

The Place of Ascetic Practices in Buddhism

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At the time of the appearance of the Buddha, asceticism was being widely accepted by all the religious schools in India. Tapas and Yoga were regarded as the way of religious practice. The Tapas which means penance, which suppresses the body and diminishes its power, was supposed to raise the purity of the soul. This concept had developed slowly and steadily in the religious society through the ages. At the time of the Buddha it came to the culmination. For instance Mahavira has proclaimed the doctrine of renunciation (dhutavāda). It is mentioned in the Ācāraṅga Sūtra¹ that the quitting all worldiness (visottiyam), one should bear all feeling being possessed of the right view, he is really naked.

The Jaina ascetics had no fixed dwelling of his own. It enforces a life of wandering. The monks should wander from one place to another. Ācāraṅga Sūtra² describes the places where the Jaina monks should frequent. They can stay in gardens, cemeteries, deserted houses, mountains, caves and potter's workshops, in course of their tour. When selecting a lodging place for one night it should be a place of Ahimsa. The Jaina monks were to depend on food, gathered from begging only.³ Like the other sramanas they went on begging. They must beg, as a rule, at all houses without any distinction. It is mentioned in the Ācāraṅga Sūtra that Mahavira had used his robe for a year and month. And then he became a naked, but the idea of nakedness has not been deemed as a compulsory item of monastic life. The Ācāraṅga Sūtra, we find that the Jaina monks used little clothing. Only three robes were permitted for the usage.

Asceticism was widely recommended as a salient feature of a religious Life. If we refer to the points from foregone paragraph we find that most of the religious schools in the pre-buddhistic era, ratified