

Kharavela : The Great Philanthropic Emperor

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Jainism is one of the most ancient religions, which emerged as a result of pure non-violent and humanitarian approach towards all living beings. It grew up with a profound progressive attitude and judicious understanding of special requirements and philosophically indispensable necessities of the time. The Jaina thinkers had discussed at length long ago as to how one can protect one's environment and save himself, society, nation and all creatures from natural calamities through non-violence and non-possession and mutual co-operation. Arya Mahameghabahana Cheti-Raja-Vamsa-Vardhana Maharaja Sri Kharavela, the mighty emperor of Kalinga was out and out a Jaina in the true sense of this philosophy.

The reign of Kharavela is a significant landmark in the history of Orissa. The caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri hills and the Hathigumpha inscriptions provide eloquent testimony to Kharavela's connectedness with Jainism. Among the followers of Mahavira, Kharavela stands out as the tallest name.

Considering the chronology of Post-Mauryan times and ancient glory of Jainism, his is the most important and the only inscription yet discovered link in the country. Its importance is unquestionable. The invocation formula on the Hathigumpha inscription *Namo Arihantanam Namō Sarva-Sidhamam* clearly testifies that Jainism was the religious faith, the king Kharavela, followed.

The coronation of Kharavela seems to have been performed with great pomp and grandeur amidst high hopes and aspirations, and the young king appeared to have cherished the desire to attain the idealism enumerated in ancient scriptures. That he achieved astounding success as a ruler is attested to by his biographical account recorded in the Hathigumpha inscription and by the record of his chief queen engraved in the upper storey of the Manchapuri Cave (Udayagiri hill) proudly declaring him as Charkravarti Monarch.¹

In the first regnal year, he devoted his attention to strengthen the defence of the capital *Kaliga Nagari*, the fortification of which had been damaged by cyclonic storm (*Batyahata*)

He repaired "gopur" "prakara" "Nivesana" (Gateways, ramparts and the palace) and made the fort strong and invulnerable. To beautify the city, he constructed embankments and flight of steps in many cool water tanks and developed a number of (Uddyanas) gardens and parks. The defence work continued upto his fifth regnal year when the aqueduct, excavated by *Mahapadmananda* three hundred years before, was extended upto the capital city and a perennial supply of water was provided to the moat that surrounded the fortification. For all these works, he spent about thirty-five lakh coins. He distributed 60,000 *Karshapanas* among his subjects.

The tenth line of the Hathigumpha inscription refers to the building activities of

Kharavela i.e. (Caves for the Jaina Monks). The 12th regnal year record (line-12) of this inscription mentions that when king of Magadha had invaded Kaliga and conquered the same, he carried with him the image of Kaliga Jina. King Kharavela made on imperial expedition to Magadha, defeated the Magadhan army and to commemorate this unique event he brought back that image in a triumphant procession. Then he professed Jainism in common with his queens, Kumaras and officials. Thus, it is clear that the honour of the royal family was interlinked with the image of Kaliga Jina. Similarly the 13th year's record of Kharavela's reign (line 14 of the inscription) says that he devoted himself entirely to religious practice on Kumari hill. Kharavela offered maintenance and white garments to the monks. He excavated 117 caves to serve as resting places of the Arhatas or Jaina saints.²

From line 14 to the end of the inscription it is revealed that illustrious Sramanas, Yatis and Jaina Saints had assembled at Kumari hill from different parts of India for whom Kharavela, at the insistence of his queen Sindhula of Simhapatha, constructed a magnificent abode close to the dwellings of the Arhatas at a cost of 105,000 coins. Kharavela has been eulogized as a Jaina who had given the religion a proper place in his daily life.

The life of Kharavela was a symbol of sanctity. No doubt, he was a great warrior. He could achieve a series of brilliant victories extending his way from the north western part of India to the farthest extent in the south.³ No Indian monarch in history is known to have accomplished such astonishingly successful conquests embracing such vast expanse of India. But all these conquests were ephemeral. What gives him undying fame in history is his benevolent deeds.

Spirituality is essentially individual and individuality creates collectivity on the basis of

discipline and practices. Every basic reality of the universe is integral. Jainism reconciled the parts of reality with the whole by means of its relativistic approach.⁴ The "Aryanga", the oldest Jaina text says therefore, "One who knows one, comes to know all, one who has known all, knows one." Kundakunda, a great thinker of about 1st century A.D. and other Jaina philosophers followed the same view- "Je ege Janai te savve Janai, Je savve Janai te ege Janai."⁵

Kharavela recognized self and tried his best to know all living and non- living beings around him. He had an enriched vision of ecology. Son of a king, he could prove himself to be the son of the soil too. He gave paramount importance to the welfare of his subjects as well as to the nature. "Aspire for self, the same which you aspire for others and which you do not aspire for self do not aspire for others." This is the fundamental principle of Jainism. That Kharavela adhered to this basic principle has been artistically reflected in rock cut architecture of the twin hills, Khandagiri and Udayagiri. It would not be an exaggeration to ascribe him as a Rajarshi or the saint monarch of Orissa.

References :

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