

# Gods or Demons?:

## Lower devas in Jaina tradition

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The Jainism has a wide range of living beings including humans, animals, plants. God is also regarded as one category of them. The details of the gods in Jainism, however, are not clear so far. This paper gives a brief description of them, especially that of so called "lower gods". Main sources of our exploring are Sanskrit texts, especially Tattvārtha sūtra (hereafter TS), a compendium of Jaina doctrine, and commentaries on it, Sarvārthasiddhi (hereafter SS) and so-called auto-commentary (hereafter SBh). We will also refer to notion of the gods in other texts.<sup>1</sup>

TS consists of ten chapters, and the fourth entirely explains gods as well as the place where they resident. The gods in the Jainism, first of all, are divided into four groups: the mansion gods, the forest gods, the luminous gods, and the empyrean gods.<sup>2</sup> Of them, the gods of the second group are, as the name suggests, supposed to suns, moons, planets constellations and scattered stars.<sup>3</sup> In the same manner, we can conjecture nature of the gods of the fourth group from their names. They live the highest part of the gods<sup>4</sup> and enjoy long and pleasant lives there though there are several strata of their ranks and condition of welfare.

Beside these two groups, the other two, i. e., the mansion gods and forest gods, are somehow ambiguous in terms of their nature and residence. We understand ten subdivision of the mansion gods; 1) fiendish youths, 2) dragon youths, 3) lighting youths, 4) vulturine youths, 5) fiery youths, 6) stormy youths, 7) thundering youths, 8) oceanic youths, 9) island youths and 10) youths who rule the cardinal points.<sup>5</sup>

They are called “youth(*kumāra*)” because their clothes, ornaments, weapon, vehicle, chariot, amusement are like those of human kids.<sup>6</sup>

All of these gods live at their own mansion (*bhavana*) in the upper most stratum called *ratnaprabhā* of the hell which consists of seven layers vertically. The mansion of fiendish youths is located at a muddy part of the stratum while those of the others are situated at a central portion of hard-earthen part.<sup>7</sup> This difference of locations among the ten group of the youths suggests that the fiendish has a special activities which we will refer to afterwards.

The second group of the gods, i. e., the forest gods are of eight types: 1) deformed human, 2) deformed person, 3) great serpent, 4) musician, 5) treasure keeper, 6) demon, 7) devil and 8) goblin.<sup>8</sup> SS explains these gods called *vyantara* because they have their places in various parts.<sup>9</sup> SBh gives more concrete reason of their group name; they live at different places of three portion of the cosmos, i. e., the upper, the middle and the beneath,<sup>10</sup> saying in detail, the gods have their residence on rock (or in mountain), in cliff, in forest or hole.<sup>11</sup>

In the mansion gods like the empyrean gods, there are ten ranks: chief, co-chief, minister, councillor, sentinel, custodian, army chief, citizen, attendant, and menial while in the forest gods like luminous gods there are only eight ranks excluding minister and custodian from the ten mentioned above.<sup>12</sup> Natures of these ten ranks will be mentioned afterwards. However we are not sure of this difference because both of SS and SBh keep silence about it. Again, the two group have two chiefs in each devisions.<sup>13</sup> For example, fiendish youths of the mansion gods have two chiefs and the same for the other nine devisions while deformed humans of the forest gods have two chiefs as well as the remaining devisions. This means that among the mansion gods there are twenty chiefs while the forest gods have sixteen chiefs. Naturally all of them have their own names though SS and SBh show difference in some cases.<sup>14</sup>

*Leśyā* or karmic stain of a soul is very unique to Jainism. Each and every soul has

its own colour which shows its spiritual level. It is said that there are six kinds of the colour: black, blue, grey, yellow, lotus pink, and white. Of them the first three are indicative of lower stages of spiritual stages while the last three of higher ones.<sup>15</sup> TS of the Śvetāmbara tradition does not mention to *leśyā* of the mansion gods and the forest gods. On the other hand, that of the Digambara tradition says the first three classes of gods have the first four colours.<sup>16</sup> Considering the vertical order of residence of the gods, we can conclude that the mansion gods have black colour while the forest gods have blue one.

The Jainas admit three genders for living beings in general. Of gods there are only two: male and female.<sup>17</sup> This means there are gods and goddesses both.

TS chapter four refers to lifespan of the gods. It is interesting enough that the references to that of the mansion gods and the forest gods are different with each other between the Śvetāmbara tradition and the Digambara tradition. The former maintains that the maximum lifespan of the chiefs of the southern half among the mansion gods is 1.5 pit-measured periods, and that of the other chiefs is 1.75 pit-measured periods.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the two chiefs of the fiendish youths lives, at maximum, one ocean-measured period and a little more than one ocean-measured period respectively.<sup>19</sup>

According to the latter, i. e., the Digambaras, the maximum lifespan of the mansion gods are as follows; that of the fiendish youths are one ocean-measured period, of the serpentine youths is three pit-measured periods, of the island youths is two pit-measured periods, and of the remaining six youths is one and half pit-measured periods.<sup>20</sup>

The Śvetāmbaras maintain that the maximum lifespan of the forest gods is one pit-measured period while according to the Digambaras, it is somewhat more than one pit-measured period.<sup>21</sup>

On the minimum lifespan of the two groups, the two sects are of the same opinion. They say that as the infernal beings in the first hell live ten thousand years at

least the mansion gods also live for the same duration at minimum and the same is of the forest gods.<sup>22</sup>

Jainism distinguish three types of birth: by agglutination of material particles, by the womb, and by descent.<sup>23</sup> Of them All the gods including the two groups are born by descent and the same to infernal beings.<sup>24</sup> This means the gods are born suddenly, so to speak, without any support such as womb or any other materials.

TS and its commentaries, to our knowledge, does not refer to activities of the gods. Exceptionally that of the fiendish gods is mentioned at TS 3-5; the inhabitants of the first three infernal lands are tortured by the fiendish gods of evil thoughts and deeds.<sup>25</sup> Here it is not intended that all the fiendish gods are of evil and torture the hell beings. In reality some of them called *amba* and so forth do so.<sup>26</sup> In any case, these fiendish gods act in bad manner because they injury other beings even though the being tortured ones are also of evil nature. As well known, to harm other beings should be avoided by any means in Jainism.

Now we are induced to compare the activities of asura youths in Jainism so far we have checked with those in other cultural traditions of India, especially in Buddhism. However let us limit ourselves just to remark that being asura or fiendish gods is one of three fortune states along with the human beings and sometime the gods are regarded as one of eight groups of guardian for the Buddha.<sup>27</sup>

Many Jaina Sanskrit texts other than TS and commentaries on it depict the gods in various ways. Among them let us pick up *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacāritra* (Hereafter TṢC) by Hemacandra. TṢC, however, being a very voluminous work, here we check only the last chapter of it which deals with the life of Mahāvīra.

A brahman called Mauryaputra visits Mahāvīra with doubt about the gods. To him Mahāvīra shows the gods beginning with Śakra or Indra who have come to the place he gives sermon. He continues “Because of their absorption in concerts, et cetera and because of unbearable odor of mortals, they do not come during the rest of time. Their non-existence of is not (proved) by that. That they come to the earth at birth-

bath, et cetera of Arhats...’’<sup>28</sup> Here with the word ’god’ Hemacanra seems to refer to god in general, mainly to the empyrean ones, but also does not exclude the mansion and forest gods. As matter of fact when Mahāvīra’s mother gives birth to him, 56 mansion goddesses Bhogaṅkarā and so on come and perform the birth-rites for the two.<sup>29</sup> After that(!) Indra comes to the lying-in house, and takes Mahāvīra to the top of Mt. Meru for birth bath. There pure fragrant water is sprinkled over. On this occasion, the fiendish god and the serpent god along with other gods and humans worship the bath-water and pour it repeatedly so it covers their whole bodies.<sup>30</sup>

For the Jainas the birth of a tīrthaṅkara is not the only occasion of celebration but there are five auspicious moments (pañcakālyāṇaka) in life of a tīrthaṅkara including mokṣa or emancipation because it means complete separation of karmic matter from a soul and the final goal for the Jainas.<sup>31</sup> Therefore it is a time for festival and naturally many kinds of ritual are performed. From the shaking of their thrones, Indras of gods and Asura knew that Mahāvīra would go to emancipation and they came to the earth. After he breathed the last, Purandara or Indra places his body on the pyre. Then fire youths create a fire on the pyre and the wind youths create a wind that made it burn.<sup>32</sup> Other gods threw fragrant incense and pithers of ghī and honey by hundred on the burning pyre. When the flesh et cetera had been consumed, the Stanita-gods, i.e., the thundering youths at once extinguish the pyre with water from the Ocean of Milk.<sup>33</sup>

As we have seen so far, some of mansion gods, though not all, behave like a pūjārī or ritual assistants in Jaina Śvetāmbara temple nowadays. Therefore they can be regarded as a kind of gods not as demons who are mischievous and sometimes harmful for humans.

The forest gods or vyantaras in TṢC chapter 10, on the other hand, seem to be a kind of demons because they disturb the people. Let us take up a case of treasure keeper or yakṣa called Śūlapāṇi. Once up a time Mahāvīra went the village named Asthikagrāma during a rainy season, and he asked the villagers to live in the temple

of a yakṣa, Śūlapāṇi. They said it would be impossible because “The yakṣa had been a bull in previous life and died with anger to be reborn as the yakṣa in the same village. Revenging for the insult to him as a bull Śūlapāṇi killed many villagers whose bones (asthi) were gathered in a pile.”

Even then Mahāvīra stays at the temple alone in the night and keeps meditation. There Śūlapāṇi appears and tries to terrify him in various ways; “When the Lord was not disturbed by the noise of the burst of laughter, the Vyantara created the terrifying form of an elephant. The elephant-form being scorned by the Master, he made the figure of a piśāca tall as the measuring-rod of heaven and earth.”<sup>34</sup>

Even though Śūlapāṇi disturbs and terrifies him with any other ways, Mahāvīra does not break the meditation. At last the yakṣa requestes him, “Lord, pardon the very great crimes that I, evil-souled and ignorant of your power, committed against you, Ocean of Compassion.”<sup>35</sup>

This story of Śūlapāṇi tells us that he was first hostile to Mahāvīra and disturbed the latter’s meditation,<sup>36</sup> but finally became his follower or admirer. Therefore Śūlapāṇi is, though he has a title of yakṣa or vyantara, goodwilled one.

There is another type of yakṣa told in TṢC. Once Mahāvīra arrives at a settlement named grāmāka. There is a temple of yakṣa Bibhelaka in the garden Bibhelaka where Mahāvīra stands in kāyotsarga posture. “The Yakṣa had a trance of right-belief from a former birth, and penetrated by affection, worshipped the Lord with divine flower, unguents, et cetera.”<sup>37</sup> This vyantara is, from the very beginning of his meeting with him, an admirer of Mahāvīra.

This type of yakṣa reminds us of a pair of yakṣa and yakṣiṇī as attendant of a fīrthamkara and are the protectors of his teachings. They have been, to our knowledge, hostile to their master in the past and present as well.

These activities and natures of the lower gods remind us of vidyādhara or a kind of surpernatural beings with magical power. Though they are not mentioned in TS and commentaries on it and in chpater ten of TṢC they appear only once,<sup>38</sup> many

Jaina texts refer to this mysterious beings. What are they? God, demon or any other being? Amarasimha puts the word vidyādhara among gods or devas,<sup>39</sup> but Hemacandra does not list it in his thesaurus.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusional Remarks

So far we have checked briefly what the 'lower' gods are. They are lower because they live at lower parts in the universe and because their leśyās are inferior to those of the other groups. In terms of their behaviour, however, not all of them are worse. Asura kumāras surely can be called 'evil gods' because they torture infernal beings, and some of yakṣa also too because they are mischievous to humans. But some of them are regarded as 'helpful' being attendants of fīrthaṃkaras. Relationship between these gods and vidyādharas are left to be considered more.

### Abbreviations and references

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Śrīmad Amarasimha Viracitaḥ *Amarakoṣaḥ*. Paṇḍita Śrī Joṣītyupāhṇa Sadāśīva śāstrīṇā svakṛtayā Prabhānavatīkālāmṛtya saṃśodhita. Haridāsa Saṃskṛta Granthamālā 144. Varanasi n.d.

*Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* of Śrī Hemacandrācārya. Edited with an Introduction. By Nemichandra Śāstri. Vidyabhawan Sanskrit Series 109. Varanasi 1964.

*Samavāya sūtra*. Edited by Jambūvijaya. Ahmedabad and Bhāvnagar 2005.

SBh = Auto commentary on TS by the author. See TS.

SS = Āchārya Pūjyapāda's *Sarvārthasiddhi* [The Commentary on Āchārya Griddhapiccha's Tattvārtha-sūtra]. Edited and Translated by Siddhantacharya Pt. Phoolchandra Shastri. Bharatiya Jnanpith. Seventh Edition. 1997.

*Sthānānga sūtra* Part III. Edited by Jambūvijaya. Ahmedabad and Bhāvnagar 2003.

TS = *Tattvārthadhigama* by Umāsvāti Being in the original Sanskrit with the Bhāshya by the author himself. Edited by Mody Keshavlal Premchand. Calcutta 1903.

TSĀC = Kalikālasarvajña Śrī Hemacandrācāryaviracitaṃ *Triṣaṣṭīśalākāpruṣacarita mahākāvyaṃ* (daśamaṃ parva). sampādakaḥ Vijayaśīlacandrasūriḥ. Amadāvāda 2012.

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注

- 1 Sūtra number is quoted according to Śvetāmbara tradition. When we refer to sūtra unique to Digambara tradition, the number will be preceded by “SS”.
- 2 TS 4-1: *devās caturṅgikāyāḥ*. For the name of the four groups, see TS 4-11, 12,13 and 17 respectively.
- 3 TS 4-13: *jyoṣṭikāḥ sūryāḥ candramaso graha-nakṣatra-prakīrṇa-tārakāś ca*.
- 4 According to the Jaina cosmology their residence is not located at the highest part of the universe (*loka*) where the liberated souls stay forever.
- 5 TS 4-11: *bhavanavāsino ’sura-nāga-vidyut-suparṇā-gni-vāta-stanito-dadhi-dvīpa-dikkumārāḥ*.
- 6 SS §461: *sarveṣāṃ devānām avasthitavyaḥsvabhāvatve ’pi veṣa-bhūṣā-yudha-yāna-vāhana-kṛḍānādīkumāravad eṣāṃ ābhāsata iti bhavanavāsiṣu kumāravyapadeśo rūḍhaḥ /*
- 7 According to the Jainism, the *ratnaprabhā* has three sub strata or parts vertically: that of hard earthen, mud and water. The hard earthen part comes to the upper part of the others. For clear idea for them, see *Sthānāṅga Sūtra. Part III*. p.236.
- 8 TS 4-12: *vyantarāḥ kinnara-kimpuruṣa-mahoraga-gandharva-yakṣa-ṛakṣasa-bhūta-piśācāḥ*.
- 9 SS §463: *vividhadeśāntarāṇi yeṣāṃ nivāsās te vyantāḥ*.



- 10 SBh p.98: *adhas-tiryag-ūrdhvaṃ ca triṣv api lokeṣu bhavananagareṣv āvāseṣu ca prativasanti*. Tatia [1994: 98] says “The forest gods also live in the part of the highest hell realm (4. 12) and the middle region”.
- 11 SBh p.98~9: *vividheṣu ca śaila-kandarāntara-vana-vivarādiṣu prativasanty ato vyantarā ity ucyante*.
- 12 TS 4-4, 5: *indra-sāmānika-trāyastriṃśa-pariśadya-ātmarakṣa-lokapāla-ānika-prakīrṇaka-ābhiyogyā-kilviṣikāś caikaśaḥ. trāyastriṃśa-lokapālavaryjyā vyantara-jotiṣkāḥ*.
- 13 TS 4-6: *pūrvayor dvīndrāḥ*.
- 14 For the detail of these 36 gods, see Tatia [1994: 98~100].
- 15 For concise explanation of the idea, see Wiley [2006: 128].
- 16 TS 4-2: *āditas triṣu pītāntaleśyāḥ*.
- 17 Cf. TS 2-51, 52 which read that the infernal and beings born by agglutination are necessarily hermaphroditic but it does not so in the case of gods. (*nāraka-sammūrcchīno napuṃsakāni. na devāḥ.*)
- 18 TS 4-30, 31: *bhavaneṣu dakṣiṇārdhārdhipatīnām palyopamam adhyardham. śeṣāṅām pādane*. For the detail of unit of pit-measured period, see Tatia [1994: 273] which is based on SBh on TS 4-15.
- 19 TS 4-32: *asurendrayoḥ sāgaropamam adhikaṃ ca*. Tatia [1994: 274] explains the unit ocean-measured pit.
- 20 SS 4-28: *sthitir asura-nāga-suparṇa-dvīpa-śeṣāṅām sāgaropama-tripalyopama-ardhahīnamitā*.
- 21 TS 4-47: *parā palyopamam*. SS 4-37: *parā palyopamam adhikam*.
- 22 TS 4-44, 45, 46: *daśavarṣasahasrāṇi parthamāyām. bhavaneṣu ca. vyantarāṅām ca*.
- 23 TS 2-32: *sammūrchana-garbha-upapātā janma*.
- 24 TS 2-35: *nāraka-devānām upapātaḥ*.
- 25 TS 3-5: *saṃkliṣṭa-asura-udīritaduḥkhāś ca prāk caturthyāḥ*.
- 26 SS §375: *... na sarve asurā nārakāṅām duḥkham utpādayanti/ kiṃ tarhi ambāvarīṣādaya eva kecana iti/* These gods beginning with amba are 15 in number and called *paramādhārmika* because they are most evil. For the detail of them, see SBh TS 3-5, and *Samavāya Sūtra*. 15-1.
- 27 Nakamura et als [2004] s.v. asyura [アシュラ]
- 28 TṢC 10-5-139, 140: *saṅgītkādīvaiyagyān martyagandhāc ca duḥsahāt/ nā 'yānti śeṣakāle 'mī tadabhāvo na tāvatā// arhajjanmābhiṣekādāv āyānti yam amī bhuvī/*
- 29 TṢC 10-2-52: *ṣaṭpañcāsaddikumāryāyo 'bhyetya bhogaṅkarādayaḥ / svāmināḥ svāmimātus ca sūtikarmāṇi cakrire//* For the goddess Bhogaṅkarā, see Malvania et als. [1972] s.v.
- 30 TṢC 10-2-68: *abhiṣekajalaṃ tattu surāsuranaroragāḥ / vavandire muhuḥ sarvāṅgīnaṃ ca paricikṣipuḥ //*
- 31 Other three auspicious moments are: conception, renunciation, and enlightenment.
- 32 TṢC 10-13-264: *agnim agnikumārās ca citāmadhye vicakrite/ taddīpanam vicakrus ca*

*vāyuyū vāyukumāarakāḥ //*

33 TṢC 10-13-266: *māṃsādiṣu pradagdheṣu kṣīrodād āhrtair jalaiḥ/ citāṃ vidhyāpayām āsur jhagīti staniṭāmarāḥ //*

34 TṢC 10-3-127 ~ 8: *aṭṭahāsasvareṇāpi na cukṣobha yadā prabhuh/ hastirūpaṃ tadā ghoraṃ vyantaro vicakāra saḥ// svāminā hastirūpe ca 'vajñāte sati nirmame/ piśācarūpaṃ so 'tyuccai rodasīmānadaṇḍavat //*

Here we learn that piśāca or goblin, a sub group of the forest gods, created by Śūlapāṇi also can terrify humans.

35 TṢC 10-3-134: *mayā durātmanā nātha tava śaktum ajñānatā / nitāntam aparāddham yat tat kṣamasva dayānidhe //*

36 Perhaps he did not realize who came to his temple.

37 TṢC 10-3-613 : *sa yakṣaḥ prāgbhavasprṣtasamyaktvo 'pūjayat prabhum / divyaiḥ puṣpāṅgarāgādyair anurāgadhivāsitaḥ //*

38 See TṢC 10-1-207 where they are said to be conquered by a cakravartin Priyamitra.

39 See *Amarakoṣa* I-11.

40 *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* II-3 ~ 6 list four classes of the gods and its sub classes as TS does with some variations of terms, but no references to vidyādhara. See index of *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*.