

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF EARLY JAIN PURANIC LITERATURE IN HISTORICAL PERIOD IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and case studies, we examine the factors that facilitated the spread of Jainism in Karnataka, including royal patronage, economic influences, and social dynamics. We also consider the contemporary relevance of Jain principles in a diverse society. The state's historical rulers, including the Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas, and the Vijayanagara Empire, not only embraced Jainism but also provided substantial patronage, facilitating the construction of temples and monuments that reflect the religion's core values. Early Jain literature, comprising the Agamas (canonical texts) and subsequent commentaries, offers an invaluable, often overlooked, source for reconstructing the socio-economic history of ancient India (6th century BCE – 6th century CE). These texts, often written in Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit, provide detailed, realistic, and sometimes satirical accounts of daily life. Along with the monks, the Jain laity also contributed to the development of vernacular literature. They studied theological literature, with the help of some knowledgeable person. Chaturmal studied 'Harivamsa Puran' and other Jain puranic literature with Dhawal Pandit in the late seventeenth century of the Vikram era. Jain texts provide a vivid, detailed account of trading activities in North India, describing bustling urban centers like Rajagriha, Campa, Pataliputra, and Vaisali. The prosperous class of bankers, merchants, and landlords, offering insights into luxury, with mentions of, for instance, opulent houses, varied dishes, and precious stones. While not overtly rejecting the Varna system, the Jain laity also contributed to the development of vernacular literature. They studied theological literature, with the help of some knowledgeable person. Chaturmal studied 'Harivamsa Puran' and other Jain puranic literature with Dhawal Pandit in the late seventeenth century of the Vikram era.

KEYWORDS: Jain Literature, Social Ethics, Religious Principles, Socio-Economic Insights, Brahmanical Traditions.

Introduction

The texts indicate that while Mahavira's immediate followers were Brahmins, Jain texts are thus essential for analyzing the shift from a pastoral to a settled, urbanized society, highlighting the role of trade and the merchant class in creating a new socio-economic order. The basic profession of Jainas in the historical period has been trade both local and long-distance. As a result the community has been economically affluent. The nexus of the community with business compelled its members to acquire some elements of literacy. It is not an exaggeration to say that the community by and large has always been literate. Literacy enabled them to keep alive the Prakrit and Apabhramsa. Many Jain writers were simultaneously writing in vernacular languages as well as in Sanskrit and

Prakrit. To a large extent, this put a limit to their themes. Also, many of the works on Jain theology as was the case with the Hindu and Buddhist theology were written in Sanskrit. Languages which contain a large number of Jaina theological, literary and philosophical texts. Jainism presented a more inclusive social structure compared to Brahmanical traditions, allowing for greater social mobility. This is no mean achievement if we remember that over two millennia many with languages appeared in north India and were forgotten. The economic policies pursued by Akbar helped Jains to intensify their business activities.

The Education System of Jainism

The tradition of according high place to scholarship in the monastic order among the Jains was assiduously cultivated in the medieval age.

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Many of the Jain Acharyas or Munis were great scholars and authors. Their knowledge of Jain and Hindu theology, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, etc., was profound. They were multilingual, well-versed in Sanskrit, Prakrit and local languages. Many of them were authors and poets in several vernacular languages. They were encouraged to study grammar, poetics, logic, etc. Some of them became musicologists as well. Among the monks Guru-shishya parampara was followed. A knowledgeable senior monk attached to himself a young acolyte or a bunch of promising youngsters and chalked out programmes for his/their education. It was the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the student imbibed the necessary learning. He formulated the curriculum and the time-frame in which to complete the studies. It was the teacher who certified that the student had successfully completed the course of study laid down for him. The Jain scholars studied Sanskrit because its knowledge enabled them to study seminal books on subjects like literature, grammar, poetics, logic, six-schools of Indian philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, medicine, etc. The Jain writings were basically devotional, spiritual and didactic. Besides, many writings in vernacular languages were adaptations from Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsa texts. Many Jain writers were simultaneously writing in vernacular languages as well as in Sanskrit and Prakrit. To a large extent, this put a limit to their themes. Also, many of the works on Jain theology as was the case with the Hindu and Buddhist theology were written in Sanskrit. Furthermore, thus equipped, the Jain monks could discuss and debate theological questions with Hindu Pandits and also with members of rival sects. 60 Public disputations were frequent.

Status of Women in Jain Literature

Literacy and the exposure to the wider world made the community's outlook on the position of women much more liberal than other contemporary communities. Jain lay women's book knowledge of the tradition varies according to their social environment. From time to time, resolutions are passed in Jain conferences to encourage women's education. The women enjoyed an honored place. The peasants in the country-side were motivated to sell a part of their produce in the market and commercialization of agriculture and monetization of economy gained momentum. The status of women in Jain literature and drama is characterized by a complex, often paradoxical, mix of high spiritual regard, active social contribution, and underlying patriarchal constraints. While

Jain drama and narrative frequently celebrate the 'theological equality' of souls. There was an overall increase in trading activities which promoted Jain migration and penetration into the rural areas. In spite of professing a common religion and bound by vows to practice non-violence, the Jains were divided into a number of sects and sub-sects since ancient times. The first sectarian division brought into existence the Shvetambara and Digambara sects in the time of Bhadrabahu, more than a century and a half after the death of Mahavira. In course of time, both the sects split up again and again, giving rise to a number of groupings. They were accepted in the monastic order 138 and shown as much reverence as the male monks. The pains they took and the efforts they made for the propagation of the religion were socially appreciated. They accompanied the 'Sangha' or the collectives, which were organized to visit Jain holy places. Once in a while they also organized such journeys.

Social Ethics and Religious Principles

It was a part of Jain religious and social ethos to accompany their revered Gurus whenever they started on a pilgrimage. Jain social ethics and religion are deeply intertwined, centering on the core principle of Ahimsā (non-violence) in thought, word, and deed, to achieve both spiritual liberation (moksha) and peaceful coexistence. The rich followers met all the expenses of the party and arranged for the safety and creature comforts of the travellers. After the return of the Sangh from pilgrimage, the organizer usually hosted a feast for the community members.

Key Religious Principles & Ethics

- Ahimsā (Non-violence)
- Satya (Truth)
- Asteya (Non-stealing)
- Brahmacharya (Chastity/Celibacy)
- Aparigraha (Non-possession)
- Social Contribution

Community Structure

The right knowledge is to rightly know, to rightly understand and to rightly interpret what one, who knows, understands the faith, any concept. The ultimate objective of right knowledge in Jainism is to attain Kevala Jnana that is the ultimate, pure knowledge of soul. Acquiring knowledge is a long process of life of an individual and it takes for some individuals after many births but for some others it may take within this birth too. The right knowledge of faith is most important to keep right faith in any context. Immoral and

unethical attitude and behaviours of an individual destroy the very existence of human beings. Thus, an individual who is ethically sound builds a healthy family and further builds a healthy society. The ethical teachings of Jainism, particularly, the Three Ratnas help to build human Intelligence Quotient, Emotional Quotient and Spiritual Quotient and all the three make the holistic development of an individual. The Five Great Vows such as Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha promote peace and harmony in the family and society. The other ethical concepts like Parasparopagraho Jivanam, Jiva Daya and Maitri all the three promote the environmental protection and encourage having ecologically sustainable society and eco-friendliness.

Socio-Economic Insights from Early Jain Dharma

Jaina literature in Karnataka, particularly the works of the “three gems” (Pampa, Ponna, Ranna) and early commentaries like Vaddaradhane, highlights several aspects of contemporary life. They facilitated trade, and their wealth supported the construction of numerous temples and basadis (monasteries). Offering profound socio-economic alternatives to the rigid caste hierarchies and ritual-intensive practices of the late Vedic period, its core principles of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Aparigraha (non-possession) shaped a unique, ethically conscious, and largely urban-centric community that influenced trade, commerce, and social mobility. Key commercial groups and guilds, including the Nānādēsis and Ayyavole, are mentioned as being active during this period. The literature reflects the adoption of local caste structures in Karnataka. Animism challenged the birth-based caste system, promoting spiritual equality and respect for all life forms, which attracted marginalized groups and the merchant class (Vaishyas) looking for social dignity. The historical context of Jainism in Karnataka is also marked by the establishment of significant pilgrimage sites, such as Shravanabelagola, which houses the monumental statue of Gommateshwara Bahubali. This site not only symbolizes the religious fervor of Jainism but also reflects the socio-political dynamics of the time, where art and faith intertwined to create a shared cultural identity. The texts indicate that Jainism provided a framework for social mobility through education and business, rather than birth.

- Rise of Merchant Guilds and Urban Centers
- Agricultural and Industrial Expansion
- Role of Monasteries (Basadis)
- Social Structure and Mobility

- Status of Women
- Social Egalitarianism and Mobility

Conclusion

The other ethical concepts like Jivanam, Jiva Daya and Maitri all the three promote the environmental protection and encourage having ecologically sustainable society and eco-friendliness. The temples constructed throughout the centuries stand as remarkable monuments of architectural ingenuity and spiritual devotion, illustrating the rich heritage of Jain craftsmanship. These sacred spaces not only serve as places of worship but also function as vital community hubs, where rituals, festivals, and educational activities foster a sense of belonging and continuity among Jain devotees. The ethical principles of Jainism help to strengthen the holistic development, peace, harmony in the family and society and finally to protect the environment.

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