Jain Manuscript Collections in Punjab: With Special Reference to the Sthanakvasi Tradition

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We learn of the existence of Jain manuscript collections in various cities and towns of ancient Punjab[32], the boundaries of which went up to Kandahar (Afghanistan) in the northwest and close to Delhi[12] in the south. In the Punjab[32], the Jain tradition begins with the yatis[56], who played a very significant role in preserving the Jain religion during the Mughal and other disturbing times. Most of the collection of the yatis[56] of the Murtipujak[27] tradition is now available in the Vallabh Smarak, Delhi[12]. Collections of the Sthanakvasis[52] had been available at Lahore, Rawalpindi, Kasur, Sialkot, Pasrur, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Nakodar, Phagwara, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Faridkot[15], Panchakula, Ludhiana[24], Bathinda[6], Ambala[4], Patiala[29], Kurukshetra, Sirsa[48], Hissar[18], Sunam[53], Nabha, Samana and Banur. During the partition of India many manuscripts from western Punjab[32] were transferred to the eastern part, but possibly some Jain manuscripts still remain in Pakistan.

The itinerant Jain sadhus[42] were for a long time averse to having their own physical centres. The tradition to build sthanaks, for instance, began in the Punjab[32] only a little over a century ago. The sadhus[42] would get manuscript copies made either by their disciples or by sadhvis[44], or from some Brahmins[8] with a good hand. In the Sthanakavasi[50] tradition many of the manuscripts available are in the hand of sadhvis[44]. The reason perhaps was their good handwriting. They would also get some pages from their gurus, since it was not possible for the sadhus[42] to carry the entire collection in person as they travelled from one place to another. They also used to leave them with householder devotees and get from them whichever book they needed. Since the householders were generally ignorant about the ways and means to preserve manuscripts, though had deep respect for them, these copies got damaged with the passage of time. With the emergence of sthanaks, the collections of the monks and nuns therefore began to be left at these sthanaks. But the local committees which looked after these places were not familiar with the ways and means to preserve manuscripts.

Some sadhus[42] (especially Pravartak Suman Muni[26] and Late Sadhvi[43] Svarn Kanta) and householders worked together to prepare lists of such literature at Malerkotla, Dhuri[14], Bhikhi, Sangrur[45] and Ambala[4]. About 250 manuscripts of various works which were in the personal collection of Sadhvi[43] Svarn Kanta were donated by her to the Jaina[19][20] Chair in the Department of Religious Studies of Punjabi[33] University, Patiala[29]. The present authors, Ravinder Jain[40] and Purushottam[36] Jain[37], both of whom have worked on different aspects of Jainism[21] in Punjabi[33], have preserved at Malerkotla personal collections given to them by various sadhus[42] and sadhvis[44], such as Ratan Muni[26] and Sadhvi[43] Satya[47] Vati[55], who found these manuscripts of little use after they were published. The "P. & R. Jain Hastalikhitbhandar" contains about 300 manuscripts, mostly Agama[2] texts with Tabbas but not Tikas (because Sthanakavasi[50] monks formerly rejected Sanskrit[46]), and a few unpublished manuscripts such as the Dhal Caupais, Thokaras and Bhajans[7] in different languages. Inspired by Acarya[1] Sivmuni, a list of the books has been prepared for this collection, the collection of the Jain sthanak[49] in Malerkotla, which holds a rare illustrated manuscript of the Samgrahanisutra, and collections in Faridkot[15] and Ambala[4]. The Atma[5] Gyan[17] Peeth in Mansa[25], established by Muni[26] Bhandari Shri Padam Chand ji, also hosts a collection of valuable Agama[2], Jyotisa, Ganita and Mantrasastra manuscripts. Important is the collection of manuscripts from the Punjab[32] of the late Acarya[1] Susilmuni in the Ahimsa[3] Bhavan, New Rajendranagar, in New Delhi[12][28].

The manuscript collection of the Terapanthi[54] tradition is always with their guru[16], and further texts are available at Ladnun[22] (Rajasthan[38]). As it is, the Sthanakvasi[51] tradition in Punjab[32] does not seem to be interested in the preservation of such manuscripts. It has not been possible for various reasons to assemble the entire collection, spread across sthanaks and private households, at one place where an expert could look after them. The Sthanakavasi[50] collections include highly valuable manuscripts, most of them still unpublished: Agama[2] Tabas, Dhal Caupais, Caritras of the 24 Jinas and other mahapurusas,

Pattavalis, Bhajans[7], Thokaras, etc. Very few manuscripts are illustrated. They are in Prakrit[31], Sanskrit[46], Gujarati, Rajasthani[39], Hindi, Punjabi[33], Urdu and Braj: all of them are in Devanagari[13] script. They are up to 350 years old. Most of these manuscripts are now getting damaged. This will be an irreparable loss to the Jain tradition, especially if they lose their heritage literature due to mere negligence.

Ravinder Jain[40] and Purshotam Jain[34] *have a long association of working together in the field of Jain studies. They have jointly authored many books on different aspects of Jain religion, literature and history. Their work has been the first ever on Jainism[21] in Punjabi[33].*



Purshottam Jain[35] & Ravinder Jain[40] Photo: Peter Flügel[30], Ambala[4] 21.12.2010

Sources

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