

## Paumacariyam and Jaina Identity

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Religious identity in India has not invariably had a fixed 'all or nothing' exclusivity attached to it. John E.Cort has stated that "it is essential to understand the Jaina conception of history, the temporal self identity of the Jains in order to understand Jains".

Paumacariyam is an important text in order to draw an understanding about how Jainas articulated their own identity. This must have been influenced by the Jaina ideals on one hand and shaped by society around them on the other. The earliest extant Jaina Purana, Paumacariyam is written in Maharashtri Prakrit, composed probably in conformity with the Jaina belief that Prakrit was the sacred language in which the words of Mahavira were preserved.

According to A.B. Keith in the Paumacariyam we find the free use of what the grammarians have called *deshishabd*s, words for which no derivation from Sanskrit is obvious or normally possible.

Paumacariyam is the earliest extant non-canonical literary Shvetambara work. The date of this text has been debated by the scholars and the dates range from the first century to the seventh century. However, Romila Thapar has argued that composition of the text around third century seems more likely.

Paumacariyam is divided into one hundred and eighteen cantos or chapters, which consist of a total of eight thousand six hundred and fifty one gathas. The first thirty five cantos or chapters are called *Uddeshas* and the rest *Parvans*. The first twenty four describe the illustrious beings who according to Jaina universal history flourished before the time of Rama. The chapters twenty five to eighty five i.e. a total of sixty one, form the main part of the text. The last thirty three chapters contain the events following banishment of Sita like the death of Lakshmana, Rama's renunciation and attainment of moksha.

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The story of Ramayana by the Jaina writers was not merely being rewritten but was changed significantly in terms of context, stories, plot, incidents and characters. When we analyze these changes and alterations, the objective or aim of the author in writing these texts can be brought out clearly. We see a distinct shift as far as religion of the main characters of the text is concerned. For instance Ravana is being portrayed as a devout Jaina. As most of the characters are either followers of Jainism or convert to Jainism towards the later parts of their lives, there is conscious and constant effort by the author to highlight the Jaina pilgrim places, temples, values, principles, rituals and Jaina way of life.

It is very interesting to note here that Vimalasuri writes that Lord Mahavir was named so because while playing once he moved the Mount Meru with his finger. This incident is very similar to what we have in the Mahabharata, where Krishna had lifted Govardhan on his small finger to help people when there was flood in the city of Mathura. It is relevant to note here that it has been claimed that Vimalasuri was also author of first Jaina Mahabharata, which has been lost.

Paumacariyam is full of stories and incidents about numerous kings abdicated the throne in favor of their sons and took to the life of an ascetic. There is reference to many such *Vidyadhara* kings renounced the world and several others following the path of *Jinadhama* were born in *Devavimana*. In the text we come across a story of Lord *Ajitanath* and it is in this context that we find an instance where he left his kingdom and took to what the author has termed as '*Nirgrantha*' (Jainism). Vimalasuri goes on to write that along with *Jineshvar*, ten thousand kings also abdicated the throne and took *Jaina-Diksha*.

Further Vimalasuri mentioned that at the time of Lord *Ajitanath* there were ninety *Ganadharas* and ninety nine thousand nine hundred and ninety one *Sadhus*. In the time of *Rishabhadeva*, there were eighty four *ganadharas* and eighty four thousand *sadhus*. Well. Looking at these

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figures we can say with authenticity that these were not the real numbers but just following numerology of nine in the first case and eighty four in the other.

If these numbers were to be believed Jainism seems to have been a popular religion at that point of time. But what is being amply reflected in the text is that kings, who were considered role models by the people, are taking to Jaina way of life in large numbers. This may have been a major driving factor for many people to convert to Jainism or perhaps figures were just exaggerated in order to lure more and more people to adopt Jaina way of life or convert to Jainism.

King Bali of Vidyadhara clan of Vanaras is also being portrayed as a devout Jaina. When Ravana attacked the kingdom of Kishkindhapura, Bali made Sugriva the king and took to asceticism as he had pledged that he will not bow before anyone but Jinavarendra. He has been portrayed as a devout Jaina who did not want to fight a war as it led to destruction of so many lives.

In contrast, we have in this text the character portrayal of Ravana who is also a devout Jaina who regularly visited the temples and worshipped the Lord Jinendra. He is also referred to as the one who constructed and renovated many Jaina Chaityas but he is being shown in the text as someone who is constantly at war. Why did the author choose to portray these two devout Jainas in such different light? They both are being referred to as a devout Jaina, they both are kings as well but Bali follows the path of ahimsa and Ravana of violence. Hence we can see it clearly that the core principal of Jainism i.e. ahimsa has been compromised in the Jaina Ramayanas.

It will be of great relevance to state here that Ravana who is believed to have vanquished all the kingdoms of the earth according to the author, is being made to bow before Bali who was a believer in non-violence It is significant to mention here that after Bali took to asceticism, when Ravana was passing over Mount Ashtapad (also called Mount Kailasha) his Vimana stopped there and asked Marichi the reason for this. Marichi replied that a very powerful saint seems to be

meditating here and you must pay your obeisance to him. Ravana was enraged to see Bali and tried lifting the Mount Ashtapad. Bali in order to save the Jaina temples pressed his toe against the mountain and Ravana screamed in pain, hence named Ravana. When the pressure was relieved by Bali, Ravana came and bowed before Bali pleaded for forgiveness.

According to this text there was a Jaina temple right in the middle of capital city of Dasharatha. There is reference to a Jaina festival also being celebrated. As far as rituals are concerned there is reference to three types of worship of Jaina images- Mansa, Vacha and Karmana. King Bharata along with his family visited the Jina temple where he pledged to renounce the world when Rama would come back from exile. The one who believed in teachings of Jinendra would be wealthy and respected by everyone. Donation of food is emphasized and it is mentioned when gift of knowledge is given as a gift then the person got expertise in all forms of arts. The one who does not take food in the night he would have an auspicious position. There is mention of numerous rituals and practices of Jainism in the Paumacariyam. Vimalasuri has stated in the text that here is no better dharma than devotion and worship of Jineshvar.

Further it seems that the author encouraged conversions to Jainism or the idea of conversion. In the eleventh chapter titled 'Marut ke Yajna ka Vidhvans' Vimalasuri has referred to the fact that Ravana had conquered all the kingdoms of earth. Ravana after having defeated kings who were 'full of pomp' undertook renovation of many Jina temples and worshipped idols of Jineshwardevas. It is stated here that he obliterated those who were against Jinavar.

The Jaina Ramayana under review explicitly manifests the attempt of the Jaina authors to highlight benefits of the Jaina rituals and principles on the one hand and futility of brahmanical rituals and principles on the other. Let us analyze one such incident referred to in the text. Once Narada saw that there are herds of animals being tied up in a place where lot of people had

gathered so he went there to inquire about it. He was told by a Brahmana that these animals were to be sacrificed for the yajna that was on line of the teachings of the Vedas and can be performed by three varnas only – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The performance of animal sacrifice was to please the gods. Narada retorted that what has been written in Vedas about yajnas, was that within our body which is like a vedika, with fire of Karma, we should burn- krodh, maan, maaya, lobh, raag, dvesh and moh, these are the animals which we need to kill. People, who torment and smother animals for yajnas, will go to hell just like the hunters. Narada tried stopping the sacrifice of animals but was captured. Soon the news reached Ravana, who was a devout Jaina and he sent his army to release Narada. The Brahmanas were trounced and released the animals.

Historically speaking, these instances also bear testimony to the fact that forced conversions to Jainism or ill treatment of followers of other religion did take place at the time when this text was composed. This may also be seen as the author's support for the 'idea' of conversion by force or by teaching about Jainism. There is reference to an incident where a Jaina sage promised to save life of a man who was punished with death penalty for sitting on the same carpet with the queen, on the condition that he would accept the Jaina faith.

An epidemic had broken out in the city of Mathura. When seven Jaina sages came to that city and due to rainy season they decided to stay on. Due to their presence of such pure souls, that epidemic came to an end and city became full of agricultural wealth. When they were leaving the city, they told Shatrughna that in order to keep epidemic at bay, you should get Jina temples constructed and install Jina images in houses. "The houses which will not have Jina images, there epidemic will kill people in the same way as tigress kills a deer. But a house with even thumb-size image of Jina will not be affected by epidemic.

We may argue that Paumacariyam was an attempt by a Jaina author to spread knowledge about

Jainism. Ramayana was chosen as a medium as in the contemporary times it was a popular story of an ideal king. It is relevant to note here that Vimalasuri has used Paumacariyam very effectively to spread knowledge about the Jaina rituals, values and principles, simultaneously attacking and exposing the futility of brahmanical rituals.

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