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Plagiarized Purāṇas?
Jain Textual Composition in Early Modernity

Much ink has been spilled in the academic study of pre-modern Indian religious literature dealing with the roll of the author and the relationships between received tradition and literary newness or innovation. In 1991 scholar of Indian religious history Padmanabh Jaini contributed to this larger discussion by describing what he termed an obvious case of "skillful plagiarism" committed by a man named Śrībhūṣaṇa, a seventeenth-century Digambara Jain bhaṭṭāraka (cleric) based out of Sojitrā, in modern-day Gujarat.[1] In his Sanskrit *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa*—a Digambara treatment of the deeds of the heroic Pāṇḍava brothers from the *Mahābhārata*—completed in 1600, Śrībhūṣaṇa apparently copied in near totality the work of a previous author, Bhaṭṭāraka Śubhacandra who had lived some fifty years earlier. Śrībhūṣaṇa's work is not identical to Śubhacandra's; in fact, Śrībhūṣaṇa's *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa* contains 779 additional *śloka* verses not found in Śubhacandra's text. In support of his argument for Śrībhūṣaṇa's plagiarism, though, Jaini provides a direct comparison of a single chapter from both authors' *Pāṇḍava Purāṇas*, one that narrates the five auspicious events (*pañca-kalyāṇakas*) in the life of the seventeenth *Jina*, Kunthunātha. According to Jaini: "The correspondence both in the narrative and vocabulary is so manifest that no further argument is necessary to prove…that Śrībhūṣaṇa had committed a flagrant act of plagiarism."[2] Jaini's comparison is indeed striking; his argument that Śrībhūṣaṇa's text corresponds so closely to Śubhacandra's that the only explanation is Śrībhūṣaṇa's copying his predecessor's text is compelling. This paper, though, attempts to rethink Jaini's labeling of Śrībhūṣaṇa as a plagiarist, and in its place I argue that the practice of textual copying was a valid

[1] Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Bhaṭṭāraka Śrībhūṣaṇa's *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa*: A Case of Jaina Sectarian Plagiarism," in *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 363–74.
[2] Ibid., 366.

form of argumentation among Jain authors in pre-modernity, indeed a type of argumentation of which we have other examples.

The paper will proceed in two main parts. I will first examine in more detail the process by which Jaini arrives at labeling Śrībhūṣaṇa a plagiarist. In my reading of Jaini, he employs, either explicitly or implicitly, two factors in thinking about plagiarism which I argue are inherently western and modern and therefore need to be rethought in their application to pre-modern Indian material; these are the notions of individual intellectual property and a desire to deceive for some type of either personal or group gain. The second part will introduce Brahma Jinadāsa, a prolific fifteenth-century Digambara author who wrote in both Sanskrit and Old Gujarati. Specifically, I will discuss his Sanskrit *Padmapurāṇa*, a work that I argue shows clear signs of being in large part copied from Raviṣeṇa's seventh-century Sanskrit work of the same name. My goal in this is not to equate Jinadāsa and Śrībhūṣaṇa; I will discuss some major differences between the two textual copying phenomena. But I do argue that Jinadāsa and Śrībhūṣaṇa were employing similar tactics for argumentation, and that understanding this helps scholars to understand why Digambara *purāṇic* composition continued so late into the early modern period.

First though, let me explain a bit about why I find the label "plagiarist" to be problematic. The concepts of textual similarity, borrowing, and plagiarism are not unknown, of course, to pre-modern Indian thinkers, especially classical Sanskrit literary theorists. Ānandhavardana covers the topic in the *Dhvanyāloka,* as does Rājaśekhara in the *Kāvyamimāṁsa*. Hemacandra, the twelfth-century Śvetāmbara Jain polymath, incorporates much of Rājaśekhara's treatment into his own work, and in the seventeenth century, Jaggannātha Paṇḍitarāja commented about the unfortunate possibility of ill-bred poets stealing his work. As Devadhar points out, though, this

concern with plagiarism never seems to have crossed beyond the realm of theorization: "Plagiarism in general was detestable and was deemed to show a lack of originality on the part of the poet who indulged in such borrowing. It appears, however...[that] Sanskrit poets were never prevented from gathering their literary harvest wherever they could, and that 'the notion of literary propriety' did not much trouble their minds."[3] In the modern academy, of course, plagiarism is real and it is troubling. In applying modern ideas of plagiarism to pre-modern material, though, we may all too often be led to *stop* inquiry and conversation, to label *a person* as fraudulent and unethical and *their work* as therefore lacking value and unworthy of study. We see this in Jaini's article; upon labeling Śrībhūṣaṇa a plagiarist, any attempt at further analysis is basically abandoned. The nearly 800 original verses that Śrībhūṣaṇa composed are fruit of the poisonous tree and therefore do not merit attention. Similarly, the introduction to Śrībhūṣaṇa's text, which is where Jaini admits much of Śrībhūṣaṇa's originality can be found, need not be examined. It is this reaction to the label of plagiarism—its inherent ability to shut down avenues and modes of inquiry—that I find problematic.

Returning, though, to his article, I argue that Jaini follows an idea of plagiarism that is intimately linked with specifically modern notions of personal intellectual property and the desire for some sort of gain via deception. These are concepts that do not necessarily translate into a pre-modern Jain ethos. Taking first the concept of personal intellectual property, we must remember that Jain *purāṇas* generally begin with dialogues between King Śrenika—a prominent figure in much of Jain narrative literature—and the Jina Mahāvīra and his primary disciple (*gaṇadhara*), Gautama. During these dialogues, the king—racked with doubt due to the fact that he has heard so many different and conflicting versions of a specific tale—asks the two men to

[3] C. R. Devadhar, "Plagiarism—Its Varieties and Limits," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 35, no. 1/4 (1954): 212.

narrate definitively the story of whomever the *purāṇa* will be about. Gautama agrees to the king's request, and narrates the story, insuring the king that he has learned the truth directly from the Jina himself. As Raviṣeṇa puts it in his *Padmapurāṇa*—and this is indicative of how later Jain authors also describe the encounter—Gautama declares: "Listen carefully, oh long-lived king who is indeed dear to the gods, to my speech, which was uttered by the Lord of the Jinas himself and the goal of which is to communicate the truth."[4]

Since the narrative that follows is the word of the omniscient Jina, later authors of any subsequent individual work make no personal claim to its contents; rather, the author simply recounts *dharmic* truth, a truth conceptualized not even as the product of the Jina himself, but rather as something eternal and unchanging, something which continually reenters the world through the conduit of the Jina and his subsequent disciples. What is even more, according to Digambaras—and this is a fact that is contested by their Śvetāmbara sectarian counterparts—the omniscient Jina's preaching is not through the medium of normal speech, but instead via a primordial, "divine sound" (*divyadhvani*) that emanates from the body of the omniscient Lord. This divine sound would be unintelligible to any listener without first being translated into actual language by Gautama or another *gaṇadhara*. Thus why, in the quotation above from Raviṣeṇa, it is Gautama who narrates the story. Jaini too gestures towards the fact that one's telling of a *purāṇic* story is not one's own when he remarks that: "The modesty of the Jaina mendicant authors is well known even to this day—their names appear at the end of a long list of the teachers in their lineage."[5] Again, "modesty" might not be the best term here. There is an indebtedness to previous teachers that is important in these lists, and as other scholars have

[4] Pannalal Jain (ed.), *Raviṣeṇācārya's Padmapurāṇa [Padmacharita]: Volume 1*. New Delhi: Bharatīya Jñānapīṭha, 2009: 32.
[5] Jaini, "Bhaṭṭāraka Śrībhūṣaṇa's *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa*: A Case of Jaina Sectarian Plagiarism," 365.

pointed out, showing proper mendicant lineage is an important aspect of argument making more broadly. In many cases one can be attacked not simply because of what one says, that is, the content of an argument, but also because of being perceived as unqualified to say it on account of an illegitimate or broken lineage. The performance of proper lineage history, then, is not simply an example of modesty, but an important way of claiming authority to speak *in the first place*.

The second concept inherent in plagiarism that Jaini relies upon in making his argument is that of intended deception for some sort of gain. Let us examine the second half of this proposition first: did Śrībhūṣaṇa have anything to gain from copying Śubhacandra's text? Jaini postulates two areas of possible gain: personal and sectarian. Jaini touches upon the former only briefly, pondering whether, "in the case of Śrībhūṣaṇa, one must ask the question if he was inspired more by a personal ambition to exhibit skillfulness as a poet."[6] He also remarks that the nearly 800 original verses in Śrībhūṣaṇa, "suggest a strategy to convey his superior skill in verse-making…over his rival Śubhacandra."[7] This is a possibility, though Jaini is more interested in discussing the likelihood of sectarian competition and gain. Perhaps Śrībhūṣaṇa was impelled by "a sectarian spirit…to match his Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha lineage with that of the rival Mūlasaṅgha, which had a *Pāṇḍava-Purāṇa* of its own, composed by a recent author who also happened to be a bhaṭṭāraka in a neighboring state, and thus a rival for the patronage of the Jaina laity."[8] There is a long history of animosity between the Mūlasaṅgha and the Kāṣṭhasaṅgha; history characterizes the Kāṣṭhasaṅgha as perpetually trying to play catch-up with the more dominant Mūlasaṅgha, which Dundas describes as exerting "the dominant and most longstanding influence in the

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 371.
[8] Ibid., 372.

Digambara ascetic community."[9] Indeed, the Kāṣṭhasaṅgha, which traces its own history back to a seventh-century ascetic named Kumārasena, had since at least the tenth century been a target of Mūlasaṅgha criticism. The Mūlasaṅgha author Devasena excoriated Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha monks for abandoning the traditional peacock-feather broom in favor of one made of cow's tail hair.[10] With this history in mind, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that Śrībhūṣaṇa's copying of Śubhacandra's text was part of a long history of animosity between the two lineages, and that an interest in either personal or sectarian gain on the part of Śrībhūṣaṇa is completely plausible. Indeed, the two need not be mutually exclusive and in fact would probably go hand-in-hand: personal renown is likely associated with support of and contributions towards the sustenance and growth of the lineage. So the short answer to whether or not there was something to gain for Śrībhūṣaṇa in copying Śubhacandra's text is yes, there certainly was.

What is left, though, is whether or not that advantage, either personal or sectarian, depended on deception to work. Jaini believes this to be the case. On the one hand, Śrībhūṣaṇa never mentions Śubhacandra in his text, unsurprising given the seemingly tense relationships between the authors' lineages. Jaini also points out that Śrībhūṣaṇa changes the first and last verses of every *sarga* (chapter) of the text and, as already mentions, adds verses of his own. All of this Jaini interprets as Śrībhūṣaṇa's attempts to hide his plagiarism: "This would appear to be the extent of Śrībhūṣaṇa's originality; he probably thought that by changing the first and last verses of each *sarga* and by adding here and there several verses of his own, he could cover up his act of plagiarism."[11] The logical questions that follow such a statement are: whom is Śrībhūṣaṇa trying to deceive by covering up this plagiarism, and would changing two-or-so lines

[9] Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992), 121.
[10] Ibid., 122.
[11] Jaini, "Bhaṭṭāraka Śrībhūṣaṇa's *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa*: A Case of Jaina Sectarian Plagiarism," 371.

from each chapter, and adding verses throughout the text, accomplish that? Put another way, who is the intended audience for both Śrībhūṣaṇa's and Śubhacandra's texts? Jaini associates textual production and lay patronage; "having" a *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa* made a monastic community more attractive to the laity, and therefore inclined them to patronize that community at the expense of others. Why this may be the case is left largely unexplained. On the one hand, it perhaps assumes a pre-modern lay interest in textual production itself: perhaps the laity liked best the lineage that produced the largest number of texts. On the other hand, perhaps there is a collapsing of textual production and the performance of didactic sermons based on stories included in texts. Of course, it is probably not the case that members of a lineage that did not "have" its own *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa* would not know the stories of the Pāṇḍava brothers, or would be incapable of using those stories in their interaction with the laity. Both of these scenarios, then, seem unlikely. The former sets up a view of the laity as being extraordinarily fickle, switching their patronage between lineages based on which one creates the most number of texts. It ignores the fact that many bhaṭṭāraka institutions during the late-medieval an early-modern periods were linked with specific, regional caste communities, that the bhaṭṭārakas, by virtue of their *not* being the classical Digambara peripatetic munis, actually laid down roots in the communities surrounding them. The latter scenario equates text production—and especially text production *in Sanskrit,* a language inaccessible to most of the laity—with sermonizing in a way that strikes me as implausible. In all, the relationship that Jaini sets up between monastic communities, the laity, and textual production is a murky one. Instead of making a direct link between text product and lay patronage, I argue Śrībhūṣaṇa's project of textual copying was meant to circulate among and between members of different Digambara monastic lineages themselves, and that far from wanting to deceive people into thinking him an original poet, Śrībhūṣaṇa *wanted* members of the

Mūlasaṅgha to know that he had done this, that he was appropriating Śubhacandra's narrative into his own lineage, making the claim that his lineage alone was qualified to narrate the story of the Pāṇḍava brothers. In Śrībhūṣaṇa's mind, Śubhacandra's story was correct; but being a member of the Mūlasaṅgha disqualified him from relating it correctly. Śrībhūṣaṇa's project is not to deceive; rather, it is a public declaration about the primacy of his own lineage vis-à-vis the rival Mūlasaṅgha.

We can, of course, look for other examples of pre-modern Digambara textual copying to test the theory that it was a valid form of argumentation. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, we see another such example in the fifteenth-century *Padmapurāṇa* of Brahma Jinadāsa.[12] His text—which tells a Digambara version of the story of Rāma—is largely based off of Raviṣeṇa's seventh-century text of the same name. We know this for two reasons. First, the two opening verses of each text—which establish a beautiful image of Indra worshipping at the feet of Lord Mahāvīra—are identical; Jinadāsa clearly lifted them from Raviṣeṇa's text in order to begin his own. This is, I argue, an intentional signal to any qualified reader, well versed in the tradition of Digambara *purāṇic* composition, that Jinadāsa is placing himself in some sort direct relationship with Raviṣeṇa. The second reason we know that Jinadāsa is copying Raviṣeṇa is that he tells us that it is the case. In the sixty-third verse of his introduction, Jinadāsa begins a series of praise verses describing Raviṣeṇa, and explains that, having acquired the complete knowledge of all the previous *ācāryas* through whom the story of Rāma came down, Raviṣeṇa "made" or "created" (*cakre*, the singular third-person–or first-person, though here impossible–perfect from the verbal root *kṛ*) that story. This creation that Jinadāsa discusses seems to be a specific object, a physical text. All of the previous ācāryas that Jinadāsa described simply "tell" the story; only Raviṣeṇa

[12] Jinadāsa's works are as yet unedited and unpublished. The *Padmapurāṇa* used for this paper came from the Āmer Śāstra Bhaṇḍar in Jaipur, India.

"makes" it. And indeed, it is that very object, that text, that Jinadāsa eventually admits to working from, saying: "And having received [*prāpya*] the work consisting of his [Raviṣeṇa's] words, here, I make this treatise clear with an introduction so that people will know it." In the meat of the narrative itself, too, it is obvious that Jinadāsa has at hand a copy of Raviṣeṇa's earlier text. Unfortunately I do not have the time here to back this claim up with concrete examples, but similar to how Jaini put it with respect to Śrībhūṣaṇa and Śubhacandra, the similarities between Jinadāsa's and Raviṣeṇa's works, especially at the levels of vocabulary and word order, are simply too close to be explained by any other reason.

This is not to say, of course, that Jinadāsa's case is exactly the same as Śrībhūṣaṇa's. As I already mentioned, Jinadāsa admits that he is working from Raviṣeṇa's text; he "cites" Raviṣeṇa in a way that—as already discussed—Śrībhūṣaṇa does not do with Śubhacandra. Historically, of course, there is also the fact that between Raviṣeṇa and Jinadāsa lies a span of some 700 years, while between Śrībhūṣaṇa and Śubhacandra there is only fifty years. Related to this is that there is no animosity between Raviṣeṇa and Jinadāsa, no spirit of competition like in the case of Śrībhūṣaṇa and Śubhacandra. The differences are recognizable and inescapable, but the very phenomenon of text copying is the same, and both serve to highlight a relationship between the two texts and their respective authors in order to make some further argument or arguments. The impetus behind each of our examples, I argue, constitutes two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, Srībhūṣaṇa copied Śubhacandra's text in order to make a public argument about the supremacy of his own lineage over that of his rival. Śrībhūṣaṇa challenged Śubhacandra's very eligibility to narrate the story of the Pāṇḍavas by using his own words against him and his larger monastic lineage. On the other hand, Jinadāsa copied the words of Raviṣeṇa—a universally admired Digambara poet—in an attempt to portray himself as the proper inheritor of the Rāma

story, which of course is traced back to the mouths of Gautama and Mahāvīra. In copying the texts of their predecessors, both Śubhacandra and Jinadāsa are making arguments about lineage and about authority to speak.

That is probably not, of course, all that the two authors are doing. If we set aside the notion of plagiarism and agree that the phenomenon of textual copying is a valid, and indeed valuable, form of argumentation for pre-modern Jains, then we can think further about what the differences between texts may mean. As J.Z. Smith has pointed out, making sense of difference is the interesting part of any comparative project; it is within the differences between two seemingly similar exempla that important information lies. A major difference between Raviṣeṇa's and Jinadāsa's texts, for example, is that while Jinadāsa oftentimes uses the same basic vocabulary as his predecessor, and follows closely the plot that Raviṣeṇa lays out, he removes the more poetic aspects of Raviṣeṇa's text. His language is, by and large, direct and succinct in a way that Raviṣeṇa's is not. This makes sense given the quote above, in which Jinadāsa says he wants to make Raviṣeṇa's text "clear," but it also raises questions about how each text is supposed to work on a reader and why, in the first place, Jinadāsa thought it necessary to make Raviṣeṇa's text clear in the first place. In the case of Śrībhūṣaṇa, his nearly 800 additional verses to Śubhacandra's main narrative suddenly become more important. What might an analysis of these verses show a reader? What trends might we see in what they discuss? What aspects of the narrative might they highlight or gloss over? How might language be used differently and what might that signify? The *importance* of these verses is highlighted only by the realization that the rest of the text is copied, and what I have hoped to show here is that they are only valuable if we remove the concept of plagiarism from our interpretive toolbox and take seriously the roll of textual copying as a form of argumentation.

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