

Historio-Cultural Data as Available from Samarāicca Kahā

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Importance of Literature

Though the archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics etc. are the most authentic and copious source-materials for writing our history; the equally important source of information is literature—both sacred and secular as well as folk-tales and folk-lores. These later were produced and preserved through the ages by different sects and religio-social communities. While such literature has more or less a religio-regional base or bias, it is certainly, no doubt, most useful material for reconstructing our history of the ages when archaeological sources are very meagre or none.

Contribution of Jaina Community

The Jaina Community has contributed its mite to the history and culture of our country. Though they have hardly produced any special book on history from historical perspective, there are some books written by Jaina **Āchāryas** mostly after christ, no one would have any obvious reason to deny the presence of historical sense in their writings for they have to the extent developed the quality of historical understanding and exactness. For this reason the Jaina sources are also most remarkable for its vastness and variety. They do not only concern with earlier periods of our history but lay its arms over the whole range of historical times and are hugged to almost every phase and part of our vast country giving an opportunity of being buried under the file of manuscripts in many languages. No doubt the early Jaina literature was mostly in **Prākṛut**; for it is true that Jaina **Munis** were and are fascinated in preaching the religious principles in the language of the people. The fact is that

the **Prākṛut** language stood closer to the popular languages of the day than did **Sanskṛut** and a very large number of **Prākṛut** works are composed by Jaina **Āchāryas**.

Prākṛut literature is to be assessed by its value of humanity and its estimation is to be determined by the principles to what extent does it contribute to the progression of mankind and its importance to the society by conveying various aspects of our culture. Of these the Jaina **Prākṛut** Jaina literature is a rich source of certainly highly unique material of a point of cardinal importance.

Importance of Jñānabhaṇḍāras

The Jaina community, so to say, is very rich, wealthy and cohesive. It also believes in giving generous donations for the cause of its religious development and betterment of the community. This was partially due to the emphasis laid on **Śāstradāna** and the importance of scriptural knowledge for attaining **Mokṣa**. This has inspired this community for preserving and distributing literary works of religious merit and of secular importance. More so, the zeal of performing **Śhastradāna** enkindled their souls to evolve a system of printing & publishing the scattered literature for free distribution. Perhaps this may be the only religious community who has taken a special care of spreading knowledge. This objective has contributed much to the making of the national heritage to some extent. They have preserved with care MSS in **Jñānabhaṇḍāras** and these unaccessible **Jñānabhaṇḍāras** made available to scholars. They have also painstakingly published those MSS; and established good libraries wherever possible alongwith the **Jñānabhaṇḍāras**, or wherever there is either a big or small Jaina community even without **Jñānabhaṇḍāras**. This means, where there is an **Upāsraya**, there is generally a library, — a worth mentioning contribution of Jainas to the cause of learning.

Activities of Jaina Munis

These multi-faceted facilities, say activities, did help and do help even now Jaina **Munis** to utilize their free time in reading those books in the libraries which enkindled their inquisitiveness. Secondly, the discipline of **Vihāra**, i.e. moving one place to another on foot, also helped them to look into the things lying on the road-side or in the forest and the system of **Cāturmāsa**, i.e. compulsory staying at one place during rainy season, also gave them an opportunity to chew those things seen during **Vihāra-Yātrā**, and which in turn offered an opportunity to verify those material or help confirmed them using the books of the temple-libraries. These two systems encouraged those **Jaina Munis** to write something on what they had seen during their **Vihār** tenure. Many of these writings of **Jaina Munis** do throw some light on many buried as well as moot problems of our history.

Historical Importance of Jaina Literature

During their **Vihār** period they do come across many cities and villages, get acquainted with different customs and cultures, observe and study monuments, sculpture as well note down the content of inscriptions and make necessary notice of historical places. They also make use of **Jñānabhaṇḍāras** on the way during their **Vihāra**. Steady life during **Cāturmāsa** also give them timely opportunity to nourish their academic activities. These have offered students and researchers at their disposal description of many religious and historical places, minute narration of temples and images as well as reading of those inscriptions of **Bhavana-Nirmāṇa** and **Pratimā-Sthāpana**. Main contribution of **Jaina Munis** lies in books on sacred places which do not remain just limited to only general description of temples, idols and places concerned but do furnish with information regarding geography, toponymy, inscriptions, political activities, society et cetera.

All these information do certain historically important material. Such travelogues, though written by religious **Acāryas** from religious perspective, are very useful in writing history of different part of our country.

Some of these **Jaina Munis**, blessed with typical type of discipline and multitudinous facilities, devoted most of their time to study and pursuing to write new treaties. Generations of Jaina monks have thus enriched the various branches of **Bhāratiya** literature and in turn producing good material for reconstruction of our history according to their travelling capacities, training of learning, aptitude for research, instinct of tapping resources, test of seeing things and more so the temperament of acquiring knowledge and inquisitiveness to know.

Jñānabhaṇḍāras : a resource centre

Special mention, may not be out of order, of the **Jñāna Bhaṇḍāras**. These **Bhaṇḍāras**, of course of Jaina faith, whether big or small, deserve to be looked upon as centres of source-material and all the more as national wealth; for they have treasured and preserved old, valuable and rare manuscripts belonging to Jaina faith especially and of other faiths in general. If the **Bhaṇḍāras** are older than there is a greater possibility of obtaining a few more old and rare manuscripts. For the study of palaeography, calligraphy, development of paintings and contemporary society these valuable material are, no doubt, very useful, and significant.

Keeping this background in view the purport here is to highlight the contribution made by Jaina **Munis** in making of our heritage by reviewing only one book i.e. **Samarāicca Kahā** (hence forth SK.)

Purpose of Dharmakathās

SK is a good Book on religious stories. Generally we

find a beautiful description of the spirit of adventures of both heroes and heroins in such **Dharmakathās**; but in the end we find them renouncing the worldly pleasures and accepting the discipline of religious obedience. Such religious stories are normally interwoven on one side with adventure and on other side with religion. We can thus label such stories as having an objective of admonishing religion.

Ācārya Haribhadra

Epoch-maker writer as he was **Ācārya Shree Haribhadra** is the author of the book under discussion. He has extensively written both in **Prakrut** and **Sanskrit**. Most of these were written in the 8th century A.D. and they throw a good deal of light on different aspects of our culture then. From this one and other contemporary works it seems that **Rājasthān** in particular and **Bhārat** in general had advanced towards religious prosperity and the credit of which goes to **Ācārya Shree Haribhadraji**.

Pivotal theme of SK

The central theme of the Book, i.e. **Samarāicca-Kahā**, is that human life is full of miseries. Jealousy, enmity, rivalry et cetera are the vices which are quite visible in human life. To get rid of them every one should live pious and moral life. Negligence or idleness in observing a moral life leads one's to bad results. To convince this object to his readers, **Haribhadraji** has used the approach of telling stories within the main one. From this, one can surmise that many parts of our country then was engulfed and enclamped more by wickedness, immorality and injustice and to keep oneself away from such unrighteousness these stories have prophesed to live a life of non-violence and morality. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th **Bhavas** describe in detail the force of **Māyā**, **Lobha** and **Anruta**. At the same time the remedy for this has also been narrated. **Ācārya Haribhadraji** had very clearly pointed

out that one has to born as an animal in the next birth for living sinful life and making offences. It is also possible to go to hale. We can thus surmise that during author's time the theory of rebirth was widely prevalent. Inspite of this notion and understanding people generally were indulging in doing unreligious affairs, for Haribhadra had oft-repeatedly pointed out this thing very clearly.

Fiction or Dharmakathā

In this manner SK is a **Dharmakathā** in one sense while it is fiction on the other hand. It is said that the propagation of writing fiction literature both in **Sanskrit** and **Prakrit** might be widely in vogue especially in Rājasthān and perhaps across the country in general during the time of Haribhadra. Even Jaina religious literature had adopted this form of writing as well.

Different things have been knitted well in this work. Though the information detailed out in this work throw good deal of light to the national heritage, the purport here, it seems, is to highlight to what extent the information given here-in is useful to reconstruct the cultural history of Rājasthān.

Administration

We get interesting facts regarding administration of Rājasthān. From frequent mention of different kings it is possible to surmise the possibility of Monarchical system of government then. The monarchy was hereditary as can be seen from the Prince Guṇasena as getting the throne from his father (**Bhava** one). State might have been known as Empire from the fact that it was divided into provinces and the responsibility of provinces were entrusted to Viceroys. Samarketu was the Viceroy of Ujjain (**Bhava** five). The tradition of **Yuvarāja** (heir-apparent) was also prevalent. Aparājit was Yuvarāja (**Bhava** six). During the tenure of **Yuvarāja** all sorts of

training was imparted, so that after becoming a king he has not to encounter more difficulty in the administration. A son of a king was entitled to be a king. But to get rid of from a wicked king it was necessary to dethrone him. The case of Samarāditya was a point in information (**Bhava** seven). Viewing through his own chain of rebirth he opted to spend more time to pious activities than to material happiness, and also lived a saintly life. But his father did not approve his son's indifferent attitudes. Hence he ordered three of his men (namely Ashoka, Kamankura and Lalitanga) to become Samarāditya's friend for briefing him the importance of worldiness (**Bhava** nine). Not contended with this, his father also explained him the necessity of **Kāmasāstra** as a means of attaining **Mokṣa**, but Samaraditya retorted his father by saying that it increases the sin (**Bhava** nine).

Ministers as state-adviser

The cabinet was formed to help king in running administration. Subuddhi (**Bhava** one), Matisāgar (**Bhava** two), Indrasharmā, Buddhisāgar, Brahmadata (**Bhava** three) were the ministers we come across, nevertheless their nature of work is not possible to know. But it seems that the ministers were very close to the king and had enjoyed the status of his advisers. The king, after returning from Jaipur, had first counselled with his ministers about his intention of retiring and that of renouncing (**Bhava** two). We can infer that the king might have been sought help from them and might have taken any steps after enjoying their confidence. We can also say from the narration of the SK that the feudal lords were also cooperating the king. While accepting the supremacy of the **Yuvarāja** Kumārsena, the victor; Vindhyaketu, the Sāber leader, declares the people of his lord as **Sambandhini** (**Bhava** two). This shows that the political relation between

the king and his feudal lords was very close. After accepting the supremacy even an enemy becomes a friend of the overlord as has been known from the SK. At one place (**Bhava** eight) even the victor **Yuvarāja** calls his mutineer feudal as elder brother and asks him not to apologise.

Local Organisation

SK throws some light on the local organisation of the state. Village or town was the smallest unit of the province. **Nagarmahañtaka** and **Karñika** were the officers in charge of the town (**Bhava**, p. 409). This **Nagarmahañtaka** of SK may be as equal as the **Pañcāyat** president or **Nagarapati** (i.e. Mayor) of today. **Drangswāmī** was the head of the village administration. Both **Nagarmahañtaka** and **Drangswāmī** were free to give judicial decision. This means that they were enjoying legal powers too. They were also entitled to attend the cases of theft or adulteration. SK narrates that the position of **Nagarmahañtaka** was higher than that of **Karñika**, for we see the usage of the term 'Taddhisthit'. **Grāmasabhā** had a positive say in trifling matters. The **Grāmasabhā** does send its four members to investigate into the dispute between the two warring groups of the village (**Bhava** six). These four members were welversed in religion and economics and were very seasoned for their old age. This shows that the experienced and practically wise people might have been elected at the **Grāmasabhā**. Both **Karñika** and **Pañckula** constituted a joint committee to investigate the matters. Here **Karñik** was the name of an officer, while **Pañckula** might be a people's representative. A conjecture can be made from this that there might be a system of arbitrator and its decision was acceptable.

From all these information it becomes quite clear that though there was a monarchy, for many matters decentralisation was in force. This means that the king was hardly meddling

into day to day affairs.

Blind Faith in Superstition

SK reveals that the Jainism had grown in Rajasthan during 8th century A.D. Other faiths also did exist at the time but SK does not throw much light on them, though we do see the mention of terms such as **Pisācha, Rāksasi, Vyantara, Caṇḍika**. It can be infer that superstition and blind faith might have been prevalent there and then. Lower strata people of the then society might be taking to bad omens. **Candravarmā, Indra, Meghanāda, Kinnera, & Vidyutkumara** are such names from which we can infer that the people of that age might be worshipping heavenly elements and objects of nature. Goddess worship was also in vogue as had been viewed from the prevalence of the names of **Chandrikā, Kinnarī, Yakṣiṇi** et cetera. Sabar and other tribals were also worshipping Goddess. It is believed that the importance of God Shiva alongwith Goddess is always there, but SK does not refer to this god directly.

Importance of Upavāsa

No special discussion could be found in SK regarding religious rituals. The greatness of **Upavāsa** (fast) was recognised then. To keep away miseries of this birth during next one **Upavāsa**, which has been frequently refered to by Haribhadraji in SK, was most important. For this reason Agniśarman took vow of **Upavāsa** taking only one meal every month and that too by visiting only one house. Not only this, but if he did not get any food from that house, he instead of going to another house waited till the next turn i.e. next month. From this incident, it seems, that the people then had a total faith in obseving severe vow if need be. Human sacrifice, of course occasionally, was also in vogue for getting the desired things. (p.530). Tribals such Sabar were also used to offer sacrifice for their desire. Vow was also kept

for having a boy-baby. Both Vaiśramaṇa and his wife Śrīdevī took a vow of worshipping god **Yakṣa** Dhandeva for their desire of having a son and to keep his name after that god (**Bhava** four). After the son was born the merchant couple went to the temple of Yakṣa and after performing the **Pūjā** they named their son as Dhana (p.192-193).

Rebirth : a pivotal concept

The concept of rebirth was considered the powerful character on the realm of the religion then and there. The very creation of this book (i.e.SK) had been built up around this concept. This particular concept was very much within the all living religions of our country as can be known from the study of SK. As this work certainly belongs to Jainism it can be said that the same concept might be very much in vogue in Jainism too. Essentially it was believed to perform **Dharma, Dāna, Tapa, Sādhanā** etc. in this birth as to have happiness and wealth in the next one.

Role of saintly life

The saints might be great devotees of **Jnānakarma** system as can be viewed from the reference of the term **Kevleen**. What emerges from this word is that the learned and educated people of the society were mostly taken to saintly life. Purnachandra once was a dead body carrier and had therefore decided to become a saint. (**Bhava** one). A king had also consulted his cabinet for becoming a **sādhu** (**Bhava** two).

Four Cardinal Characters

Connected with religion was astronomy. People were used to consult an astrologer for **Muhūrta** for performing sacred things. A reference is to be found for observing **Muhūrta** at the time of the marriage between Kusumāvalī and Kuṅvarsinh (**Bhava** two). The study of SK helps us to know that **Dāna, Śīla, Tapa** and **Bhāvanā** were the four major characters of

the religion (**Bhava** three). It seems that people then might be understanding these four elements of religion. Following were enjoying a great importance in religious context : **Sādhu-Dharma**, & **Yati-Dharama** (**Bhava** one), **Bhāvanā-Dharma**, **Dāna-Dharma**, **Śīla-Dharma**, **Tapo-Dharma** (**Bhava** three). **Mañtra**, **Namaskāra**, **Karmas**, **Aṇuvrata** et cetera were considered as part and parcel of the religion.

Social Stratigraphy

Drawing a picture of the then society SK does help by offering good data. Varied people constituted the society. King, **Brāhmaṇ** and saints were enjoying high status in the society. Then comes in the rank were merchant class and government servants. People like **Cāṇḍāl**, fishermen, thieves etc. were considered as the people of lower strata in the society. Even then we do not find a single reference regarding four-fold **varṇa** system in SK.

Marriage System

Though youths of both sex were free to choose their life-partner, the consent of the parents was formally essential. Prince Sinh and princess Kusumāvali had decided to get married, but they did seek the permission of their parents (**Bhava** four). Dhana and Dhanaśree fell in love. The father of Dhana asked for his son the hand of Dhanshree (**Bhava** four). Dowary system was prevalent. The tradition of fire-alter was also there. Exchange of things from lovers was also in vogue. Fruits, floweres, garlands and painting of swan were the objects of exchange between **Kusumāvalī** and **Sinhal** (**Bhava** two, p. 72-86).

Parent's Approval a must

Not only in marriage affairs but in other equally important matters the parents' approval was also considered necessary. Dharaṇ, son of a a merchant Bandhudatta, after returning

from abroad had sought the advise of his parents for his desire to live saintly life—even after earning from his experience a high respect from and a promising offer made by the king, which he very politely declined (**Bhava** six, p. 490).

Miscellaneous Facets

Dream had an important place in the society. Things seen in dreams were considered as true. Shreekāntā, wife of Purushadatta, saw a lion in her dream (**Bhava** two) and in this context she named her new-born as Sinha.

People used to hide wealth as there is a reference in SK of a buried golden-vessel with tunnel containing seven hundred thousand **Dinār** (**Bhava** two). It may be conjectured that people used to bury their precious belongings from the fear of stolen away. This means theft was known to the society. There are references to the thefts in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th **Bhavas**. Maurik was a thief as mentioned in the 6th **Bhava**. Death sentence was imposed for theft or robbery. (**Bhava** three).

We also have an idea of what sorts of currency was in force then & there. **Dinār** was used as an official currency. Oft-repeated references to the word **Dinār** help us to consider this thesis.

A compromise resulted into going abroad for merchandise after a waring dispute between Dharaṇa and Devanaṇḍi. The agreement was made in this context wherein a goods worth five hundred thousand **Dinār** was to be given to both of them (**Bhava** six, pp.410-11). There is a reference to two hundred thousand **Dinār** when queen **Kāntimatī** sent two of her servants to hunt for a proper prince for her daughter (**Bhava** eight, p. 614). It becomes clear from these references that the **Dinār** was the currency of the treasury but there is not a single reference to its various denomination in SK.

A strange custom was prominently in vogue in the then society of Rājasthān in particular and elsewhere in general. It was none other than giving a poison whenever an occasion occurs either of dispute or disagreement or difference of opinion. There are such several references in SK. Because of distrust, Nandayanti gave a snake-poison to Pūrṇabhadra (**Bhava** two, p. 109). Normally it was given by mixing in food. Shikhin was given poison by his mother Jālini (**Bhava** three). To keep away from sea-journey Dhanashree had given a poison to her husband Dhana (p. 202). To hold control over the buried wealth Guṇachandra was given poison by Bālachandra (**Bhava** three).

There might be games of varied nature for entertainment but SK does not throw more light on it. There is a reference of gambling in the 4th and 9th **Bhavas**. Guṇachandra was undergoing a training in Bow-learning (**Bhava** eight). It seems from this reference that Bowing might be one of the games in those days. Varied types of riddles (game) come up in the conversation between Guṇachandra and the two votaries, namely Chitramati and Bhuṣaṇa, sent there by queen Kāntimati as mentioned earlier. In this sort of game a verse can be recited keeping the last alphabet in context which is very similar to present day **Āntākṣari**. There is also a reference to the game like asking questions and getting answers. Guḍha Chaturtha is also referred to in this context (**Bhava** eight). Hence, people of those times might be enjoying their free time playing different games.

Mine of Onomastics

SK is full with numerous place-names and personal-names of varied test and nature. It is also true that many of those names are but fictitious. Even then those fictitious names do help us in framing and designing the patterns of naming things and persons, for the author of the work does reflect

the object, thought and action of the society in which he lived—irrespective of whether names are real or not. Most of the names occurred in SK were emotional & qualitative. e.g. Aparājita, Amarsena, Kāntimati, Guṇachandra, Guṇasena, Chitramati, Jayasundari, Mānabhaṅga, Yashovarma, Vilāsvati et cetera. The second category includes names such as Indradeva, Indraśarmā, Agniśarmā, Candrā, Devanandin, Dharmaghoṣa, Dhanadeva, Dhanaśhree, Nandivardhan, Yajnadatta, Lakṣaṇasena, Lakṣmikānta, Śhrīdevi, Somadeva et cetera.

These names have been originated from personal names of Gods. Aśokadatta, Kumudini, Kusumāvali, Kālamegha, Candrasara, Samudradatta etc. were the names originated from flowers, constellation & natural elements.

Flora-Fauna

We do get some information about the position of flora-fauna from SK. Horse, elephant, donkey, rat, frog, parrot, monkey, goat, peacock, swan, dog, lion, snake etc. were the animals referred to in SK. We also know some thing about trees such as mangoes, coconut, jasmine etc.

To sum up, it can be concluded, in the light of the facts cited above, that SK provides useful information on varieties of things and aspects of cultures and enhance our knowledge about the past of Rājasthān, for it was written there; but being a Jaina Muni, the author had an advantage of knowing things elsewhere while undertaking Vihāra and hence about our country in general.