the one who takes the vow of non-possession, cannot have a wife or woman. So it became necessary for Mahāvira explicitly to add celibacy as an independent vow and to lay considerable stress on the observance of this vow.

If we contemplate this question historically, we notice that the ancient Vedic *ṛṣis* used to marry and had progenies. After that state in life, on the one hand is followed the concept of *vānaprastha*, in which a *ṛṣi* did have a wife but observed celibacy; on the other hand, as informed by the Nirgrantha canonical literature, there were *śramaṇas* who were of the view that to enjoy a woman without possessing or getting her married was no sin: which is why Mahāvira included in the fold a separate, clear, definite and uncompromising vow of celibacy.

In Pārśva's tradition, repentance was not accepted as an essential daily duty. Only when a monk committed sin or transgression of his vows may he repent. But Mahāvira made repentance an obligatory daily-duty. A monk must repent every morning and evening whether he committed a sin and violated his vows or not. In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*<sup>39</sup> and in the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*<sup>40</sup> as well as in other canonical works of Mahāvira's discipline it is known as *pratikramaṇa-dharma*.

One more difference in monastic practice was that Pārśva did not lay stress on nudity; he rather allowed one or two apparels for his monks (who thus were *sacelaka*), while stressed on nudity and so Mahāvira's tradition was known as *acela-dharma*. Though the medieval commentator of the *Uttarādhyāyana* holds that Pārśva allowed his *śramaṇas* to wear expensive or coloured robe,<sup>41</sup> we possess no early textual support for such an assumption.

These three were the main features distinguishing the monastic code of conduct of Pārśva and that of Mahāvira. Alongwith these three major differences, there also were some minor differences which are found in the concepts of the ten *kalpas* or planes of asceticism.<sup>42</sup> For instance, in Pārśva's tradition a monk could accept the invitation for food and also could take food prepared for him; but

Mahāvira forbade this practice. Pārśva allowed his monks to accept the meals prepared for the king; Mahāvira prohibited it. In Mahāvira's tradition it was vital for a friar (or nun) to move from one place to another, except during the rainy season: Also, an ascetic, he had said, must not stay at one place for more than a month. But, according to Pārśva's tradition, a friar could stay at one place as long as he wished. In short, to keep on wandering was essential in Mahāvira's but was optional in Pārśva's disciplinary code. Again, Mahāvira had stressed that an ascetic must stay on at one place during the four months of the rainy season; in Pārśva's tradition this practice was also optional.

According to Mahāvira an aspirant to friarhood must be initiated probationally. After this testing period, if he is proven eligible, then he may be allowed to be ordained second time and his seniority was fixed accordingly in the Order or Saṅgha.

These are some of the distinctive features of Pārśva's philosophy, teachings, and monastic discipline as can be traced out from the early literature. The belief that all Jinās teach the same code of conduct, and that the ascetics of the Pārśva's Order had become wayward by Mahāvira's time receives no support from the evidence locked in the earlier canonical books.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. X. Appendix. A list of Brāhmī Inscriptions S.N. 110, p. 20.
2. *Kalpasūtra* 216. In the various inscriptions of Kaṅkāli Tilā, Mathurā, we have two readings about this kula of the Koṭṭiya-gaṇa: (1) Thāniya-kula (2) Sthāniya-kula. While in the *Kalpasūtra* we have a third reading, Vāṇijja-kula.
3. Preserved in the Government Museum, Lucknow.
4. This date is after the recent researches by Gritli v. Mitterwallner.
5. Cf. U.P. Shah, *Studies in Jaina Art*, Varanasi 1955, plate 1, fig. 3.
6. *Me Kaṭe ime viyāpata hohonti ti niganthesu Pi*-- Inscription No. 7, line 16, Delhi-Topara Inscription.
7. See G.P. Malalasekere, *Dictionary of Pāli-Proper names*, Vol. II, London 1974, pp. 61-65.
8. Hermann Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras*, Part II, (S.B.E. Vol. XLV), Introduction, p. xxi.
9. (A) *Cāujjāme niyaṇṭhe-Isibhāsiyāiṇ*, 31.  
(B) *Cāujjāmo ya jo dhammo jo imo paṃcasikkio-Uttarādhyayana* 23/12.
10. See Pt. Sukhalal, *Cāra Tirthaṅkara* (Hindi), (sec. edn.), Varanasi 1989, pp. 141-43, See also "Introduction", *the Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXII, p. xlv.
11. *Isibhāsiyāiṇ*, 31.
12. *Ācārāṅga II*, 15/25.
13. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga II*, 7/8.
14. *Vyākhyāprajñapti* 1/9/21-24; 2/5/95; 5/9/254-255.
15. *Jñātādharma-kathā* 2/3/1-6.
16. *Uttarādhyayana* 23.
17. *Rājapradeśiya* 2/3.
18. *Narakāvalikā (Niryāvaliya-sūtra)* 3/1.
19. *Sthānāṅga* 9/61.
20. *Uttarādhyayana* 23/12-13; see also commentary of Śāntiācārya for these verses.
21. *Samavāyāṅga* 8/8; 9/4, 16/4, 38/1, 100/4.
22. *Āvaśyaka-niryukti* 238 and 1241-1243.
23. *Viśeṣāvaśyaka-bhāṣya*.
24. *Āvaśyaka-cūṛṇi*.
25. *Paryūṣanā-kalpa (Kalpa-sūtra)* 148-156.
26. *Mūlācāra*.
27. See Arhat Pārśva.
28. *Isibhāsiyāiṇ*, 31.
29. See Sagarmal Jain, *Rishihhasit : A Study*, Jaipur 1988.
30. *Isibhāsiyāiṇ*, 31.
31. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga II*, Chapter 7th.
32. *Vyākhyāprajñapti* 10.9.33. Ibid, 2.5.
- 33.
34. *Uttarādhyayana* 23.
35. See *Cāra Tirthaṅkara* for detailed discussion.
36. *Uttarādhyayana* 23/12.
37. *Se vāriyā ithi saraihattam-Sūtrakṛtāṅga* 1/6/28.
38. *Ibid.*, 1/3/4/9-10.
39. *Ibid.*, 2/7/81.
40. *Vyākhyāprajñapti* 1/9/123. See also *Āvaśyaka-niryukti* 1241.
41. *Uttarādhyayana* 23/12. See also Śāntiācārya's *ṭīkā* on the above verses.
42. See (a) *Āvaśyaka-niryukti*, 1241-1243.  
(b) *Bṛhat-Kalpa sūtra-bhāṣya*, 6359-6366.

