

# REFLECTIONS ON THE JAINA EXEGETICAL LITERATURE

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According to the Jaina tradition the teachings of Jina Mahāvīra were grasped and then composed by his close disciples, the *gaṇadharas*, in the form of *sūtras* which later on came to be orally transmitted to the successive generations of teachers. And those teachings, according to the Śvetāmbara tradition, finally settled down in writing, passing through a few redactions carried over during the course of about a millenium, as the “Ardhamāgadhī canon” consisting of same 45 sacred texts. Depending on the nature of the texts and the needs of the time, a great number of explanatory works—āgamic *vyākhyās*—were composed, at first in Prakrit, and next in Sanskrit and old Gujarātī<sup>1</sup> by the Jaina *ācāryas* between the period of c. A. D. 100-1800. This huge mass of literature is generally known as the Jaina exegesis or the Jaina exegetical literature, which has contributed its important mite to the history of Indian thought and literature. This vast literature is represented mainly by its four classes or types, namely Nijjutti (Skt. Niryukti), Bhāsa (Bhāṣya), Cuṇṇi (Cūrṇi) and Vitti (Vṛtti) or Ṭikā, mostly forming the four successive layers.

After the Jaina studies in general and the study of Jaina canonical works in particular were pioneered by the Western scholars like A. Weber and Hermann Jacobi, for several years it was the 4th class of the Jaina exegetical literature, namely the Ṭikās, that served the purpose of scholars indulging in deeper and extensive studies in the field of Jainology, both in India and in the Western countries, and in Japan. The state of knowledge of the other three classes was so poor that even scholar like Jacobi at times confounded Bhāṣya and Cūrṇi<sup>2</sup>, and Jal Charpentier rather conjectured the Cūrṇi as metrical<sup>3</sup> besides suspecting (through grammatical lapses) the metrical correctness of the Niryukti and the Bhāṣya.<sup>4</sup> The Niryukti, the first type of exegetical literature, being long ago ignored by the later Sanskrit commentators (the Ṭikākāras) by dropping them from their works, likewise had received scant attention in our days. It was Leumann who inaugurated a systematized study of the Niryuktis some 90 years ago, concentrating as he then did on one of them, namely the *Avassaya-nijjutti* (*Avassaya-niryukti*), extended its study over subsequent layers and allied groups, and finally called the outcome of his long, hard and sustained studies, the “Avassaya Literature”. Since then the importance and magnitude of, as well as the hurdles in, the study of the Jaina exegetical literature conspicuously have come to light. But, unfortunately, as remarked by Walthar Schubring and noted by Ludwig Alsdorf,<sup>5</sup> “Leumann has never had a successor” —his work has not been resumed and continued<sup>6</sup>. The reasons for such a state of affairs in this important domain of Jaina studies can be noted as follows : the non-coming to

light of the entire exegetical material, the existence of the non-critical and unsatisfactory texts of all the four types of commentaries (parts of many of which are either mixed or intermingled), their non-availability owing to rarity of manuscripts and several of the published ones going out of print, the limited or difficult accessibility (owing to rarity) to the available ones at many centres and libraries, etcetera.<sup>7</sup>

Let us, then, have in brief a connected and comparative view of these four classes of the Jaina exegetical literature as known and today available.

The Nirṇuktis are a peculiar type of versified commentaries developed by the early Jaina teachers with a view to explaining the canonical texts. To facilitate oral transmission, they came to be composed in the form of memorial verses with catch-words that helped the teacher in instructing and explaining the holy scriptures. Actually, the Niryukti is defined as that which contains a decided or intended meaning of the terms contained in it. Alsdorf points out that the most prominent feature of the Niryukti "is the so-called *nikṣepa*, no doubt the exclusive invention of the Jaina scholars and their most original contribution to scholastic research."<sup>8</sup> The *nikṣepa* is a method of investigation to which any word or concept can be subjected by applying the various points of views for getting the multi-faced knowledge of the same. Such being the nature of the Niryukti, it did not much help in understanding the meaning of the corresponding canonical text. Hence other explanatory verses were, at later stages, inserted or added. The result was the emergence of the Bhāṣya, the next class of the Jaina exegetical literature. The available Niryuktis are ten in number and tradition attributes them to Bhadrabāhu I (B. C. 300). But Leumann, after deep study, has attributed them to the Bhadrabāhu of A. D. 100<sup>9</sup> though a group of scholars now-a-days take the bulk of them to be posterior to the Valabhi Synod II (c. A. D. 454/457 or better A. D. 503/516).<sup>10</sup> The Niryuktis have not been written on all the canonical texts but only on the most important ones, those that formed the nucleus of the canonical material and required that kind of explanations. They contain, on the average, a few hundred verses. But the *Āvaśyaka-niryukti* has the largest number of verses and it is said to be complete and scientifically presented.

As noted above, from the later additions and insertions of the further explanatory verses into the body of the *Niryukti*, there emerged the Bhāṣya type of exegetical literature. This phenomenon has been explained by different scholars in differing ways. I would rather quote here H. R. Kapadia : "Nijjutti contains verses really belonging to it and some of the corresponding Bhāsa too; but the former preponderate over the latter. Similarly Bhāsa consists of verses which legitimately belong to it; and in addition, it has some verses of the relevant Nijjutti as well; but the former exceed the latter in number."<sup>11</sup> This means that the verses in the extant corresponding texts of these two classes of exegetical literature are partly intermingled. We today possess no Bhāṣyas for 5 Niryuktis. (There is no

certainly whether these ever were written). The total number of the currently available Bhāṣyas on the canonical texts is 11, which are broadly dated between A. D. 500-700.<sup>12</sup> Most of the Bhāṣyas comprise a few thousand Prakrit verses each. Re-explanatory processes at length in the case of some important scriptural texts like the *Āvaśṣaya* have produced extraordinary commentaries like the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśṣaya-Bhāṣya* (c. A. D. 585-590) that comprises the more ancient *mūlabhāṣya* as well as the Bhāṣya, and the *Vīṣeṣabhāṣya*, the author Jinabhadra gaṇi Kṣamāśramaṇa (latter half of the 6th cent. A. D.) is prominent among the Bhāṣyakāras, besides Saṅghadāsa gaṇi Kṣamāśramaṇa.

The Cūrṇis mark a new phase in the growth of the Jaina exegesis, both in respect of form and linguistic trait. They are mostly in Prakrit prose with the mixture of Sanskrit in varied degrees.<sup>13</sup> This indicates the need of the time—the Jaina Ācāryas being tempted to begin to adopt Sanskrit too in their exegetical writings, a trend that further paved the path for the latter commentaries in Sanskrit, namely the Tīkas. Cūrṇis are found to have been written on some 20 canonical works between c. A. D. 600-700. The prominent of the Cūrṇikāras is Jinadāsa-gaṇi Mahattara. It may be noted that the sub-domains of Bhāṣya and Cūrṇi cannot be duly demarked chronologically; at least one Bhāṣya is posterior to the earliest Cūrṇi; but a Bhāṣya on which we have a Cūrṇi is assuredly anterior to that particular Cūrṇi. The main value of the Cūrṇis lies in the preservation of the old Prakrit narratives in their own grand style. And several quote from works now lost. Leaving aside the mixture of Sanskrit, the Cūrṇi, on the whole, may be said to have contained the full text of the traditional exegesis that was passed on from tongue to tongue in early days.

When we come to the Tīkās we find some interesting features of form, language, exegetic methodology, etcetera. They are in Sanskrit prose. Most of them, however, preserve their narrative parts in Prakrit—in almost the same form and content as in the Cūrṇis.<sup>14</sup> They explain the Niryukti verses as well as the Bhāṣya verses, many a times alternately and often adopting and brandishing the technique of the Brahmanic Nyāya school. There has been at least one Tīkā for almost every canonical work. Haribhadra Sūri (8th cent. A. D.) happens to be the first among such commentators and most of the remaining commentators flourished between A. D. 800-1300, though the Tīkās continued to be written till A. D. 1600.

My interest in and curiosity for the Jaina exegetical literature led me through some of these works and the concerned critical writings of some modern scholars and made me acquaint myself pretty well with these four classes or layers of the Jaina exegesis, a very succinct account of which I have so far tried to give. But some of Alsdorf's observations in this regard, presented very concisely,<sup>15</sup> most particularly drew my attention. They are :

'To quote Schubring (*Doctrines.*, p. 63): "As long as such insertions were limited, the title of Nijjutti remained .... but when the size of the latter had swollen up owing to an extraordinary number of Bhāṣya verses, it was they who gave the whole work its title." What this explanation fails to make clear is the relation between Bhāṣya and Cūrṇi. According to Schubring, the Cūrṇi is a commentary on the Nijjutti as well as on the Bhāṣya, but in some cases the Cūrṇi follows immediately on the Nijjutti without a Bhāṣya in between, I am afraid these views are based on a misunderstanding of the true character of the Bhāṣya. My own opinion will be given with some reserve; it may have to be modified after a more extensive study of the whole Bhāṣya literature. But a comparison of the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* with the *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi* leaves to me no doubt that the former is a mere versification of the prose tradition represented by the latter. I believe that certainly in this case, and probably also generally, Ṭīkā and Bhāṣya represent two parallel developments: the Ṭīkā changes the Prakrit language of the Cūrṇi to Sanskrit but keeps to the prose form; but the Bhāṣya versifies the traditional prose yet keeps to the Prakrit language. It is perhaps not too bold to see in the Bhāṣya an attempt at the continuing, beside the new Sanskrit exegesis, the old Prakrit tradition in a new form. This new form may indeed have been suggested by the progressive insertion of Bhāṣya stanzas into the Nijjuttis; but that the Bhāṣya really marks a new departure is shown by its very size which is a multiple of that of the average Nijjutti; it is underlined by distinguishing the 257 Bhāṣya stanzas inserted into the *Āvaśyaka-nijjutti* as 'Mūlabhāṣya' from the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* of Jinabhadra.

After going through this passage we find that Alsdorf proposes to present here (of course, with some reservation and subject to modifications after thorough investigation), his opinion about the true character of Bhāṣya mainly through the following lines of thinking :

(i) The comparison of the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* with the *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi* undoubtedly shows that the former is a mere versification of the latter.

(ii) Ṭīkā and Bhāṣya (the *Āvaśyaka-ṭīkā* and the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* and also other Ṭīkā and Bhāṣyas) represent two parallel developments :- (a) The Ṭīkā changes the Prakrit language of the Cūrṇi to Sanskrit but keeps to the prose form; (b) the Bhāṣya versifies the traditional prose but keeps to the Prakrit language.

(iii) In the Bhāṣya one sees an attempt at continuing, besides the new Sanskrit exegesis, the old Prakrit tradition in a new form.

Now examining the first line of thinking of Alsdorf's opinion, of course on the basis of my own comparison of the two works of the Jaina exegetical literature, namely the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya*<sup>16</sup> and the *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi*,<sup>17</sup> I find that the learned Professor's attention has, some how, missed the narrative element which prominently appears in the *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi*, wherein the *kathānakas* are narrated in beautiful Prakrit prose. On the other hand, the *Vīṣeṣ = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* is

satisfied by merely giving a very brief summary of the narratives, or rather by merely quoting the concerned Nirvyukti verses containing catch words of the respective narratives. For example, after mentioning in v. 3332 (which also happens to be the Nirvyukti verse No. 865) the eight names of religious heroes to be exemplified in respect of *sāmāyika*, the *Vīṣeṣa = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* disposes off the eight narratives in just 17 verses (3333-3349). The narrative of Cilātīputra is given here in just four verses (3341-3344), which, also, happen to be the Nirvyukti verses 872-875.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, in the *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi* the tale of Cilātīputra is fully and beautifully told in Prakrit prose on pp. 497-498, and this prose narration is followed by the same Nirvyukti verses (872-875) by way of its closure with an apt quotation.<sup>19</sup> Hence the *Vīṣeṣa = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* cannot be said to be a mere versification of the prose tradition represented by the *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi*. Second, the *Vīṣeṣa = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya* comprises Mūlabhāṣya, Bhāṣya and Vīṣeṣabhāṣya verses. Such composition cannot be said to be a single (planned) attempt at representing the old prose tradition. Third, when we go to extend such comparison of Bhāṣya and Cūrṇi to some other similar cases, we find that the comparison does not stand at all: The *Dasaveyāliya-bhāṣa* comprises 63 verses<sup>20</sup> and the *Uttarañjhayāna-bhāṣa* comprises just 45 verses;<sup>21</sup> how, then, can these stand comparison with the corresponding Cūrṇis which are pretty bulky prose texts? Hence Bhāṣyas cannot be said to be mere versification of the prose tradition represented by Cūrṇis.<sup>22</sup>

Further, we can also say that *Ṭikā* and Bhāṣya cannot represent two parallel developments: Because, we have just seen in the foregoing how the Bhāṣya type of exegetical literature emerged and now it is essential to note that *Ṭikā* changes the Prakrit language of the Cūrṇi (already in prose) to Sanskrit as per the need of the time, which fact has been already indicated by the mixture of Sanskrit with Prakrit appearing in the Cūrṇi itself. And one's viewing in the Bhāṣya an attempt at continuing the old Prakrit tradition in a new form, applies only to the extraordinary commentaries, like the *Vīṣeṣa = Āvaśyaka-bhāṣya*.

I find that the history of the genesis and growth of these four layers of exegetical literature that developed around the Jaina canonical texts, remains condensed in a single aphoristic observation of Schubring<sup>23</sup>: "The commentaries on the canonical texts represent the apprehensions of their time", on which I would comment as follows: An early nucleus of the canonical texts was provided with the Nirvyuktis—comprising memorial verses with catch words, leaving the other explanatory and instructional matter to the teacher. These Nirvyukti verses, along with the canonical Sūtras, later required to be further explained, leading as it did to the composition of Bhāṣyas. Some Bhāṣyas, like the *Āvaśyaka* (*Āvaśyaka*), the *Kappa* (*Kalpa*), and the *Nisīha* (*Niśītha*) had to indulge in further detailed explanations of philosophical, dogmatical and disciplinary matter and, consequently, they swelled to considerable size.<sup>24</sup> The Cūrṇis embarked on the prose style, almost assuming the written form for the old full oral exegetic tradition, which earlier was

maintained with the memorial verses containing catch words; but, as the same time, the Cūrṇis indicated their temptation to switch over to Sanskrit by partially admitting Sanskrit into their regular Prakrit medium. The Ṭikās, then, fully realized this temptation of the Cūrṇis, imbibing scholastic techniques of the Brahmanic Nyāya school and displaying them well in their commentarial efforts.

After getting introduced fairly well to these four types of the Jaina exegetical literature, some interesting questions stand before us : Why do we have no Bhāṣya for every Niryukti ? Or, why Niryuktis like the *Āyāra* and the *Sūyagaḍa* remained free from later additions and insertions of explanations ? Why some Cūrṇis stand independent of Bhāṣya ? Why should a Bhāṣya, like that on the *Dasaveyāliya* (*Daśavaikālika*) comprise just 63 verses ? We cannot bundle off all these and many such other questions by simply saying that all the exegetical works (in different layers too) have not come down to us. But we have to apply ourselves, first and foremost, to bringing out critical editions of the available exegetical works and to study them intensively, extensively, and comparatively, so that we may be able to answer all such questions and also know many new facts about and facets of the Jaina tradition, history, dogmatics, theology, philosophy, metaphysics and hence the Jaina contribution to Indian thought and literature. This would be possible only when we will have some Leumanns, in India and Japan, and of course in the West, who would produce scholarly studies like 'Āyāra Literature', 'Dasaveyāliya literature', 'Nisīha Literature', etcetera.

### Notes and References

1. There could have been also produced some such exegetical works in Apabhraṃśā, old Hindi and old Rājasthāni. But I have no knowledge of their existence.
2. Walther Schubring. *The Doctrines of the Jainas*, Delhi 1962, p. 83, f. n. 5.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 83, f. n. 3.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 84, f. n. 3.
5. Vide "Jaina Exegetical Literature and the History of the Jaina canon", in *Mahāvīra and His Teachings*, Bombay 1977.
6. Alsdorf and his team of scholars were said to have been trying to do it in Hamburg. Vide Alsdorf, "Jaina Exegetical.", p. 8.
7. (i) Last year I intended comparatively to refer in respect of the "Cilātiputra Kathānaka", to all these four types of commentaries on the *Avassaya*. I had to borrow, with difficulty, the *Vīṣeṣa* = *Avatīyaka-bhāṣya* Volumes from the Rajaram College Library, Kolhapur. And when I sat for my job with all the works, the uncritical and intermingled texts, with neither tables of contents nor indexes of any kind, tired me for days together until I received a reminder from Kolhapur to send back the borrowed Volumes.

- (ii) At the same time I cannot fail deeply to appreciate the generous lending hand of the rich Rajaram College Library, which I many a time have availed.
8. Alsdorf, p. 8.
  9. Mohanlal Mehta (after Muni Puṇyavijayaji), however, states that this Bhadrabāhu happens to be the brother of the great astrologer Varāhamihira and hence is placed between 500-600 V. S. Vide *Jaina Sāhitya kṛ Bṛhad Itihāsa* (Hindi) (Part III), Varanasi, 1967, intro., p. 9.
  10. Only this date can synchronize with the Maitraka ruler Dhruvasena's date. This alternative, seemingly providing a more valid date, is based on computing at B. C. 477 the *Nirvāṇa* of Mahāvīra.
  11. *A History of the Canonical Literature of the Jains*, Surat 1941, p. 123. (However, most historical synchronisms are possible if B. C. 477, in lieu of B. C. 527, is taken as the date of *Nirvāṇa* of Jina Mahāvīra.)
  12. M. A. Dhaky recently has narrowed down this bracket to c. A. D. 550-600, just as *cūrṇi* to c. A. D. 600-700.
  13. Alsdorf observes that the amount of Sanskrit in a *cūrṇi* indicates its relative age—the more Sanskrit the later the *cūrṇi*: "Jaina Exegetical.", p. 8.
  14. Some commentators, however, have rendered the Prakrit narratives in Sanskrit.
  15. Alsdorf, p. 8.
  16. Part II, Ratlam 1937.
  17. (i) Part I, Ratlam, 1928.  
(ii) Vide also *Āvaśyakasūtra* (Part III), Surat 1936.
  18. *Op. cit.*
  19. *Op. cit.*
  20. Kapadia, *The History of the Canonical.*, p. 189.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
  22. In point of fact there is hardly any *cūrṇi* on any *āgama* which can be said to precede its *bhāṣya*.
  23. *The Doctrines.*, p. 82.
  24. The mentioned Bhāṣyas contain 4847, 8600 and 6439 verses respectively. Vide Kapadia, pp. 187-190.