

Jain Literature as a Source of Social and Cultural Life of Medieval Rajasthan (1400-1800 A. D.)

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Of the sources of the political history of Rajasthan there is no end. Many works printed and hand-written, dealing with the lives of the kings and courtiers are available. They supply graphic accounts of wars, treaties and conquests of military importance. But there is a paucity of the works which deal with the history of organic or national growth. However, this drawback in the writing of history can adequately be made good by the works of the Jain writers who, broadly speaking, deal with the life of man and woman in its varied aspects and his or her achievements in the fields of religion, society, art and literature. They throw light on the pilgrimages of the *saṅghas*, pastime, festivals, fairs, education and several customs, usages and traditions, prevailing during the period. These writers also throw light on the town-planning and the planning of the gardens. A mass of the Jain literature consists of manuals dealing with rituals, rites and code of daily discipline. They also make useful contribution to our knowledge of moral behaviour expected from the people and the princes. There are also some works which have nothing to do with history, yet their prologues, epilogues and colophons often furnish valuable data regarding social, economic and cultural life of the age, to which they belong.

Such writings in the forms of manuscripts and printed publications are available in various *Bhaṇḍāras*¹, repositories of Rajasthan and other places. These priceless treasures consist of *Rāsas*, *Vats*, *Dhālas*, *Dohās*, *Copaīs*, *Caritras*, *Gāthās*, *Kathās*, *Vārtās*, and *Gītas* in Rājasthānī and *Kāvya*s and several digests in Sanskrit, Prākṛit, Apabhraṃśa and Rājasthānī languages. The manuscripts preserved in several Jain temples are extremely valuable, which if surveyed, pooled together and catalogued, can give valuable hints on several courses of events which happened in Rajasthan. The manuscripts, preserved in the temples of Sādrī, Bhiṇḍer, Ghāṇerāo, Nāgaur, Jalore, Alwar, Bharatpur, Lādnū etc., are among the major *Bhaṇḍāras* which have much to furnish and tell.

1 The *Amber Bhaṇḍāra*, Jaipur, The *Jaisalmer Bhaṇḍāra* and the *Bhaṇḍāras* of Bikaner, Nāgaur, Jodhpur, Sādrī, Ghāṇerāo etc., are the *Bhaṇḍāras* of great repute.



Originally, this kind of literature was not very lengthy but with the passage of time it grew in size and contents and began to exert an ever greater influence on the thought and action of the period. Jain writers, for example, concerned themselves less with strictly individual biography and purely political narrative and more with the evolution of social forces and religious as well as social institutions.¹ Muscial literature, for example, was a most helpful and fascinating hand-maid to the understanding of man and the universe. The literature of the period also presented description of mythical aspects and compared folk-customs and thus maintained closed liaison with religion and environment. Such productions were highly appreciated by both materialists and the philosophers. By voice and pen the saints and *sādhus* of Jain order preached prodigious number of bits of information and primitive folk-lore intermixed with philosophical ideas in such a subtle manner that the readers and audience could lead themselves towards a higher plane. In a way the literature referred to above was fostering an intellectual movement of impressive and effective nature.²

In so far as the social life and cultural progress of the vast majority of the people of Rajasthan is concerned, the Jain literature (in prose and poetry), therefore, constitutes for the period under review, our basic source of study. It is both dull and tedious at the occasion of this magnitude to attempt an exhaustive analysis of these assets. I, therefore, crave the reader's indulgence to select a few of the typical examples to highlight their importance.

Such, in the first place, is the *Nābhinandana Jinoddhāra Prabandha* by Kakkarsūri of the 14th century A. D. It consists of five chapters in Sanskrit verses and contains mainly the traditional account of the *Uddhāra* ceremony of the temple of *Śatruñjaya* by Samara Singh, a Jain devotee of repute.³ Accidentally the poet also records the accounts of Ukeṣapur (Osiān) and Kiratkūpa (Kirāḍu), the two important towns of religious and economic importance.⁴ The comments on the life and the court of Alāuddīn Khiljī and the attitudes of the Turkish nobility are of special interest.⁵ The picture of the *Vaiśyas*, as drawn by the writer, is that of incessant toil devoted to religious practices and acts of piety.⁶ As regards the duties and functions of the *Saṅghas*,⁷ our author takes a realistic view. The duties appear to be thoroughly in accord with the practice of the age.

Such is also the work entitled the *Hammīramahākāvya* of Nayacandra Sūri, composed in the 14th century A. D.⁸ It is a historical *Kāvya* of 14 cantos, dealing with the Chauhān ascendancy, particularly the heroic works of Hammīr Deo of Raṇathambhor. Though, it contains unnecessary and meaningless descriptions and digressions, the author cleverly introduces a

1 Compare, References in Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan, G. N. Sharma, pp. 141-142.

2 Compare, Kalpasūtra Paintings of the 16th century, note, Rajasthan Studies, G. N. Sharma, pp. 141-143.

3 *Prastāva*, III, IV.

4 *Prastāva*, I, vv. 43-63, 343-356.

5 *Prastāva*, III, vv. 10-18, 273-317; 318-323.

6 *Prastāva*, I, vv. 32-37.

7 *Prastāva*, IV, vv. 1-19; *Prastāva*, V, vv. 1-23; 174-182 etc. Compare, References from *Rajasthan Studies*, G. N. Sharma, p. 174.

8 Nothing is definite about the date of the work. On some indications of the author it appears that it was completed in or about 14th century A. D., vide *Hammīramahākāvya*, p. 28.

series of descriptions of rainy season¹, *satī* system², religious routine of the Rājā³—all referable, as it were, to those chief subjects. It also contains a few brief notes of the moral views regarding hospitality to the guests, protection to those who sought asylum, feeling of sympathy towards the hungry etc.⁴ From the description of wars and arms it appears that his knowledge of traditional method of the Rājput Warfare and his acquaintance with the improved methods of Turkish military techniques is specific.⁵ For the study of the military history of the 14th century the work may be placed in the first rank.

The next is the *Somasaubhāgyakāvya* of Somasūri. This celebrated work is devoted chiefly to the life-history of Soma Sunder, but it also contains references to the social and cultural aspects of the 15th century. Though, it is, in fact, exceedingly poor in historical details, the period of which it treats is one of the most interesting in the history of Rajasthan—that of the glorious regin of Mahārāṇā Kumbhā. It contains ten cantos in Sanskrit verses with rhapsodical and eloquent stuff which is of little use except to show the author's power of fancy and invention. From the canto 1st to 4th, the author gives details of the stages of Soma Sunder's education. The practice of fixing auspicious hour for commencing his education by the astrologer, the aims of education, the subjects of his study, the last offerings to the teacher made by the pupil and final initiations are important aspects covered by the poet.⁶ The description of Devakulapaṭaka (Delwādā) as an important centre of Jain religion and trade is graphic. We are also told by the author that the market of the town was full of foreign cloths and there were merchants expert in business and commerce.⁷ With regard to the wall-painting the author is specific.⁸ His writing is, therefore, very useful for the study of the growth of Mewār painting. At the end of the work the author bestows praise upon the teachers of Soma Sunder. Hence, inspite of the general meagreness of historical details, the *Kāvya* is contemporary to several items of common practice of education and town life of the 15th century.

There is Samaya Sunder, the writer of several folk-tales in Rājasthāni and Gujrāti, belonging to the 16th & 17th century. From his own pen we learn that he was the son of Rūpsi-Panwār and Lilādevī of Sānchor.⁹ His religious *Guru* was Jinacandra Sūri, the famous Jain saint of high fame. He wrote his *Siṃhalsut* at Mertā in 1672 V. S. (Vikrama saṃvat). At Jaisalmer he wrote the *Valkalcīri* in V. S. 1681. The *Campakaseṭhakathā* was composed at Jālore in V. S. 1695. It appears that he was interested in explaining his compositions to his followers by travelling from place to place.¹⁰ These works may be described as a collection of fictitious stories and anecdotes, written in popular language, illustrative of the virtues, vices and calamities of man-

1 The *Kāvya*, Canto 60, vv. 49-62.

2 Ibid., Canto 13, vv. 173-186.

3 Ibid., Canto 9, vv. 52-90; Canto 13, vv. 39-47

4 Ibid., Canto 14, vv. 17-19

5 Ibid., Canto 11, vv. 70-103

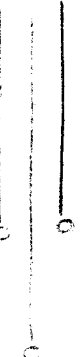
6 Canto II, v. 47; II, v. 57; IV, v. 55.

7 Canto VIII.

8 Canto V. v. 39.

9 *Kusumāñjali*, vide *Samayasunder Rāsa Pañcaka*, Introduction, p. 1. He was born about V. S. 1615.

10 *Samayasunder Rāsa Pañcaka*, Introduction, pp. 2-4.



kind. They are more useful in understanding the prevailing opinions of contemporaries, through the examples of common experience. The story of the sea voyage recorded in *Sindhalsut* appears to bring home the reality of social behaviours of the parties concerned.¹ Other stories are similarly devoted to the illustrations of some mental or intellectual quality expected of the 16th century society.²

Similarly, Hemaratana, the writer of *Gorābādala* (V. S. 1645) belonging to the time of Rāṇā Pratāp; and Jaimal, a Jain *Śrāvaka* of Lāhore, and the writer of the *Gorābādala Copāī* (V. S. 1680) are graphic in their description of a beggar, a soldier etc. They throw a flood of light on the medieval warfare and the heroes of their choice. They emphasize with all their force on an important aspect of 'Swāmī Dharma'—the need of the time. These works have their special place in resolving the problem of Padminī's historicity, which is beyond the purview of of this paper.³

As regards the 17th century Jain Literature the name of Upādhyāya Labdhodaya, a prolific writer, stands pre-eminent. He spent the major part of his life in Mewār and went round Udaipur, Gogundā and Dhūlev time and again. He belongs to the school of the famous Gurus like Jinacandra Sūri, Jinamāṇikya Sūri and Guṇaratna and was the pupil of Gyānkuṣal. According to the *Malayasunder Chopāī* his pupils were Ratna Sunder, Kuṣal Singh, Sānwaladās, Khetsī, Jasaharṣa, Kalyān Sāgar, etc. He composed his famous work *Padminī Copāī* in V. S. 1706-07. It consists of 49 *Dhālas* and 816 *Gāthās* in poetry. The work was written at the instance of Bhāgacanda the minister of the Rāṇā.⁴ It records the geneology of his patron and his successors. Though the work is mainly devoted to the study of the prosperous condition of Chittor and its lay out⁵, its value is chiefly attributable to the social condition and the institutions of the period at which it was written. The occasional references to the game of *Śatarāñjī*⁶, slave girls, dowry⁷, palanquins, court etiquette⁸, importance of the council of the feudal order, dress and diet of the people etc.,⁹ by no means include the whole series of social set-up of the 17th century of Rajasthan.

Khumān Rāso of Dalapat Vijaya may shortly be described as an annals of Mewār History commencing from the early Guhilots to Rāj Singh. It was composed between 1767 to 1790 V. S. The writer introduces himself as the pupil belonging to the order of Sumati Sādhu Sūri, Padamvijaya, Jayavijaya, Śāntivijaya etc. The contents of social history contained in the pages of this work are the *Pardā* System, Slave system, *Satī* system and the mode and manner of dress and diet of the people of status and position. He also registers the duties of the *Kṣatriyas* emphasizing the spirit of sacrifice, boldness and piety as necessary requisites. The ideal of *Kṣātravrata* is

- 1 *Sarvagāthā*, 196. Abhaya Jain Granthāvalī, No. 4318, 89
- 2 *Sarvagāthā*, 215 etc.
- 3 *Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Patrikā*, year 4th, No. 8.
- 4 *Padminīcaritra Copāī*, Introduction, pp. 19-39.
- 5 *Chittor Varaṇana*, vv. 1-11
- 6 *Kriḍā Vijaya*, vv. 1-5
- 7 *Padminīvivāha*, vv. 7, 12, 15, etc.
- 8 *Dehigaman*, vv. 1-5
- 9 *Gorābādālagaman* vv. 1-5, etc.

described at length by the writer in order to infuse a sense of duty in the warrior class. His information regarding the garrison of Chittor, collection of the implements of war in the fort and other preparations are authentic as far as the political environment of 18th century is concerned,¹

To the foregoing account of Jain literature, must be added a few words about its significance. This significance was two-fold. First, a remarkable extension of Jain missionary activity; and second, purging of superstitions especially through popular songs and tales. It acquired, at any rate, a taste for education, love for religion and art. As far as the intellectuals were concerned, it gradually wrought a veritable revolution. Some turned to reform-movement seeking to reconcile their traditional faith with modern developments. The literature also provided profound effect on Indian culture and society and showed how it provided a cultural endorsement of traditional social stratification and the concept of religious and cultural awakening.

The picture of the social and cultural position of Rajasthan which emerges from our survey of this sample material will help us to draw similar and other relevant facts from the vast and scattered Jain literature of importance.



1 (a) *Nāgarī Pracārīnī Patrikā*, Year 44, No. 4
(b) *Padmīnīcaritra Cōpāī*, pp. 129-181.