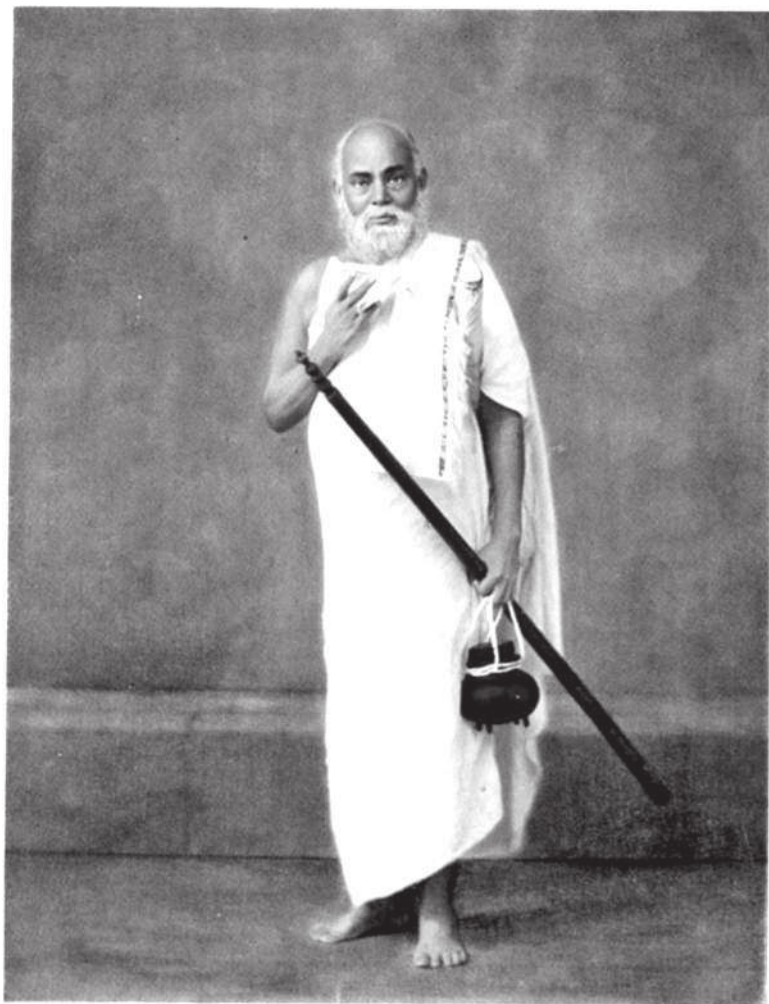


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SHASTRA-VISHARADA JAIN ACHARYA
SHRI VIJAYA DHARMA SURI

Jain Literature Society

VIJAYA DHARMA SŪRI

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY

A. J. SUNAVALA, B.A., LL.B.

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY
F. W. THOMAS

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE subject of this interesting memoir holds a position of great distinction and influence among the Jain community; and the reader will himself have the feeling of being in contact with a man of original force and character. But a few words may still help us in appreciating the significance of Vijaya Dharma Sūri's work.

There are not a few Jain *Sādhus* in India, presiding over their large or small communities, instructing and edifying their disciples, studying their canonical texts, publishing editions of them or original works relating to them. Such pious and learned men have never been wanting among the Jains. Nor has there been a lack of loyal supporters who have liberally contributed what was desirable for the erection and maintenance of shrines and institutions or for literary enterprise. The practice of the community, which encourages a gradual assimilation of the laity to its ascetic leaders and which accords to the Sheth, or influential layman, a recognized position, has in this respect borne abundant fruit. But an inquirer would probably find that at the present time the cultivation and support of literary enterprise is unusually active among the Jains; and he would hardly be mistaken in attributing this in a large measure to the example of Vijaya Dharma Sūri.

Apart from the purely personal qualities depicted in the memoir, the singular force of character, and sincerity of conviction, the dignified, unaffected mildness and friendliness, which characterize the saint, we shall, no doubt, be right in selecting his open-mindedness and wideness of outlook as his most distinctive traits. Not only have his activities been, as shown in the memoir, of a many-sided character, but he has extended a cordial welcome to western personalities and methods, facilitating in many ways the work of scholars and himself complying with their critical principles. In this way he has come to be regarded as the true mediator between Jain thought and the west; while his own literary labours have been recognized in the highest quarters by election to honorary membership of societies and by grants of titles of distinction. This does not at all imply an abatement of faith in his own religion: on the contrary, the serenity of his assurance is the real basis of his receptivity. Himself an unsparing observer of the rules of his order, he is free from pedantry in his demands upon others; and, while exercising a remarkable and far-reaching authority, he will be found rather pleading and reasoning with his disciples and friends than laying down the law. No wonder if similar graces reappear conspicuously among his devoted followers.

The Jain doctrine and community are ancient, having an unbroken continuity from an early period of Indian religious thought. They are marked by

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rationality and consistency of principle, ethical outlook, and ascetic practice. In the present period of transition such traits are a strong equipment: the qualities of representative leaders such as Vijaya Dharma Sūri will contribute to a further expansion of the community.

The author has not laboured to include every interesting particular in the life of the teacher—it was not his purpose to do so. A reader anxious to learn more may find something to his purpose in the accounts mentioned at the end of Chapter II and also in the late Dr. L. P. Tessitori's *Vijaya Dharma Suri: A Jain Āchārya of the Present Day* (Calcutta, 1917).

F. W. THOMAS.

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