



# Jain Literature in Kannada

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## Jain Literature in General

Jaina literature in its earliest phase is found in Prakrit viz., Ardhamāgadhī and Jaina Śaurasenī. According to the Śvetāmbara tradition, after Lord Mahāvīra taught the Sacred Laws in the Ardhamāgadhī language, his teachings, as received and composed by Sudharmā (the 5th Gaṇadhara) in the twelve Aṅgas, were preserved through *svādhyāya* on the tongues of generations of monks for about a thousand years and then were finally put to writing, more or less, in the same language<sup>1</sup> at the Vallabhī Council convened by Devardhigaṇī in 454 A. D. According to the Digambara tradition, the canonical knowledge of the twelve Aṅgas was almost lost except some portion of the 12th Aṅga and a part of the 5th Aṅga which have been preserved in the *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* by the great foresight of Ācārya Dharasena and the sincere efforts of the two learned monks Puṣpadanta and Bhūtabali who composed it in Jaina Śaurasenī between the 1st and 2nd centuries A. D.<sup>2</sup> Besides almost all other works of the pro-canon of the Digambaras have also been composed in Jaina Śaurasenī.

After the appearance of the principal canonical works in Ardhamāgadhī and Jaina Śaurasenī, commentaries of varied types were written in Jaina Mahārāṣṭrī, Jaina Śaurasenī and also in Sanskrit. Thereafter Jaina teachers and scholars commenced to produce original works in Sanskrit, in addition to those in Prakrit, possibly to convince and propagate their religious tenets in Sanskrit-knowing circles and also to expand their influence over rival groups and others by composing worthy works of secular nature too. There also arose a situation when Sanskrit was preferred to Prakrit as a literary medium. Shri K. M. Munshi, observes :<sup>3</sup> "The revolt in favour of using Sanskrit as against Prakrit, headed by Siddhasena Divākara (C. 533 A. D.) was an attempt to raise the literature and the thought of the Jainas to the high intellectual level attained by those of the Brahmins. This revolt naturally met with considerable opposition from the orthodox Sādhus."

Moreover wherever the Jaina teachers moved and settled down they adopted the language of the soil, cultivated it and produced in it excellent works of varied interests. Tamil and Kannada literatures stand out as classical examples of this Jaina feat in South India, whereas Apabhraṃśa (the forerunner of the New Indo-Āryan languages), Hindī, Rājasthānī and Gujarātī hold out this fact to a notable extent in North India. Thus in the long cultural history of India, the contribution of the Jainas to Indian literature and thought can be seen through the media of Prakrit (Ardhamāgadhī, Jaina Śaurasenī, Jaina Mahārāṣṭrī and Apabhraṃśa) and Sanskrit, through Hindī, Rājasthānī, Gujarātī in North India and Tamil and Kannada in South India. And this contribution, as assessed by eminent scholars like Winternitz,<sup>4</sup> is of no mean value.

## Jaina Literature in South Indian Languages

The beginning and growth of Jaina literature in South Indian languages is invariably



connected with the advent and prosperity of Jainism in South India. According to a well-known South Indian tradition, Jainism entered into South India with the great migration of the Jaina Saṅgha, headed by the Śrutakevalī Bhadrabāhu and accompanied by his royal disciple Candragupta, who left Madhyadeśa owing to the twelve year famine, moved to the South and had their first colony at Kaḷbappu (Śravaṇabelgoḷa) in C. 300 B.C. Then a part of the Saṅgha under Viśākhacārya moved further to the Tamil country. But an evidence of the existence of Jainism in Ceylon in C. 400 B.C. led scholars to serious thinking and, then, to a reasonable conclusion that Jainism had made its entrance into the Telugu country via Kalinga during the life-time of Mahāvira himself (C. 600 A. D.), passed on to the Tamil country and then reached Ceylon and that consequently the Jaina followers were already in Karnatak before the great migration.<sup>5</sup>

This acceptable track of Jainism in South India would naturally tempt us to expect from the Telugu region, which was the first and earliest to receive the Jaina teachers and scholars, rich and varied forms of Jaina literature in the Telugu language. But the actual state of things is quite different : there are found just less than a half dozen Jaina works belonging to the later period, the earliest available literary work in the language being the *Mahābhārata* of Nannayya Bhaṭṭa (C. 1050 A.D.). But taking into consideration the very early advent of Jainism into the Telugu country, the available Jaina epigraphs and the various Jaina vestiges, scholars opine that at the beginning Jainism had its hold in several parts of the Telugu country. Then rivalling with Buddhism on one hand and the Hindu reaction on the other, it established its influence over different strata of society and had made Krishna and Guntur districts its strong-holds. The 9th and 10th centuries were prosperous for it. By the middle of the 11th century, the mighty and violent Hindu revival swept it away when all Jaina literary works might have been destroyed.<sup>6</sup> The names like *danavulapāḍu* (Place of demons) given to a Jaina vestige is sufficient to indicate the whole dreadful story.<sup>7</sup> Hence it will not be hazardous if we surmise a Jaina period in the Telugu literary history between the 9th and 11th centuries.

But in the Tamil country, which received Jainism in two streams as noted above, Jaina literature had a good beginning and considerable growth until the Śaiva saints and the Vaiṣṇava Alvēras strongly reacted and produced vast literature of their own. As usual the Jaina monks and scholars soon picked up the Tamil language, cultivated it for literary usage and produced in it a good amount of literature in its varied branches : inscriptions, poetry, prosody, grammar, lexicography, mathematics, astrology etc.<sup>8</sup> To mention a few :<sup>9</sup> *Tolkāppiyam* (C. 450 A.D.)—the most authentic Tamil grammar, *Tirukkuraḷ* (C. 600 A.D.)<sup>10</sup>—the immortal Tamil Veda, *Śilappadikāram* (C. 800 A.D.)—the well-known Tamil classic of abiding interest, *Jīvaka Cintāmaṇī* (C. 1000 A.D.)—the great romantic epic and *Vasudevanār Sindam* (?),<sup>11</sup> which is based on the Pāisācī Bṛhat-kathā of Guṇāḍhya and which stands in rank with the Prakrit *Vasudevahiṇḍī*—are all by Jaina authors. The Tamil Jaina inscriptions, as observed by scholars in the field,<sup>12</sup> clearly show the Jaina contribution to the growth of Tamil language and literature.

When we come to the Malayālam language of Kerala, the Southern portion of the west coast of India, we do not find any Jaina contribution in it. The reason is obvious that it happens to be the youngest of the Dravidian group of languages which had its distinctive existence just by the 10th century A.D. Until when Śendamil (Pure Tamil) was the sole language of the land. The first Malayālam literary pieces go back to C. 13th century A. D.<sup>13</sup> Yet there are reasons to believe that Jainism had its spread and roots in this country too. It is interesting to note that Prof. A. Chakravarti, while presenting critical observations on the *Śilappadikāram*, writes<sup>14</sup> “Mr. Logan in his Malabar District Manual states several important points indicating the Jaina influence over the people of Malabar coast before the introduction of Hinduism.” Moreover, Dr. P. B. Desai, basing his study on the notes on the Chitral inscription and the Jaina vestiges in Travancore published in the Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. I (1910-13), pp. 193 ff., and Vol. II (1920), pp. 125 ff., comes to conclusion that approximately the age of 9th to 11th centuries

constituted the glorious period of Jainism in Keral.<sup>15</sup> Hence we can reasonably expect some Jaina literature produced in Keral during this period. But according to the linguistic picture of the country of this period, as viewed above, such literature could be in Tamil alone

And lastly coming to Kannada, we find that this has been for the Jaina scholars—monks and lay disciples, the most favourite of the South Indian languages in which they have left a very rich literary heritage in addition to their contributing significantly to the general cultural wealth of the land which they have described as the home of Jainism in one of their inscription.<sup>16</sup>

#### Jaina Literature in Kannada

Jaina literature in Kannada, being vast and varied, is a topic for an independent monograph. Hence taking just a bird's researching eye-view of it or presenting a descriptive and critical sketch of outstanding works and authors, high-lighting some of the findings of the recent researches, could alone be within the range of my attempt here.<sup>17</sup>

The earliest available Jaina literature in Kannada can be said to be in inscriptional form belonging to C. 7th century A.D. and even a little earlier. In the epigraphic wealth of Karnataka the Jaina share is of considerable volume and value<sup>18</sup> and it extends even up to the end of the 18th century. Many of the Kannada Jaina inscriptions are metrically composed and have high poetic quality. Some of them also provide us with varied data of religious, social and political importance. It can be remembered with pride that the appearance of the Śravaṇabelgoḷa inscriptions in the Epigraphia Carnatica Volumes gave the Jaina studies a historic and scientific turn and inspired towards the birth of the esteemed volumes of the Jaina Śilālekha Saṅgraha in the M. D. J. series.

Then the earliest available Jaina literary work in Kannada is the *Kavirājamārga*, a treatise on poetics, of Nṛpatuṅga, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa King, also known as Amoghavarṣa (815—877 A.D.) who was a disciple of Ācārya Jinasena. This work on poetics naturally presupposes the existence of a pretty good number of earlier Kannada works. Nṛpatuṅga mentions several names of earlier eminent writers of Kannada prose and poetry : Vimala, Udaya, Nāgārjuna, Jayabandhu and Durvinīta as eminent prose-writers ; Śrīvijaya, Kavīśvara, Paṇḍita, Candra and Lokapāla as renowned poets. Unfortunately we do not get any exact and decisive information about these authors, Durvinīta is identified as the Gaṅga King who was a disciple of Devanandī or Pūjyapāda. Kavīśvara is surmised as Kaviparamēṣṭhi praised by the Ācāryas Jinasena and Guṇabhadra. Any way it is quite possible that several of these authors were Jains.

Besides such eminent authors there are a few great ones who, along with their works, are known by references only : Syāmakuṇḍācārya wrote a commentary in 12,000 gathas on the *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and *Kaṣāya Prābhṛta* in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Kannada. He is placed in C. 600 A. D. Tumbaḷūrācārya wrote on these very works another commentary in Kannada, named *Cūḍāmaṇi* extending over 91,000 gāthās. He is placed between round-about 650 A.D. Moreover some so far unidentified scholar wrote on the *Tatvārthasūtra* an exhaustive commentary in Kannada extending over 96,000 gāthās. Though anything definite about its date cannot be said, it must be more or less on the same antiquity as that of the two commentaries on the *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* noted above. Lastly, Bhrājṣṇu wrote in Kannada a voluminous commentary on the *Mūlārādhana* (*Bhagavati Ārādhana*).<sup>19</sup> It appears to have been in prose and possibly belonging to the period anterior to that of Nṛpatuṅga.

Had these four commentarial works, together with those of the eminent authors mentioned by Nṛpatuṅga, been available to us, the glory of the early Kannada literature, as mainly built by the Jaina teachers and scholars, would have stood before our eyes in its far factual vividness than could be just conjectured now; and also the early line of development of Kannada literature could have been restored to a great extent. Hence all these four commenta-



rial works can be said to represent a hidden landmark in the history of early Kannada literature and I am tempted to call the period covered by these works, together with a few other ones,<sup>20</sup> the Period of the great Jaina Commentaries, which could in all probability be the 6th and 7th centuries A. D.

Next to *Kavirājamārga* is available the *Vaḍḍārādhane* (C. 925 A. D.) the earliest available prose work in Kannada which is based on the *Mūlārādhana* (*Bhagavatī Ārādhana*) of Śivārya. It is an *Ārādhana Kathakośa* standing in rank with similar *Kathakośas* of Hariṣeṇa, Śricandra, Nemidatta and Prabhācandra. This can be said to be the only *Ārādhana Kathakośa* in modern Indian languages, Aryan or Dravidian, and hence, is of great oriental value. It shows considerable influence of the diction of the Prakrit narrative works and is unparalleled in Kannada literature in respect of its excellence of language and literary style.<sup>21</sup> Along with this classic can be mentioned another prose work, the *Cāvuṇḍarayapurāṇa* (C. 978 A. D.), composed by the great Cāmuṇḍarāya. The prose of this work shows some Prakrit influence; but the language is more Sanskrit-ridden.

Now entering the realm of poetry, we first meet Pampa (941 A. D.), the greatest of the Kannada poets. He is known as the Ādikavi of Karnataka. His *Ādipurāṇa* and *Vikramārjunavijaya*, composed in the Campū style, are the masterpieces in Kannada literature. Ponna (C. 950 A. D.), known as Kavicakravartī, composed his *Śāntipurāṇa* in the same Campū style. Ranna (C. 993 A. D.) also entitled as Kavicakravartī by the Cālukya King Tailapa, gave us the far esteemed *Ajītapurāṇa* and *Gadāyudha*. All these three poets are known as the Ratnatraya of Kannada literature.

Among other eminent Jaina poets who flourished after this great trio, the following are worthy of special mention along with their respective works : *Śāntināthapurāṇa* (1068 A. D.)—*Sukumāracarita*; Nāgacandra or Abhinavapampa (C. 1100 A. D.)—*Ramcandracarītapurāṇa* and *Mallināthapurāṇa* Brahmasīva (C. 1100 A. D.)—*Samayaparīkṣe* and *Trailokyacūḍāmaṇi Stotra*; Nayasena (C. 1112 A. D.)—*Dharmāmṛta*; Nemicaṇḍra (C. 1170 A. D.)—*Nemināthapurāṇa* known as *Ariṣṭanemi* and also a secular romance called *Līlāvatī*; Aggaḷa (C. 1189 A. D.)—*Candra-prabhapurāṇa*; Bandhuvarma (C. 1200 A. D.)—*Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*; Guṇavarma II (C. 1225 A. D.)—*Puṣpadantapurāṇa*; Janna (C. 1230 A. D.)—*Yaśodharacarita* and *Anantanāthapurāṇa*, Āṇḍayya (C. 1300 A. D.)—*Kabbigara Kāva*, an interesting secular work written in pure Kannada without the mixture of Sanskrit words; Nāgarāja (C. 1331 A. D.)—*Puṇyāsrava*, Mudhura (C. 1385 A. D.)—*Dharmanāthapurāṇa*; Bhāskara (C. 1424 A. D.)—*Jīvandharacarite*; Bommarasa (C. 1485 A. D.)—*Sanatkumāracarite*; and Ratnākaraṇḍavarni (C. 1557 A. D.)—*Bharateśa Vaibhava*.

The Jainas, being the earliest cultivators of the Kannada language, have predominantly contributed to its grammar, lexicography, prosody and poetics : Nāgavarma's (II) *Karṇāṭaka-Bhāṣābhūṣaṇa* (C. 1145) in Sanskrit Sutras, Keśirāja's *Śabdamaṇidarpaṇa* (C. 1260 A. D.) in Kannada and Bhaṭṭākalaṅka's *Śabdānuśāsana* (1604 A. D.) in Sanskrit with his own exhaustive commentary are well-known grammatical works among which that of Keśirāja is accepted as the most authoritative one. Ranna's *Rannakanda* and Nāgavarma's (II) *Vastukośa* are the earliest lexicons. Nāgavarma's (I) *Chandombundhi* (C. 990 A. D.) is the earliest extinct work on Kannada prosody. Nṛpatuṅga's *Kavirājamārga* (C. 815 A. D.), Nāgavarma's *Kāvyaṅvalokana* (C. 1145 A. D.) and Sāḷva's *Rasaratnākara* (C. 1500 A. D.) are notable works on Kannada poetics.

Besides inscriptions and commentaries, poetry and prose (with biography, religion, philosophy, metaphysics, logic etc.) grammar and lexicography, prosody and poetics, the Jaina scholars also applied themselves to several other fields like Mathematics, astrology, medicine, veterinary science, toxicology, cookery etc. and have produced many interesting books on these subjects. The last notable Jaina contribution to Kannada literature may be said to be in the field of history—rather quasi-history (Jaina traditional history and chronology) i. e., the *Rājāva-*

*Īkathē* by Devacandra, composed at the instance of a queen of the Mysore Royal Family. The number of Jain authors in Kannada, as noted by the late M. M. R. Narasimhachar some forty years ago, is about two hundred.<sup>22</sup> To this number may be added another hundred found in recent years. A cursory survey of the *Kannada Prāntīya Tāḍapatriya Granthasūci*<sup>23</sup> and the *List of Unmentioned works of the History of Kannada Literature*,<sup>24</sup> shows that there are numerous Kannada Jain authors and Jain works (some without the author's names) awaiting publication. All these are of the nature of commentaries on the Prakrit works of Kundakunda, Vattakera. Kārtikeya, Nemicaṇḍra etc., their translations and digests, their imitations, Purāṇas, Caritas, collections of stories etc.

### Conclusion

The Jain teachers and scholars happen to be the earliest cultivators of Kannada language for literary purpose. Unfortunately the earlier line of the development of Kannada literature, for the laying of which mainly the Jain scholars appear to have been responsible, is not traceable. The great Kannada Jain Commentaries on the pro-canonical works in Prakrit and Sanskrit represent a hidden landmark in the early history of Kannada literature of the 6th and 7th centuries A.D. There must have flourished several Jain writers of prose and poetry during the period of the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. i.e., prior to the appearance of the *Kavirājamārga* and a pretty good number of the authors mentioned in it must have been Jain teachers and scholars. The period between the 9th and 13th centuries A.D. can reasonably be called not only the Jain Period but also the 'Augustan Age' of Kannada literature, though Jain authors continued to appear here and there up to the middle of the 19th Century A.D. The Jain literature in Kannada though religious in the main, it also possesses a number of secular works produced for the benefit of day-to-day life of the people at large. In respect of antiquity Jain Literature in Tamil stands first and that in Kannada stands next, not only among South Indian languages but also when compared with that in north Indian ones. But in extent and range, Jain literature in Kannada surpasses that in Tamil too. Thus the contribution of Jainism to Kannada literature is unique; and early literature, to a certain extent, has often served as an authentic source of religious, social and political history of a community in India as also elsewhere. Hence without a thorough study of Jain literature in Kannada, the Jain Studies in general would not only remain incomplete but even rather poor.

### Notes and References

1. Of course admitting the changes effected by time, of which we have no record.
2. Thus the two traditions regarding the preservation of the canonical knowledge are complement each other to a certain extent. Vide Introduction to *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍagama* Vol. I, by Dr. H. L. Jain, Amaravati, 1939, p. iii.
3. In his *Gujarat and its Literature*, Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., Bombay 1935, p. 32.
4. In his *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, Calcutta 1933, pp. 394—95.
5. (i) Vide *Jainism in South India and some Jain Epigraphs*, by Dr. P. B. Desai, Sholapur 1957, pp. 18 ff and *Dakṣiṇa Bhārat meṁ Jain Dharma* by Pt. K. C. Shastri, Varanasi, 1967, Intro. pp. i-iii.  
(ii) Vide also Antiquity of Jainism in South India, *Indian Culture*, Vol. IV, pp. 512-516.
6. Vide Pt. K. C. Shastri, op. cit., pp. 62-72.
7. Noted by Dr. P. B. Desai, op. cit., p. 15.
8. For details on this topic vide *Jaina Literature in Tamil*, by Prof. A. Chakravarti, First Revised Edition, Delhi 1974.
9. For the dates of these Tamil works, some of which are controversial, I have mainly depended on the *History of Tamil Literature*, by Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, Madras, 1956.
10. There has been also a lot of controversy on the authorship of this great work: Some



scholars have claimed that the author of this work is Kundakundācārya (Elācārya). Generally it is attributed to Vaḷḷuvar ; but scholars have differed on the details of his life. Discussing all such points Prof. Pillai observes : "That he was a Jain admits of no doubt." Vide op. cit. pp. 79—88.

11. This important work, however, has not yet come to light. It is mentioned in the commentary of Yāpparuṅgalam. Vide Prof. Pillai, op. cit., p. 139.
12. Like Dr. K. V. Ramesh, Intro. to *Jaina Literature in Tamil*, pp. XVIII—XIX.
13. For further details on Malayalam Literature, Vide *Shipley's Encyclopaedia of Literature*, New York 1946, pp. 536-539.
14. Op. cit., p. 61.
15. Vide Jainism in Kerala, *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. XXXV—2, 1957.
16. It is the Kuppāṭūr inscription of 1408 A.D. : *Epigraphia Carnatica*, Vol. VIII, Sb. 261.
17. The general sketch of the Jaina literature in Kannada drawn here, is mainly based on : (i) *Kavicarite*, Vols. I—III by R. Narasimhachar, Bangalore 1961—63, (ii) *History of Kannada Literature*, by the same author, Mysore 1940. (iii) *Epigraphia Carnatica*, Vols I and II. (iv) *Śāsanapadya Mañjari*, by R. Narasimhachar, Bangalore 1923.
18. It is interesting to note that of the 375 Jaina epigraphs in different languages recently collected in the *Jaina Śilālekha Saṅgraha*, Part V (M. D. J. Series No. 52, Delhi 1971), 110 are in Kannada : Introduction by the editor Dr. Johrapurkar, p. 15.
19. Bhrājisṇu is mentioned by Rāmacandra Mumukṣu, author of the *Puṇyāsrava Kathākośa*. For details on his Kannada commentary on the *Ārādhana*, Vide 'Observations on some Sources of the Puṇyāsrava Kathākośa,' by Dr. B. K. Khadabadi, *Journal of Karnatak University (Humanities)*, Vol. XIV, 1970.
20. (i) There could also be some commentaries on a few important works of Kundakundācārya viz., *Pañcāstikāya*, *Pravacanasāra*, *Samayasāra*, *Niyamasāra*, etc. and the *Mūlācāra* of Vaṭṭkera.  
(ii) With the addition of these; the mammoth attempt at the commentarial exposition in Kannada of the early stratum of the pro-canon of the Digambaras would have been completed.
21. For all details and comparative study of this important Kannada Jaina classic, vide '*Vaḍḍāradhane : a study*,' by Dr. B. K. Khadabadi, Karnatak University, Dharwar 1977.
22. *History of Kannada Literature* p. 66.
23. Edited by Pt. K. Bhujabali Shastri, Bharatiya Jñānapīṭha, Varanasi, 1948.
24. Available in Kannada : *Karṇāṭaka Kavicariteya Anukṛta Kṛtisuci*, by S. Shivanna, Mysore University, 1967.

