Jain Sahitya in Kannada Literature

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Some scholars are of the opinion that Kannada literature was in existence even before the Christian era. Excepting the inscriptions, the first literary work available in Kannada is the Kavirajamarga which is written by Amoghavarsha Nrpatunga in about 850 A. D. It appears from the references and the passages quoted in this work that there lived some Kannada poets earlier than its author. But unfortunately none of them is available. According to some scholars, the author of this Kavirajamarga is Amoghavarsha but according to some others, its author is the court poet, Srivijaya. Though it is said that Srivijaya wrote the Raghuvanashapurana, yet it is not available. Similarly, the works such as Harivansha, Sadraka, by Gunavarma, Vatsarajacarite, by Nagavarma, Suloconacarite by Nagamanda, Bhuvanaikararnabhuyada by Ponna etc., are lost beyond recovery. All these works belong to Jaina literature in Kannada. Thus the Kannada literature made its start with Jaina works.

Besides the Kavirajamarga, we have two great literary Kavyas from the pen of the great poet Pampa e. g., Adipurana and Vikramarjunavijaya. Pampa won the epithets such as Adikavi, Mahakavi of the Kannada poets. His works are counted as the first and foremost Kavyas and that Mahakavyas too. He lived in 941 A. D.

Pampa was followed by Ponna (950 A. D.) who composed two Kavyas: one a religious poem called Saptipgurana and the other a secular poem by the name Bhuvanaikararnabhuyada. Ranna (993 A. D.) who followed Ponna wrote two poems: one a religious and the other a secular one viz., Ajitaratapurana and Gadayuddha or Sahasabhnavijaya. Thereafter Janna who lived in 1209 A. D. gave to the Kannada literary world his two poems such as Anantaithapurana and Yasodharacarite both of which are religious in character and contents. All these three poets won the epithet as Kavikakavarti. Nagachandra who lived in 1100 A. D. has been ascribed to the authorship of Ramacandaracaritapurana or Pamparumaya, and Mallinathapurana. The former work is styled on the model of Pampa's second work and due to this he is called himself as "Abhinavpampa". All these poets continued their writings in the same trend and each of them wrote a secular and a religious one, in the Campa style i. e., mixed with prose and poetry (more poetry and less prose).

Apart from these literary works, the Jaina writers are said to have adventured to write books on scientific themes. Nagavarma (990 A. D.) wrote his book on prosody with the title "Chandombudhi." The Madonnaillaka which deals with erotics has been ascribed to Candraraja. Srideracarya (1050 A. D.) wrote his Jatarilaka on astrology. Nagavarma II's (1040 A. D.) Kavyavalokana on poetics, Bhashabhushana, a grammar, Vastukostra, a dictionary, Chandoryttri on prosody, Jagardala Somanatha's (1100 A. D.) Kalyanakarakara, a treatise on medicine Khagendra-manidarpaana by Mangaraja on Vishavaidya are some of the excellent gifts contributed by the Jaina writers to the Kannada literature in particular and to the Indian literature in general. The Sabdamanidarpaana of Kesiraja who lived in 1260 A. D. has won the popularity from both the
students and scholars as an ideal grammar of Kannada language and it has served as a model to the subsequent works on Kannada language.

Besides the above mentioned works, Vardhamānapuruṣa of Nāgavarma II (1040 A.D.) who is the author of Kāvyavalokana, Dharmānta of Nayasa (1100 A.D.), Sukumaracarita of Śāntinātha (1070 A.D.), Samayapārīṣe of Brahmaśiva (1150 A.D.), Nemināthapurūṣa of Karnapārya (1140 A.D.), Nemināthapurūṣa of Nemicandra (1180 A.D.) etc., are some of the famous works which are written in Campū style.

Thus from 9th to the 13th century A.D. the Jaina poets are seen engaged themselves in the product of works embracing all branches of Kannada literature and thereby won the reputation as poets, scientists, rhetoricians, compilators of dictionaries, astrologers, physicians and grammarians etc. Just as the Jaina writers have proved themselves to be the pioneers of the above branches of Kannada literature, they are said to be the first to bring about literary works in the prose style. Cāvunḍarāya who is well-known to the world as the one who got installed the collosal of Bāhubali at Śravaṇabelgola wrote his prose work called Cāvunḍarāyapurūṣa or Triṣaṭhiśalākāpuruṣacarita. After him Śivakotyācārya or Revakoṭacarya whose date has been put between 900-1070 A.D. wrote his famous Kannada prose work called Vadāharadhane which contains 19 stories of varied length and these stories are found sprinkled over with Prakrit gāthās. This period has been called as the Age of the Jainas or the Age of the Campū, because this age has seen mostly the works of Jaina writers. After the 15th century A.D., the Jaina poets started composing their poems in the Sāṅgitya or Satpadi metres because these metres were being used popularly by poets of other communities. It is found later on that the Jaina saints wellversed in Sanskrit and Prakrit have written extensive commentaries in Kannada on some of the most important Jaina philosophical works in Sanskrit and Prakrit. Thus these saints have enriched this section of Kannada literature also. The works like Gommaṭasāra, Padārthasāra, Puruṣārthasiddhyupāya, Tattvaratnadīpikā, Pañcastikāya etc. are made easily accessible to the Kannada readers only through these commentaries.

Though Kannada literature repletes with works of Śivaśiva and Brahmin writers, the Jaina literature forms a class by itself because of its being vast and varied in character and thus has become admirable to the Kannada world.

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I love India not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, not because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have been issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great ones.

—Rabindranath Tagore