

Jain Community of Bundelkhand

Socio-economic and Cultural Change

Prakash C. Jain

Foreword by
Ravindra K. Jain



International School for Jain Studies

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Foreword

The area of the former Bundela Rajput kingdoms is still known by its indigenous name 'Bundelkhand' ('the domain of the Bundelas'). Besides designating the territory of former Bundela rule, Bundelkhand is the name of a linguistic region of India. The great majority of the people of seven southern districts of Uttar Pradesh and six northern districts of Madhya Pradesh speak Bundeli, a dialect of western Hindi. The Bundeli linguistic region is much larger (43,452.4 sq. kms.) than the area of former Bundela kingdoms and domains (22,180.7 sq. kms.).

In contemporary politics and economy, the Bundelkhand region is known for an incipient demand for political statehood and, at the same time, its teeming poverty and extremely drought-prone terrain. Its present day backwardness is in ironic contrast to its pristine historical glory that is amply recorded in legends and other oral sources. From the time of written records of this region's history Jain merchants alongside Hindu business castes of the Vaishya varna have played a prominent role in the rural and urban economy of Bundelkhand. The tradition continues to this day.

The focus on the Jains of Bundelkhand in this study is well chosen and timely. If we take a bird's eye-view of the Jain community in India there are pockets of this minority prominently in the western states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and southwards into Maharashtra. In the Indo-Gangetic plain proper there is a sprinkling of Jains, mostly in non-agricultural occupations in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In southern India there has been a long history of Jain settlements in Kannadiga and TAMILIAN regions. Here, along with the instance of Maharashtra there are some Jain agricultural communities. Historically, it is worth pointing out that whereas in much of northern and western India the Jains conform culturally to a Vaishya or trader model, the southern Jains have been inheritors of a kingly tradition, the Kshatriya model, which is mirrored even today in their being partly agriculturists and also organised around royalty-supported institutions like that of the Bhattaraka. Jains in Bundelkhand belong to the typical Vaishya model of north India with their roots in the rural communities and situated at an arm's length from the royalty. On the other hand, they have throughout been at the mercy of predator rajas, small and large estate-holders of Hindu castes, who are often depicted in regional histories as bandit-kings.

The spring-board for Dr. Prakash C. Jain's work on Bundelkhand Jains is these rural communities of small businessmen though many of their members have now attained mobility as wealthy merchants. Alongside the harnessing of wealth, they have contributed much to a variegated rural and urban elite status in terms of religion, philanthropy, legal profession, scholarship and literary accomplishment. Dr. Prakash C. Jain has eloquently recorded their story. However, set against the all-India profile of the Jains -- both rich and plebeian -- the Bundelkhand Jains exemplify par excellence the small change of commercial and ritual transactions that mark their day-to-day quotidian life. This feature is markedly manifest in the temple-related worship and festivities in the villages of Bundelkhand. The religious community consists of sets of specialists such as tyagis, pundits or vidwans and munis in regular interaction with lay Jains. I have provided a flavour of this community life through a detailed account of Bundelkhand rural Jainism contained in the autobiography of Kshullak Ganesh Prasadji Varni (Jain, Ravindra K., 1999, Chapter 5). It portrays what is to my mind, *The Jain Path of Purification*, (to use the title of Professor P. S. Jaini's noted book on the subject) for the laity and how it interacts with worldly demands. Let me in conclusion state what I have not done in introducing Dr. Jain's monograph. I have resisted from summarizing or even highlighting the substantive data contained in this comprehensive sociological text. There is a nuanced relationship and distinction between sociology and anthropology. It may be noted that my observations above and in my own monograph alluded to earlier, complement and supplement anthropologically the sociological insights of Prakash Jain's study. Ideally, one should have also raised the issue of comparative religion and society, especially the interface between metaphor and community in Jainism and Buddhism, for instance. But let that be our joint task for the future!

9th June 2019.

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Preface

I was greatly interested in doing some work on the Jain community since my post-graduation days, but circumstances did not allow me to do that for about four decades. So following my superannuation as Professor of West Asian Studies, when the opportunity came to me to submit a research proposal for a Senior Research Fellowship to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, I chose to work on the Jain community of Bundelkhand to which I myself belong. I was born and brought up in Saidpur village of Lalitpur district. My early schooling up to eighth grade was done in my village school and up to 10th grade at Shri Varni Jain Inter College, Lalitpur. My further studies and the subsequent employments at Varanasi, Ottawa and Delhi prevented me from staying in the region for longer periods of time, but regular short visits in order to meet parents and other family members have kept me in touch with the region ever since.

My familiarity with the region, academic background of Sociology, and the working knowledge of Jain philosophy through basic texts such as *Tatvarth Sutra*, *Sarvartha Siddhi*, etc. that were taught to me by Pt. Kaiash Chand Shastri during my four-year long stay at Shri Syadvad Dīgambar Jain Mahavidyalaya at Varanasi prompted me to take up this theme for sociological investigation. The broad theme of Bundelkhand's Jain community was further delineated by putting focus on the socio-economic changes in the community to which I have been a witness since the late 1950s when I was growing up in my native village as a teenager. A vividly fascinating account of Bundelkhand's Jain community of the first half of the 20th century is also available in Kshullak Ganesh Prasad Varni's autobiography *Meri Jeevan Gatha*. Needless to say, there have been significant changes in various aspects of the Jain community of the region since then.

The present study attempts to sociologically examine the select aspects of socio-economic and cultural changes in the Jain community of Bundelkhand. More specifically, it focuses on changes in the community's educational and occupational profiles; social structural features, and the Jain way of life. The data were collected with the help of a questionnaire in the four core districts of Bundelkhand, namely Lalitpur, Jhansi, Sagar and Tikamgarh. Additionally, secondary material pertaining to certain Jain elite families, pandits, ascetics, vidyalayas, associations, places of pilgrimage, etc. was also collected.

Data collection would not have been possible without the active support of a large number of people of Bundelkhand. These included about 200 odd Jain respondents to the questionnaire including about a dozen or so key informants. I am thankful to all of them. Among the informants, mention must be made of Ms. Nikita Jain, Nirmal Kumar Jain, Sagar; Neelesh Jain, Lalitpur; V. K. Jain, BHEL, Jhansi; Shikhar Chand Jain and Chakresh Jain, Tikamgarh; Kailash Chowdhary, Mahroni; and Devendra Kumar Jain, Sadumal.

I am also thankful to Dr. Alok Kumar Jain of Delhi's Shri Vir Sewa Mandi for making me available a soft copy of Siddhantacharya Pandit Phoolchandra Shastri's book *Parwar Jain Samaj ka Itihas*, and to Surendra Kumar Jain of Bhagwan of Chhatarpur district for promptly sending to me his book *Golapurav Jain Samaj: Itihas Evam Sarvekshan* and a couple of other books relevant to the study. My thanks are also due to Dr. Deepak Jain and his wife Sunita Jain, editor and publisher of Bhopal-based monthly "Taaran Bandhu", for sending to me some useful material about Taaran Samaj, including privately-conducted population enumeration data of the community. My friend Dr. Ramesh Chand Jain, a well-known Jain scholar, loaned me a book by Doctor R. K. Jain of Kota that helped me in preparing the list of Jain monks and nuns who were born and brought up in the greater Bundelkhand region. I am thankful to him for this and for discussing the subject-matter of the book on a number of occasions. Needless to say, without these books, this work would have been incomplete, and perhaps much different than what it is now.

For writing the Foreword of the book I am grateful to Dr. Ravindra K. Jain, formerly Professor of Anthropology and Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Even otherwise, as a senior colleague, he has always been a source of inspiration for me as we share the academic interest on Indian diaspora and the Jain community.

I am also grateful to Dr. Shugan C. Jain, Founding Chairman and Director, International School for Jain Studies, New Delhi for agreeing to co-publish the book as a part of the School's publications programme (www.isjs.in). At the ISJS, thanks are also due to Dr. Shrinetra Pandey, Shri Sushil Jana, Shri Shivam Saxena and Ms. Jyoti Pandey for various acts of help towards getting the Manuscript ready for publication. Shri D. Kumar, Shipra Publications, New Delhi deserves a word of thanks for readily accepting the book for publication. Last but not the least, I would like to thank my wife Dr. Renu Saxena and my daughters Dr. Rashi Prakash and Ms. Sanskriti Prakash for their love and support that made my academic pursuits a lot less arduous.

My going to Varanasi for post-High School studies and staying at Shri Syadvad Mahavidyalaya during 1962-66 happened within a certain pattern which has generally been discussed in Chapter Four: Accordingly, informed Jain parents/guardians of Bundelkhand having moderate educational aspirations for their wards, and that too without having to spend too much money, used to send them to the community-run Sanskrit vidyalayas spread all over north India where liberal arts stream disciplines mixed well with Sanskrit and Indological/Jain Studies.

However, in my case, the difference was that being a Science stream student I had no plan to study Sanskrit/Indological courses, and therefore had to pay a subsidized fee for my lodging and boarding in the hostel of the Vidyalaya. The only compulsion was to attend a daily class on Jainism and successfully pass out its annual examination for ensuring my next year's stay there. Apparently, all this was planned for me by my maternal uncles Shri Moti Lal Jain, M.Sc. (Technology) and Shri Kailash Chand Jain, B.E. (Electrical), who financially supported my stay for five years there. Both of them had also benefited from the Vidyalaya while pursuing their respective studies in Varanasi, particularly in the initial phases. And to repeat the pattern as it were, they were guided in this regard by their uncle Pt. Phoolchandra Shastri, who himself had studied at three-four Jain Sanskrit vidyalayas including Shri Syadvad Mahavidyalaya before settling down in Varanasi. During my stay in Varanasi from 1962 to 1978, I had many occasions to meet and take Panditji's guidance and help.

This book is dedicated to the fond memories of Siddhantacharya Pt. Phoolchandra Shastri (1901-1991), the doyen of Jain Pandits, and my younger brother Dr. Hukum C. Jain (1949-2013), Associate Professor of Adult & Continuing Education, University of Sagar who before his untimely death had begun to take serious academic interest in Bundelkhand's Jain community.

New Delhi

Prakash C. Jain

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