Wisdom in Jain Tradition


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The Scope of the Paper:
The general theme of the seminar is “Wisdom in Indian Traditions”. An attempt has been made in this paper to locate the areas in Jaina tradition in which glimpses of wisdom are seen. Jainas have their own religion, history, literature, philosophy, code of conduct and art expression in the form of caves, temples, icons, inscriptions and beautiful paintings. To bring out the hidden wisdom of Jainas in all these areas of Jaina Studies is almost impossible. Therefore in this paper observations are presented with critical remarks mostly concerned to literature and philosophy.

The Scheme of the Paper:
The paper is divided into four main parts.

A] The place of wisdom in Jaina Epistemology.

B] Some noteworthy Jaina texts and their position in Indian Lâšñanic literature.

C] The hidden wisdom of Jaina scriptures.

D] Wisdom of Jaina tradition through ages -
   (i) Cultural richness reflected in the Prakrit literature.
   (ii) Social wisdom of Jainas in creating various thought-models.

Conclusive citation from Ācārāṅga - the oldest Jaina text.

A] The place of wisdom in Jaina Epistemology:

The relation of the knowledge with soul in Jainism is not like that in the system of the Naiyāyikās and Vaiśeṣikas. In Jainism knowledge is the essence, nature or chief characteristic of each individual soul (ātman, ātman, jīva). Knowledge is sva-para-prakāśaka viz. self-illuminating and illuminating the other. Instead of giving the definition of knowledge, Jaina scriptures and Tattvārthasūtra mention the five types of knowledge viz. Matī, Śruta, Avadhi, Manphparyāya and Kevala. Matijañāna is empirical knowledge, commonly known as Indriyajñāna. It is cognition or perception gained through the sense-organs and mind. It is certainly limited. Śrutajñāna is articulate knowledge which is conceptualized through language. It can be compared with Śabdajñāna, Āgamajñāna or Scriptural knowledge. In the modern perspective it is applicable to all informative knowledge which is reliable and authentic. Other three varieties of knowledge are basically spiritual in nature.
Nandisūtra, the last Ardhamāgadhī scripture (5th cen.A.D.) is entirely dedicated to Jaina epistemology. Nandikāra has rearranged the varieties of Jāna and Pramāṇa in congruence with the contemporary Nyāya concepts. He created space for the concept of ‘fourfold buddhis’ mentioned in the scriptures like Nāyādhammakāhā. Today’s topic is ‘wisdom’. It is closely connected with ‘fourfold intellect’. Nandikāra designates it as the aśrutaniḥśrta variety of Matijñāna i.e. sensory knowledge. Autpattiki Buddhi is inborn intellect, comparable to I.Q. at modern times. Vainayikī is the knowledge acquired through proper training or education which is imparted by an able guru. Karmajī is the skill acquired through rigorous practice. Pāriṇāmikī is the knowledge gathered through our life-long experiences and it grows in accordance with our age.

Thus the concept of ‘wisdom’ is connected with empirical knowledge (Mati) on one hand and with Śrutajñāna (articulate knowledge) on the other hand. According to Nandi, Jaina scriptures are Lokottara Śrutaś and treatises of non-Jainas are ‘Laukika Śrutas’. A long list of Mithyāśrutas is given in Nandi and Anuyogadvāra in which whole syllabus of contemporary formal education in India is reflected. In one of my research paper I have interpreted the 27 names of the non-Jaina texts which are noted down in Nandi. A curious person may go through it.

The last brilliant comment of Nandikāra might have inspired the Jaina writers to produce remarkable literature dedicated to technical and scientific subjects. The concept of ‘Caturvidha Buddhi’ and ‘Laukika Śruts’ are in true sense the well spring of the secular, non-religious literature of Jainas properly designated as ‘Lākṣanika Sāhitya’.

B) Some Noteworthy Jaina Texts and their Position in Indian Lākṣanika Literature:

Pārśvanātha Vidyāśrama Śodha Śaṅsthāna, Vārānasi has published eight parts of the history of Jaina literature. In the fifth part, dedicated to Lākṣanika Sāhitya, total 27 subjects are covered. The list runs likewise - व्याकरण, कोश, अलंकार, छन्द, नाटय, संगीत, कला, गणित, शास्त्र, निमित्त, स्वाध्य, चौहयामणि, सामाजिक, रमण, लक्षण, आय, अर्थ, कोल्डक, आयुर्वेद, अर्थशास्त्र, नीतिशास्त्र, वास्तु-शिल्प, रत्नशास्त्र, मुद्राशास्त्र, धातुविज्ञान and प्राणिविज्ञान.

When we critically examine the 5th part of Jaina Lākṣanika Sāhitya we observe that -
* The lists of books and subjects are unnecessarily lengthened.
* Many of the names are copied from ‘Jina-ratna-kośa’ and ‘Jaina Granthavāli’ without any further search.
* The subjects are conjunctured from the name by commonsense and a comment is passed that ‘यह ग्रन्थ लेखने में नहीं आया है ’
* The manuscripts containing five-six folios are also noted down under the title ‘the book’.
* There is a common practice of ancient literature to quote the names of Pūrvarūpas. Sometimes names of their treatises are given. Actually they are not found in manuscript form. The description of such type of works is given in the above-mentioned fifth part.
* All the tikās, vṛttis, laghu-vṛttis and avacūris on the same work are separately counted. For the
sake of enumeration it is quite right, but the qualitative value is very meager. Thirteen commentaries on Kātantra Vyākaraṇa and twenty-three commentaries on Sarasvata Vyākaraṇa are written. Such works make the list quite sizable but due to repetition and imitation they are devoid of wisdom.

* The Real Contributions to the Lākṣaṇika Literature *

(i) About grammar, we can say that the Skt. grammars of Jainas are mostly commentarial and imitative. The originality of Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali is unbeatable. Prākritalakṣaṇa of the Jaina grammarian Canda is the first Prakrit grammar (2nd, 3rd cen.A.D.) which was followed and enlarged by Vararuci and Hemcandra. Haima-prakṛta-vyākaraṇa is studied by the students of Skt. and Prkt. The secular nature of the Apabhraṃśa gāthās is appreciated by Dr. Ghatage. Digambara Jaina sage Akalanka wrote grammar of Kannada language in Skt. All the Prkt. grammars are written in Skt. because of the exactness and compactness of Skt. Around the fourth century A.D. Jainas started their writings in Skt. For them Skt. was a pan-Indian language of formal education. They never looked at Skt. as a sacred, pious language or the language of gods-Gūrvāvī, because this concept does not suit to their philosophical and mythological framework.

Pārasikabhāsānuśāsana is written by Vikramasinha and Phāraśi-dhāturūpāvali was prepared by an anonymous Jaina writer. For details please see p.76 of the above-mentioned book.

(ii) About lexicons, it is observed that Nighantas and Niruktas are the source of inspirations for the lexical works of Jainas. The first metrical commentaries of Bhadrabahu on prominent Jaina scriptures are called Niryuktis no doubt after the word ‘Nirukta’. The worth-mentioning lexicons are Dhanapāla’s Pāiyalacchānāmamālā and the most celebrated Abhidhānacintāmanāmamālā of Hemacandra. Abhidhāna is the continuation of the famous Amarakośa with its own peculiarities. It contains hybrid Sanskrit words influenced by desī and Apabhraṃśa words.

Deśānāmamālā is the peak of wisdom and scholarship of Hemacandra. It will not be out of context to salute the wisdom of Pādalipta (1st-3rd cen.A.D.) who had prepared Deśikāṇa nearly one thousand years before Hemacandra. Hem9 refers Pādalipta at the very outset of his DENAM. The romantic poetic narrative of Pādalipta was Taranagavatīkathā, the first of its genre in Prakrit. Pādalipta’s active participation in ‘the making of Gāthāsaptāśati’ is noteworthy.

A small manuscript having six folios is available at L.D.Institute, Ahmedabad. It is a small lexical work in Skt. and Persian. It is noted at the end that -

|| इति श्री जैनमहीय श्री सोममन्त्रीवत्तमानजिविरचितां वचनीभाषायं तौतीनामामाला समाप्तम्

In nutshell, the lexical works of Jainas are important especially in the field of Prakrit.

(iii) In the field of Philosophy, except Vedānta, all the other Philosophies were systematized before Vācaka Umāsvāti wrote Tattvārtihasūtra around 4th-5th cen.A.D. He was convinced that Jainas could no more ignore the pan-Indian scholarly language viz. Skt. He converted all the important
philosophical data which was available in Prakrit into Skt. aphorisms. Umāsvāti’s dārśanīka genius is unparallel up till now.

(iv) ‘Doctrine of Karman’ is common to all Indian systems except Cārvakas. In Jaina philosophy, ‘Theory of Karman’ is the base, backbone and a strong link between philosophy and practical conduct. Jainas negated creator god and accepted the concept of beginningless and endless universe. As a corollary they methodically developed the Karma-doctrine with minute details and spiritual mysticism. Unlike its Brahmanic and Buddhist counterparts, Jainas’ wisdom is seen in developing a full-fledged branch of Karma-literature.

(v) When we consider Dhyāna and Yoga, Jaina writers wrote their treatises on this subject from 5th cen. A.D. up to 14th cen. A.D. Among them, Pūjyapāda, Haribhadra, Śubhacandra and Hemcandra are prominent. The credit goes to Haribhadra to present Jaina thoughts on Yoga in altogether new manner, new classification and the spirit of synthesis with Brahmanic and Buddhist Yoga and Dhyāna. Recently, on the line of Vipaśyanā, some Jaina monks havedeveloped the Jaina method of sādhanā called Prekṣādhyāna.

(vi) The history of the study of Astrology starts from the canonical period in Jaina tradition. Four Ardhamāgadhī texts are important, viz. Sūryaprajñāpti, Candraprajñāpti, Jyotiskaraṇḍaka and Ganiṣṭyā. According to Jaina mythology, Āryabhaṭṭa and Varāhamihira were brothers of the revered Jaina Ācārya Bhadrabāhu. The works of Haribhadra and Thakkura Pheru are noteworthy. When we go through the whole long list of Astrological texts, we find that though some of them are published, still a huge corpus is laying in unedited form. It is very curious that majority of manuscripts are preserved in the collection of L.D.Institute, Ahmedabad. Though fortune-telling was totally negated for monks, still the branch of Astrological studies is really strong in Jaina tradition. It puts light on the academic interest of Jaina monks.

(vii) The same historical facts are true about the science of Nimitta (Prognostics). Ārya Kālaka, Bhadrabāhu and Dharasena possess the epithet ‘Nimittavēṭṭa’. Jayapāhuḍa, Nimittaśāstra, Aṅgavijjā and Riṭṭhasamuccaya are some of the names of published texts on Nimitta. The language of all these can be designated as Ārṣa Prakrit influenced by Śauraseni. Most of the unpublished manuscripts are preserved in the Paṭana Grathabhāndāra, Gujrat.

(viii) In the field of Logic or Nyāya, Buddhists were the first who applied logical methods in debates. Brahmanical texts of Khaṇḍana-mandaṇa style were developed immediately after Buddhists. Jainas’ entry in this field is a little later. Sanmati-tarka of Siddhasena is the only work in logic which is written in Prakrit (J.M.). Akalanka, Samantabhadra, Pūjyapāḍa, Haribhadra etc. developed a new method of Syadvāda and Saptabhaṅgi to refute others on the basis of the theory non-absolutism viz.
Anekāntavāda. Pramāṇa-mīmāṃsā of Hemacandra, Syadvāda-maṃjarī of Malliṣeṇa and Jaina Tarkabhāṣā of Yaśovijaya are the well reputed texts. Tarkabhāṣā is written in Navya-nyāya-style. Jainas’ contribution to Indian logic is really praiseworthy.

(ix) It is the fashion of first decade of the third millennium to beat the drums of Jaina Āyurveda, very loudly. When we go through the contents of the Jaina works on Āyurveda, we realize that Caraka, Suśruta and Vāgbhata are still at the top. The Jaina author Ugrāditya (11th-12th cen.) wrote a really remarkable book titled Kalyāṇākāraka, strictly following the Jaina rules about food and medicine. The classification of diseases is new. Rest of the details can be found on p.231-232 of the above-mentioned book on Jaina Lākṣaṇika Sāhitya. One of the old manuscripts of the āyurvedic text Jatsundarīprayogamālā is preserved in the BORI collection. It is heard that the text is on the way of publication.

Three stages about the use of Āyurveda are seen in Jaina literature. In the canonical period, total negation is found. In the commentarial period it is noted that a monk can use pure and acceptable (prāsukā and esānyā) medicine in exceptional situation. The third stage is seen in the books like Kalyāṇākāraka. At this stage Jainas produce books dedicated to this subject. These types of modifications and flexibility really exhibit the wisdom of Jainas through ages.

(x) When we think of ancient Indian mathematics, the works of Āryabhaṭṭa (4th cen.A.D.), Brahmagupta and Bhāskaracārya are the most revered ones. Actually speaking, the Numbers and Measurements of Time and Space play important roles in the canonical descriptions of Jaina Cosmology, doctrine of Karman and the life-spans of living-beings. Interested person may go through the appendices of Tattvārtha edited by Dr. Nathmal Tatia. Gaṇitānuyoga of Jainas includes the treatises describing geography, astronomy and astrology.

In Jaina tradition, independent book of mathematics is not found before Gaṇitāsārasamgraha of Mahāvīrācārya. It is noted down by the concerned scholars that in many respects, this book surpasses Brahmagupta and Bhāskaracārya, still very few people know about it. One scholar named Dr. Shah is busy in writing a book on Jaina Mathematics utilizing the library of BORI. I think L.D.Institute is going to publish it.

Another remarkable work on Maths is Gaṇitsārakaumudi of Thakkura Pheru written in Jaina Māhārāṣṭri Prakrit. Pheru, a Śvetāmbara Jaina householder of fourteenth century was a treasurer at the court of Kutubuddin and Allauddin Khilji. He wrote small treatises on various scientific and technical subjects like metallurgy, numismatics, mathematics, gemology, architecture and astrology by using colloquial contemporary terminology. The book is published by Rajasthan Prachyavidya Pratishtan, Jodhpur. The name of the collection is Ratnaparīksādi-saptā-grantha-saṁgraha. Thakkura Pheru’s position is really unique in the perspective of Lākṣaṇika literature.

(xi) Kautilya’s Arthaśāstra, a proper combination of Politics. Economics and Ethics will remain always at the top in this particular field. Among the later versions of Arthaśāstra, Nitīvākyāmṛta of the
Jaina author Somadevasūri holds a higher position, because of its secular attitude and classical Sanskrit style. We cannot forget Yaśastilakacampū of the same author which possesses a rich cultural data.

While considering the commentarial literature of Jainas, it will not be an exaggeration to say that one-third part of the whole bulk is merely commentarial. One thing is worth mentioning that these authors wrote commentaries on Jaina and non-Jaina works without any sectarian bias. Amitagati’s Kāvyparakāśakhaṇḍana, Siddhacandragani’s solitary commentary on Bānabhaṭṭa’s Kādambarī and Cāritravardhana’s commentaries on five famous Sanskrit epics - are some of the gems of the secular commentarial literature of Jainas. Namisādhu explains the word ‘Sanskrit’ and ‘Prakrit’ in a very naive manner in his commentary on Rudraṭa’s Kāvyālaṁkāra (2.12)

Jainas’ expertise in commentarial literature is in itself a subject of a big research project.

C] The Hidden Wisdom In Jaina Scriptures:

It is generally observed that certain Ardhamāgadhī and Śauraseni texts, the seeds of many empirical sciences are found. Unfortunately the rich contents had not developed into a full-fledged branch of knowledge due to various religious and social reasons. All the post-canonical literature is written by monastic class. The religious history tells that in the course of time Jainism became more and more renunciative and mokṣa-centric. The religious conduct and spirituality prevailed over empirical knowledge and wisdom. Here, some of the important points incorporated in the scriptural texts are enumerated which certainly exhibit wisdom.

(i) The credit of ancient Indian atomism goes to the Vaśēṣika Sūtras of Kaṇāda. Vārttikakāras and Vyākhyākāras developed the atomic theory very systematically. Some of the oldest Ardhamāgadhī and Śauraseni canons had put forth some valuable thoughts about matter i.e. pudgala or paramāṇu. In the fifth chapter of Tattvārtha, atomism is summarized and systematized by Umāsvāti in 20 aphorisms. When we compare the Vaśēṣika and Jaina Paramāṇuvādas, we have to admit that the Jaina thought is more deep, subtle and nearer to modern Physics.

(ii) Same is the case of biological sciences. Non-violence is the essence of Jainism. Ancient Prakrit texts and later Skt. texts of Jainas proclaim that there are innumerable species of living beings in the universe. Classification of living organisms based on (a) liberation, (b) movement, (c) mind, (d) destiny (gati), (e) bodily features, (f) sex, (g) place of birth and (h) types of birth is presented in the second chapter of Tattvārtha. If we reconsider the concept in the light of biological sciences, it certainly reveals the wisdom of Jaina Ācāryas. For example, the concept of sammūrccchana is comparable to asexual reproduction, grafting and cloning. Genetic properties and the rationale behind it can be searched in the detailed descriptions of Nāmakarman.

(iii) In almost all Jaina texts the sensitivity towards all bio-forms in the universe is enhanced. There is no exaggeration at all if we say that the intrinsic nature of Jainism is pro-environmental. The
Jaina thoughts fully support the preservation, conservation and the well-being of the surrounding world full of bio-forms from epistemological, religious, ethical and spiritual point of view. If we interpret the Jaina principle ‘परस्परोपकारी जीवानम्’ in the light of the commentaries on Tattvārtha (5.21) it goes nearer to the Darwinian expressions. Darwin says, “Life-process is a continuous chain of activities which is comprehensive, independent, interrelated, complimentary, reciprocal and collaborative.”

(iv) Anekāntavāda is the ‘Jaina theory of multiple facets of reality and truth.’ It is translated as ‘theory of non-absolutism’ or ‘the theory of relativity’. The theory of relativity was expounded by Albert Einstein. The scholar of Jainism Aidan Rankin has cited one quotation of Einstein in his book titled ‘The Jain Path : Ancient Wisdom for an Age of Anxiety.’ The citation goes likewise : ‘I do not know if there is rebirth or not. But if it is true, then I would like to be born in India as a Jain.’

D) Wisdom of Jaina Tradition Through Ages:

In the conclusive part of this paper two more points are worth-mentioning.

(i) Cultural Richness Reflected in the Prakrit Literature :

The whole Prakrit literature written in the ancient and medieval period in general and the narrative literature in particular, we reveal that it provides a rich and variegated data of the contemporary Indian culture. The aspirations of common folk are reflected in the short stories, tales fables, allegories, examples and illustrations. The big narratives like Vasudevahindu, Samarāccakāhā, Kuvalayamālā etc. are really noteworthy. It is helpful for the better understanding of the behavioral patterns of classes and masses. Details are found about festivals and celebrations, fairs and pilgrims, religious and social ceremonies, customs and beliefs as well as rites and rituals. The Orientalists and Indologists have always fathomed the Prakrit literature for understanding the historical, geographical, political, economic and cultural conditions of Indian society.

(ii) Social Wisdom of Jainas in Creating Various Thought-models :

The Jainas possess a distinct religion, a separate Philosophy, a different ethical code, a set of particular beliefs, customs and manners and a vast literature of their own. They form a small minority at present and also in the past. Due to this fact, they have struggled a lot for identity crisis. For keeping the identity in fact, they have developed certain models or behavioral patterns of conflict resolution and peace which are congruent with the philosophical framework provided to them. Application of certain thought-models in one’s daily routine is not an easy task. It requires distinct social awareness and wisdom. Without going into details, here some models are noted down which show the social wisdom of Jainas. The models are likewise :

(1) The comprehensive model of Anekāntavāda.
(2) The model of suitable language.
(3) The model of choosing less harmful.
(4) The model of peaceful interaction with rulers.
(5) The model of adaption in mythology, art-expressions and social conditions.

For each of these points, ‘n’ numbers of examples can be given. Interested person may go through my research paper, titled, ‘Models of Conflict-resolution and peace in Jainism.’

I conclude this paper with a citation from Ācārāṅga, in which the wisdom par-excellence is manifested.

“All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, unchangeable, eternal law which the clever ones who understand the world have proclaimed.” (Ācārāṅga (II) 4.1.1)

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