

## Perculiarities of Jain Mahārāṣṭrī Literature\*

(A Brief Chronological and Subject wise  
Survey with Critical Remarks)

**Dr. Nalini Joshi**

Professor, H.N.Jain Chair,  
University of Pune.

**Introduction** : Jainology or Jain studies is a wholesome branch of knowledge in the perspective of Indian Culture. The edifice of Jain Tradition is based on four pillars, viz. 1) History or Antiquity, 2) Philosophy and Logic, 3) Literature and 4) Art and Sculpture. In the early years of my career, I entered Jainism through the gateways of Prakrit languages. Therefore, when I selected "Spectrum of Jainism in Maharashtra", my attention was immediately drawn towards Jain Mahārāṣṭrī literature. In this paper, I will try to draw a brief sketch of Jain Mahārāṣṭrī literature with its highlights.

The variety of languages used by Jainas is stunning. No other religion in India had carried out its literary activities in various Prakrit dialects than Jainas. The ancient canonical texts of Śvetambares are written in Ardhamāgadhī and that of Digambaras in Jain Śauraseni. Vācaka Umāsvatī introduced Sanskrit in Jain literature by writing Tattvārthsūtra in Sūtra style (4th Cen. A.D.). Many Śve. and Dig. Ācāryas continued their writing in Skt., the language of classes, up to 15th Cen. A.D.. Ācārya Bhadrabāhu (IIInd) started commentarial work on Ardhamāgadhī canons in Jain Mahārāṣṭrī in the 3rd Cen. A.D. by writing his Nijjuttis. All Śve. Ācāryas preferred J.M. for their literary activities in Prkt. up to 15th Cen. A.D.. In the meantime the religious and the philosophical teachings were written down in manuals in verse by scholars like Kundakunda, Vattakera and

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Yativṛṣabha and others up to the 12th Century. All these writings are included in the scope of Jain Śauraseni. The language found in all these books is fairly uniform but differs considerably from the Jain Mahārāṣṭrī. Though Dig. continued their writings in JŚ., number of treatises is declining. Variety of subjects and literary forms is comparatively much less than that of JM. When Apabhraṁśa dialects took literary form, Dig. writers started their writings in Apa.. Though the first Apa. epic of Svayambhu was written in 8th - 9th Century A.D., Digambara Ācāryas were in their full form between 10th up to 15th centuries. Their language is fairly uniform and constitutes the bulk of Apa. literature mostly dedicated to Caritas. The most striking feature of the Apa. literature is the fact that the whole of it is written in verses and there hardly exists any prose in it. The Apa. Works written by non-jain writers are scanty. Chronologically last part of Apa. is practically the beginning of New Indo Aryan language.

The facts which we get through this brief language-sketch of Jain literature, gives rise to ample curiosities about the Peculiarities of JM. literature.

### **Mahārāṣṭrī and Jain Mahārāṣṭrī**

In Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra, (2nd-3rd Cen. B.C.) Bhāṣās and Vibhāṣās are mentioned. Mahārāṣṭrī is not enumerated in it. Some Scholars try to prove that Dākṣiṇātyā of Bharata is Mahārāṣṭrī. Others did not agree with it. In Caṇḍa's Prākṛtalakṣana (3rd-4th Cen. A.D.) Vararuci's Prākṛtaprakāśa (6th Cen. A.D.) and in Siddhahemavyākaraṇa (12th Cen.A.D.) Mahārāṣṭrī is treated in the beginning as Sāmānya Prākṛta or Aṛṣa Prākṛta. From the date of Daṇḍin (6th Cen A.D.) onwards it is named Mahārāṣṭrī and is thought to be the best Prakrit in which famous epics were composed. (Daṇḍin-Kāvyaśdarśa 1.35). He says that the language originated in Mahārāṣṭrā is Mahārāṣṭrī.

Dr. Hornle points out that 'Mahārāṣṭra includes Rajputana and Madhyadeśa at that time. If we observe the proficiency of the Jain writers over this language, It is quite obvious that this

Mahā-rāṣṭra (big region) includes, today's geographical Maharaṣṭra, lower part of Gujarat, Madhyapradesh and also upper part of Karnataka. At least we can assume that the people residing in this bigger central part of India were able to understand the Mahārṣṭri used by Jain Ācāryas.

It is observed by the eminent scholars like Jacobi, Pischel and Konow that in classical Skt. dramas, the Prakrit used in prose passages by ladies and lower characters is Śaurasenī. We can say that Mahārāṣṭri used by non-Jain authors in Skt. dramas, Epics and Anthologies like Gāhāsattasai was quite favorable for poetical compositions. Jain Ācāryas used it for both, i.e. poetry as well as prose. The scholars like Jacobi and Pischel named it as Jain Mahārāṣṭri. The name became very popular and accepted by late Dr. A.M.Ghatge in Prakrit-English comprehensive dictionary. Śvetāmbara writers started their JM. writings in 3rd Century A.D. and continued up to 5th century A.D.. In the early centuries of Christian Era, two prominent languages were in vogue viz. Śaurasenī and Mahārāṣṭri. During this period, the differences between Śve. and Dig. were quite clear. Since Dig. had already started their philosophical writings in Śaurasenī, naturally Śve. writers chose Mahārāṣṭri for their post canonical writings. A new literary style was developed which was suitable for their philosophical, doctrinal, didactic and conductal writings.

**Close association of Jain Ācāryas with Mahārāṣṭra :**

Due to various reasons like severe famines, political unrest and foreign invasions, the religious activities of Jain Saṃgha were naturally shifted towards Madhya-deśa and Southern lands.

From the legendary histories of Jainas (viz. Vividhatirtha-kalpa, Prabandhakośa, Prabhavakarita etc.) it is known that many influential Śve. Ācāryas were in close contact with Mahārāṣṭra.

It is known from the history of Ancient India that after the death of Aśoka, Āndhrabhṛtya Sātavāhana Kings ruled over

Mahārāṣṭra from 3rd Century B.C. up to 3rd Century A.D.. In Prabandhakośa, Rājaśekhara mentions,

सातवाहनोऽपि क्रमेण दक्षिणापथमनृणं विधाय तापीतीरपर्यटं चोत्तरापथं साधयित्वा स्वकीयसंवत्सरं प्रावीवृत्त् (Prabandhakośa. pp.66-74)

The 17th king of this dynasty was Hāla Sātavāhana, who became famous for his anthology viz. Gahāsattasai. Guṇāḍhya who is famous for his paiśācī narrative Vaḍḍakahā, is said to be an honoured poet in the assembly of Sātavāhana. Through all these legendary histories it is evident that all the Sātavāhanas were interested in Prakrits and especially in Mahārāṣṭri. Pratiṣṭāna (or Paiṭhaṇa) and Nāsikya were the capital cities of Sātavāhanas.

According to Prbandhakośa, Niryuktikāra Bhadrabāhu and Varāhamihira were two brahmin brothers, residents of Pratiṣṭāna. Various legendary stories of both are mentioned in this Prabandha. The famous 'Uvasaggahara Stotra' was composed by Bhadrabāhu in his stay at Pratiṣṭāna. After the time-lapse of 800 years, it was necessary to write explanatory notes on Ardhamāgadhī canons. It was very much logical to write it in Prakrit, in continuation with the spirit of Lord Mahāvira. Bhadrabāhu wrote ten Niryuktis in Prakrit Gathā form. Since he was the resident of Pratiṣṭāna he chose Mahārāṣṭri language which was naturally influenced by Ardhamāgadhī. Further Śve. Ācāryas wrote their Bhāṣya and Curṇis following the tradition laid down by Bhadrabāhu IInd.

The famous Jain Ācārya Kālaka (4th Cen A.D.) came to Pratiṣṭāna in the last lap of his wanderings. He had discussions with Sātavāhana about the date of Paryūṣaṇa. After this incidence, Kālaka stayed at Pratiṣṭāna until his death. Due to this association, there are at least three Kālākācārya-kathānakas written in JM, which were critically edited by Sten Konow.

Pādaliptācārya is a frequently quoted Śve. Ācārya of 5th Century. It is noted in Prabandhakośa that he arrived at Pratiṣṭāna and created a Campūkāvya named Taraṅgalolā. (प्रबन्धकोष pp.

11-14) ) This beautiful literary work (which is not available now) inspired many poets to write their poetries in JM.

The famous logician Siddhasena Divākara, his Guru Vṛddhavadī and Śantisūri, the first commentator of Uttarādhyaṇa were also closely connected with Pratiṣṭhāna and Nāsikya during their wanderings.

This legendary and historical data is sufficient to throw light on the background of the bulk of Jain Mahārāṣṭri literature.

### Special Features of JM. Literature :

Niryuktis on 10 Ardhamāgadhī canons, some of the Prakīrṇakas, two Cūlikāsūtras, three Bhāṣyas along with Viśeṣāvaṣyaka and Cūrṇis of Jinadāsagaṇi - the language of all these works is generally known as Ārṣa Prākṛta because it is influenced by Ardhamāgadhī. Though Mahārāṣṭri elements are prominent, still we find same linguistic characteristics of Māgadhī and Śaurasenī. Vimalasūri's Paumacariyam (4th Cen A.D.) is also included in this category. This narrative poetry was written excluding the impossible and illogical elements of Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa. This first Jain Rāmāyaṇa inspire many writers to present Rāmāyaṇakathā in Jain manner. The poetic justice given to the female characters (viz. Sitā, Añjanā, Kaikeyī and Mandodarī) is unique in itself.

Vasudevahiṇḍī jointly written by Saṃghadāsa and Dharmasena in 5th Cen. A.D. is also noted as a grant narrative presented in Ārṣa Prākṛta or old Jain Mahārāṣṭri. The part of the book viz. Madhyama Khaṇḍa shows the linguistic characteristics of Śaurasenī. In the history of Indian Literature, Vasudevahiṇḍī acquired very esteemed position due to its curious connection with Vaḍḍakahā of Guṇādhaya.

In the 6th or 7th Century, the great Śve. logician Siddhasena wrote Sanmatitarka in JM. in which he discussed the Nayas, in a comprehensive manner on the view of Anekāntavāda. Sanmati is one of the very few JM. works on logic.

Haribhadra is the most celebrated, honoured and versatile author in the 8th century.

Throughout his life he wandered in Rājasthāna and Gujrat and never visited Mahārāṣṭra. It seems that with a sound background of Skt. he acquired the skills in JM. and produced (i) a huge prose narrative like Samaraicakahā, (ii) a unique satirical work like Dhuttakkahāṇa which inspired Skt. Dharamapariḡṣā and Apabhraṃśa Dhammapariḡkha in the later period, (iii) first JM. book dedicated to Yoga in Jain manner (viz. Yogasayaya), (v) other treatises related to Karma theory, Monastic conduct, Layman's conduct, Didactic and Karaṇa-nuyoga. Haribhadra included a lot of folk stories, examples, fables and traditional religious stories in his commentaries on Āvassaya and Dasaveyāliya. Though the explanations of Sūtras are given in Skt., he had purposely used JM. for this stories.

Conclusively we can say that the JM. used by Haribhadra represents it's classical form. His language comes nearest to pure Mahārāṣṭri. His vocabulary consists of a lot of old Gujrati deśi words, influence of Skt. in the use of *cvī* forms, compounds ending in *bhūya* (bhūta) and ample literary words. This classical form reaches its height in Kuvalayamālā of Uddyotanasūri. This monumental Campūkāvya, full of rich cultural data is written in the last lap of the 8th Century.

When we cast a glance to the 9th Century - literary, it is seem that the variety of subjects in remarkable. JM. works in this century are concerned to Philosophy, Anthology, Didactic, Karman, Hymns and Legendary histories. Śilānka started the tradition of writing Caritas in JM. along with his commentaries on Ācārāṅga and Sūtrakṛtāṅga. Bappabhaṭṭi wrote his anthology Tārayaṇa, who was in the close contact with Vākpatirāja (Bappairāya) the poet of famous Mahārāṣṭri work Gauḍavaho.

Virabhadra, belonging the 10th century, wrote his Prakirṇakas viz. Ārāhaṇapaḍāyā, Āurapaccakkhāṇa, Causaraṇa and Bhattapariṇṇa in Ārṣa Prakrit form. The language and

presentation of the subjects were so revered among the Śvetāmbaras that the Prakīrṇakas were treated as a part of canonical literature. Devsana's works on logic, Devendrasūri's Kalakācārya Kathānaka, Dhanapāla's celebrated lexicon of Prakrit words and Nanditāḍhya's work on metrics (viz. Gāhālakkhaṇa) are the remarkable treatises of this century. Pradyumna's off-beat stories are also noteworthy which are included in Mūlasuddhipagaraṇa. Carita tradition is continued in this century.

In the 11th Century, we find nine Caritas written in JM. which are published up till now. Three of them are written by Devendra alias Nemicandra, famous author of Sukhabodhā, a comm. on Uttarādhyayana. Dhaneśvara's Surasundaricariya gives sole importance to a woman character which is unique and has given rise to the tradition of women-centered Caritas. Many Kathākoṣas are written in which Devendra's Akkhāṇamaṇikosa, Guṇacandra's Kahārayaṇakosa and Jineśvara's Kathākoṣa-prakaraṇa are most important. Maheśvara's Nāṇapañcamikahā started the tradition of Vratākathas. Prakaraṇas and Kulakas are the new literary forms developed in this century.

12th Century seems to be very crucial in the history of JM. literature. Tendency of writing in JŚ. is almost stopped. The number of Skt. works of Śve. and Dig. are rapidly increasing. JM. Works are almost equal to that of Skt. works. Apabhramśa works in this century had seen to be taken classical literary form. Digambara writers are writing Apa. works with full enthusiasm. Detailed grammer of Apa. is written by Hemacandra in his Siddhahemavyākaraṇa along with the examples of Apa. verses chosen from non-Jain background. The peak point of Jain logic is seen in Pramāṇamīmāṃsā, a celebrated Skt. work of Kalikalāsarvajña Hemacandra. He continued the tradition of JM. writings by presenting his unique lexical works Deśināmālā and Kumārapālacarita. Maladhāri Hemacandra wrote the Ṭippanas on canons, Malaygiri's huge commentarial work is the speciality

of this century. Muncandra wrote five Kulakas and three Prakaraṇas. His Vanaspatisaptatikā is remarkable. Śricandra wrote in JM. and Skt. very fluently.

In the 13th Century, JM. literature is comparatively less than Skt. and Apabhramsa literature is steadily growing.

Thakkura Pheru, a treasurer of Allauddin Khilji wrote many scientific and technical works in 14th Century. His small treatises are extremely important in JM. literature. These treatises are dedicated to Numismatics, Metallurgy, Mathematics, Astrology, Gemmology and Architecture. Ratnaśekhara wrote on Ethics, Karaṇānuyoga, Caraṇānuyoga and Caritas. Jinaprabha's Vidhimārgaprapā is an authentic work on rituals. Growing ritualistic tendencies in Jain religion are reflected in Jinaprabha's other works also. Jayavallabha's anthology called Vajjālagga and Nayacandra's Prakrit drama - Saṭṭaka are two remarkable works of this century.

In the 15th Century, JM. works show declining tendency. Jinaharsa, Somaçandra, Śubhavardhana, Sakalakīrti and Cāritravardhana wrote in JM. but the variety of subjects and literary forms is not seen. Caritas and Kathākoṣas are ample in number but lack in originality and imitation prevail over creativity.

This is the brief sketch of JM. literature from 3rd Century A.D. up to 15th Century A.D..

## CONCLUSION

### Important Observations about JM. Literature :

- \* In no other Prakrit language than JM. such a huge literature is produced in India for such a long period (from 3rd Cen A.D. up to 15th Cen. A.D.)
- \* Since the Dig. had already chosen Śauraseni for their literary activities, Śve. writers had naturally undertaken Mahārāṣṭri.



- \* Mahārāṣṭrī was understandable in the bigger middle region of India during this period.
- \* Skt. was the medium of higher education, so naturally Scientific and Technical works and Classical literature of non-Jain traditions is ample in quality and quantity. Lord Mahāvira was very keen about his religions sermons through Prakrit medium. JM. played the role of Rāṣṭrabhāṣā at that time. Now-a-days though the medium of higher education is English, still Hindi possesses a status of Rāṣṭrabhāṣā, likewise side by side with the regional colloquial languages and Skt., JM. played an important role. Śve. writers continued JM. writings following the footsteps of Lord Mahavira.
- \* The earlier Śve. Jain Ācāryas like Bhadrabāhu, Kālakācārya, Pādalipta etc. were closely associated with Mahārāṣṭra and specifically Pratiṣṭhāna. Nearly for six centuries Satavāhanas ruled over Mahārāṣṭra who were pro-prakrit by nature and liberal in religious matters.
- \* JM. had undergone three distinct stages during this long period of twelve centuries.

(i) Ist Stage : 3rd to 6th Century.

The various Niryuktis, Bhāṣyas, Cūṛṇis and the narrative works like Paumacariya, Vasudevahiṇḍī and others may be taken to represent the archaic form of JM.. It was influenced by Ardhamāgadhi.

(ii) IInd Stage : 7th to 10th Century.

In its classical form, as represented by Haribhadra, Uddyotanasūri, Śilāṅka and Dhanapāla, it shows influence of Skt. but still maintaining tendencies of colloquial languages in variety of forms and the use of Deśi words.

(iii) IIIrd Stage : 11th to 15th century.

The late form of JM. is best seen in the stories of Devendra

in Utt. Sukh. and the anthology called Vajjālagga. Here we see a strong influence of the Apabharamśa dialects making it felt both in its phonology and grammar. This Apa. influence originates from the spoken languages of the authors.

After 15th Century we see that JM. is declining and Apa. is increasing. From the 16th and 17th Centuries, the history of our modern Indo-Aryan Languages Starts.

Though variety of subjects and literary forms is obviously seen in JM. literature, it is a fact that scientific and technical works as well as words on Logic are comparatively much less than in Skt. But the role played by JM. in providing rich Cultural, Social and Religious data is really very useful in understanding Indian culture in better manner. No other Prakrit language than JM. is capable in throwing light on the life of masses in India during this long period.

C/o. Ganeshkhind

Pune, 411007

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