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*ON COMPASSION:
A JAINA PERSPECTIVE*

- T.S. Satyanath*

Showing compassion to living beings, in particular to animals is one of the characteristic features that makes Jainism different from other religions. One of the ritualistic vows that the Jaina lay men and women undertook in medieval Karnataka is Jīvadayaṣṭamī-nōmpi ‘the vow to show compassion to animal life’ that is exemplified in the story of *Yaśōdhara*. The distribution of the ritual vow and its story appears to have been popular over a much wider belt as is evident from the fact that different versions are to be found in Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, Kannada, Tamil, Gujarati and Hindi. There are at least eighteen narratives and renderings of the story available spanning over ten centuries from eighth to eighteenth century C.E.,

* Dr. T.S.Satyanath has been a faculty at University of Delhi and taught Kannada Literature.

out of which five are in Kannada, four each in Sanskrit and Gujarati, two in Apabhrahmsa and one each in Prakrit, Tamil and Hindi. The availability of narratives and renderings across time and space suggests the popularity of the ritual vow and the story and the role it played during medieval Jainism. Taking a closer look at *Yaśōdhara-carite*, a *kāvya* written in *campū* style in Kannada by Janna in the twelfth century C.E., the paper investigates the following issues:

the significance of the principle of non-violence for Jaina tradition in medieval Karnataka; the ritualistic dimensions of the vow of showing compassion to animal life in the form of a *vrata/nōmpi-kathā*; and the structural and aesthetic strategies used in the construction of the story.

Over View

1. Jaina Concept of Liberation
2. The Vows
3. Narratives and Renderings
4. *jīvadayāstami-nōmpi* , and *yaśōdhara-carite*
5. *yaśōdhara-carite* in Medieval Indian Literature
6. Relevance of Nonviolence

Jaina Concept of Liberation

The Jaina liberation of soul is linked to four key concepts, *kāya* (body), *ātma* (soul), *samādhi* (meditation) and *siddhatva* (realization) through a karma theory.

Obeyesekere (1980) points out that the theory of karma originated probably among the tribal religions of the Gangetic plains and that the religions of the region, in particular, Jainism and Buddhism must have adopted such a theory from the tribal worldview.

Karma

The Jaina concept of karma differs in several respects from other philosophical systems in its definition.

According to Jaina philosophers, the world is composed of six dravyas.

They have been differentiated into two categories, namely, jīva (sacetana) and ajīva (acetana).

Pudgala

Where as jīva itself constitutes the first dravya, which belongs to the sacetana group, the other five, namely, pudgala (matter), dharma, adharma, ākāśa and kāla constitute the acetana group.

Like a magnet attracts iron towards it, jīva attracts pudgala, which is in the form of karma.

Encrustation of karma

It has been claimed that treatment of karma as the matter

form of pudgala and karma entering ātma are unique to Jaina religion.

Karma is further differentiated into two, namely, bhāva-karma and dravya-karma.

The process of unification of jīva and karma is called as karma-bandha (encrustation of karma) (Annaraya 1952).

Karma-ksaya

The karma flows into the body depending on the nature of the deed that the body performs.

Good deeds result in puṇya and sins result in pāpa.

However, as encrustation of karma takes place while the ātma is in the body, cleansing the soul from the trammels of samsāra (karma-kṣaya) could take place only while the ātma is in the body

Birth-cycle

As one life span of the body may not be sufficient for this cleansing, several incarnations or rebirths are required for this purpose. The religious heroes in the Jaina purāṇas go through a cycle of rebirths, called bhavāval,i (birth-cycle) before attaining the siddhatva (realization).

The Jaina Cosmos

The Jaina cosmos consists of seven upper heavenly worlds (svargas) and seven lower nether worlds (narakas) with the earth sandwiched between the upper and lower worlds.

After the death, and depending upon the nature of the encrusted of karma, the soul goes either to the upper or lower worlds, spends an appropriate time there and comes back again to earth through rebirth.

Siddhatva

The cycle continues till the karma-kṣaya takes place.

In the last birth before nirv,ṇa, called as arhanta, the soul-body has cleansed itself of all the karma and close to the point of attaining siddhatva.

Such a birth is called as āsanna-bhavya (closeness or proximity to greatness).

Realization (siddhatva)

The realization (siddhatva) of the paramātman is possible only through meditation (samādhi).

However, this would imply punishing the body.

Mortification of the body is a process through which the karmas are overcome and the soul is cleansed of its kārmic encrustation.

The Three Jewels

Jaina religion encompasses a three-fold path of spiritual practice.

They are called the tri-ratnas ‘the three jewels’, which helps the soul in the process of realization (siddhatva) .

The three jewels includes samyak-jñāna (the right faith), samyak-caritra (the right knowledge) and samyak-darśana (the right conduct).

The Right Conduct (samyak-carita)

The third jewel is called the right conduct.

Jaina scriptures approach this in progressive succession - conduct for householders and for monks.

For the former, the goal sought is the development of the individual and society; for the latter, it is self-realization.

Vows (vrata - nōmpi)

All aspirants of liberation dedicate themselves to proper conduct through vows (vrata ~ nōmpi) and subvows.

Vows are at the heart of Jaina morality and are undertaken with a full knowledge of their nature and a determination to carry them through

Twelve Vows

In all, Jaina ethics specifies twelve vratas for the householders (śrāvaka-jana):

Five Minor Vows: aṇuvrata,

Three Social Vows: guṇavrata

Four Spiritual Vows: śikṣā-vrata

Minor Vows:

The five Minor Vows are:

1. Nonviolence
2. Truth
3. Nonstealing
4. Celibacy

5. Nonpossession

Nonviolence: Ahimsā

Nonviolence is the foundation of Jaina ethics.

Jainism prescribes: ‘one should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture or kill any animal, living being, organism or sentient being’.

This is because of a principle of mutual interdependence:

Parasparopagraho Jīvanam

‘All life is bound together by the mutual support of interdependence’

Violence

Four stages of violence have been identified:

1. Premeditated Violence
2. Defensive Violence
3. Vocational Violence
4. Common Violence

Jaina literature is a treasury of stories and characters who exemplify the human potential for living nonviolently in this world.

Jaina Literature

Jaina literature in several languages such as, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, Tamil, Kannada, Gujarati and Hindi, are full of stories in which the importance of principles of the Jaina faith is narrated through stories.

vrata-kathās or nōmpi-kathās constitute an important sub-genre of Jaina literature.

The vrata-kathā narration where in writing or orally is called for our purposes as ‘narratives’ or ‘renderings’.

Narratives and Renderings

What we call as translations today had an entirely different connotation in medieval Karnataka and signified a cultural correspondence between religions, languages and sectarian followings.

Ramanujan (1982) suggests that it is better to call such transactions as narratives.

Such texts were hybrid in nature and often used a mixed language, designated as maṇipravāḷ,am – a mixture of ruby (Sanskrit) and coral (regional).

Narratives: Processes and Models

In order to understand the processes and models that operated behind different sectarian narratives and renderings, we have to look into Jaina narrative texts, the commentary (ṭīkā,) tradition and the folk/performing traditions.

A closer look at the processes and models operating behind the religious and ritualistic aspects of medieval narratives and renderings demonstrates the multi dimensionality of religious texts.

Life-stories in Vaḍḍārādhane

Let us now consider the case of the Jaina text Vaḍḍārādhane) Vaḍḍa vṛddha (Skt.), ‘the worship of the elders’, a text that has been claimed to have been written by Shivakotyacharya in the early part of the 10th Century (c. 920 C.E.).

This text is an anthology consisting of 19 life-stories of legendary Jaina holy men.

Vrata-kathā

The term ārādhane ‘worship’ that is inherent in the title of the text and the tradition of existence of such texts in Jaina literary tradition further suggests that the reading or recitation of the text might have been intended as the concluding part of a ritual worship similar to

the story recitation of a vrata-kathā among the sectarian communities of medieval India.

Vaḍḍārādhane: Structure

Structurally, the stories in Vaḍḍārādhane start with a Prakrit gāhe (<gathā) that tells the story line in a synoptic manner.

In some stories, along with the gāhes, Sanskrit ślokas and Kannada verses could also be found in the narrative portion of the story.

Ritual deaths among Jains

The stories of in Vaḍḍaradhane describe the details of the ritual deaths, namely samādhi-maran and sallekhana that the followers of Jaina holy men undertake.

Model

The recitation and listening of the stories not only constitute a sacred ritualistic narration but also act as a kavaca, a sacred shield that protects the listeners against all types of evil and sins that attempt to threaten the maintenance of the Jaina path.

The multilinguality of the text and the renderings that takes place from one language to another within the text itself provides the model for understanding the cultural transaction.

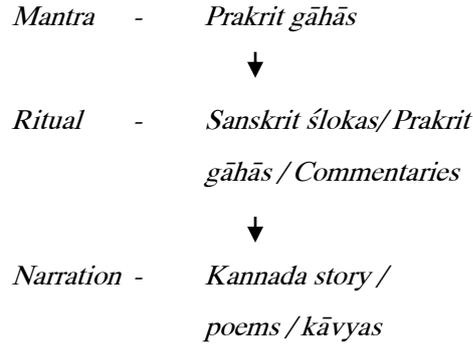
Vrata-kathā or nōmpi- kathā model

have called the model as vrata-kathā or nōmpi- kathā model, as not only Vaḍḍārādhane and several Jaina texts use such a model but also its variants could be found in many Indian languages, both at popular and folk levels.

The Model

Thus the mantra, the ritual and the narration of the ritualistic story in the language become the characteristic structure of such cultural transactions. The interconnections among different linguistic codes and their functions can be diagrammatically visualized as shown in the schematic diagram.

Schematic Diagram of Telling or Renedering Process in vrata-kathā or nōmpi-katha model



Jīvadāyāṣṭamī –Nōmpi

It is important to note that the observation of a vow is more like a ritual performance and ends with the recitation of the relevant story associated with the ritualistic vow.

One of them, Jīvadāyāṣṭamī –Nōmpi ‘the vow of showing kindness (compassion) to life’ is accompanied by the recitation of the story of Yaśōdhara-Carite (Raghavachar 1941).

Jīvadāyāṣṭamī–Nōmpi-Kathe

One of renderings of the of the story of yaśōdhara-carite in Kannada has been called as ami-nōmpi ya-kathe,t,jīvadāyas (c. 16th century C.E.) and starts with formulaic poems and the story of Yaśōdhara.

“Having bowed the feet of Muni Suvrata , I am going to tell a nōmpi-kathā, for the benefit of those who are destined to go to naraka (hell) for having committed violence, telling lies and stealing”.

Context of the Story

When the performers of the vow, Śreṇika and Celinī request the holy man Gautama-gaṇādhara to describe the details of performing the vow, Gautama-gaṇādhara narrates the modalities of vow.

After performing the vow, the couple again request the holy man to tell them the stories of the great people who performed the vow on earlier occasions Gautama-gaṇādhara accordingly narrates the story of yaśōdhara to them.

Phala-śṛti

The author reiterates further that as showing compassion to lives (jīva-daye) is the only religion, the vow of jivadāyastami became the only vow to be observed.

The great ones (bhavyar), having excelled in showing compassion to lives and having vowed to Jīvadayāstamī attain happiness”.

Jīvadayāstamī as Counter-Structure

The story of Yaśōdhara as an integral part of jivadāyastami appears to be a reaction to animal sacrifices that use to be performed during the festival of Durgmi that Brahminical Hinduism,t,ās celebrates during ten-day festival of dasarā.

A vow that Jains are advocated to take on showing compassion to animals right on the day when the other prominent community is engaged in slaughtering of animals in the name of worship is one of the most appropriate counter-structures that Jainism has constructed.

The Vow of Jīvadayāstamī

The vow of Jīvadayāstamī, its ritual and narration of the story in Kannada together constitute the entire ritual of the vow. Yaśōdhara-carite (1.3) by Janna (c. 1230) makes this point clear.

“During the fasting of the followers (śrāvaka-jana) in the vow of jivadāyastami, this story (vastu-kathana) is feast to the ears; having thought like this, kavibhāla-locana (Janna) composed this text.”

The Popularity of the Vow

Jīvadayāstamī vow has appeared in literature since 650 A.D. both in Prakrit and Sanskrit.

The story of Yaśōdhara as the vratha-kathā of the vow has appeared in several languages.

Janna's Yaśōdhara-carite

Janna's story line follows that of Vadiraja's Sanskrit

rendering (c. 11th century A.D.), which itself is based on Gunabhadra's uttara-purāna, (c. 9th century A.D.), written in Sanskrit.

The Story

yaśōdhara-carite has been considered as a marvelous piece of poetry and depicts, in a touching manner, the horrors of violence (himsā) and sensuality.

King Yaśōdhara is disgusted with life, having witnessed the committing of adultery by his most beloved queen, Amṛtamati.

When his mother enquires as to why he is dejected and not gay as usual, he tells a lie that he had a bad dream.

His mother, thereupon, suggests sacrificing a hen to the family deity to thwart the befalling evil. Yaśōdhara is horrified on hearing this, and refuses to agree to this cruel act. Now his mother suggests sacrificing a hen made of rice-flour, and not of a living hen.

Yaśōdhara accepts this suggestion as he did not want to hurt his mother's feelings, and as a result commits sankalpa-himsā (intention of violence) which causes him and his mother to wander in saṃsāra taking births in the animal world and going through horrible and torturous lives.

However, at last, the two souls take to the path of liberation after becoming awakened.

Two Parallel Themes

Scholars (Narasimhachar 1941, Sharma 1994) observe that structurally the story falls into two parts. The 'here', in which Amṛtamati the queen, having infatuated with a dwarf mahout, Asavanka, falls madly in love with him and keeps going to him after her husband king falls asleep.

Sankalpa-Himsā

When the king comes to know about her secret meetings with the mahout and starts behave like a dejected, she becomes suspicious and gets him and his mother killed.

This part appears to have been taken from popular literature or folklore. The second part of the story deals with 'hereafter' and reveals the ordeal that the mother-son have to undergo for the sankalpa-himsā, the violence in mind that they committed.

The Narrative Aspect

The narration is not straight forward. A majority of the story is narrated in a flash back manner by Abayaruci, the king Yaśōdhara reborn, who has been brought for sacrifice before Goddess Māri by Maridatta.

The role participant narrator-sufferer intensifies the stress on nonviolence in the story.

A further dimension is added when Maridatta changes heart and gets converted to Jainism. Yaśōdhara-Carite in Medieval Indian Literature. Table 1 provides details about the popularity of Jīvadāyasastami–Nōmpi as well as the story of Yaśōdhara that is recited at the end of the ritual.

All these suggest that the Jaina narratives and renderings of the Prakrit stories were ritualistic texts, usually narrated in regional languages like Kannada, Tamil Gujarati and Hindi as part of the ritualistic worship.

The History

The earliest reported text that deals with the story of Yaśōdhara is by Prabhanjana, written in Prakrit and probably belongs to c. 650 A.D.

Apart from this, there are at least eighteen narratives of the story of Yaśōdhara available in different Indian languages.

Among these, five renderings are in Kannada, four each in Sanskrit and Gujarati, two in Apabhramsha and one each in Prakrit, Tamil and Hindi.

Narratives of Yaśōdhara Available in Different Indian languages

<i>Name of the Text</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Time</i>
<i>Samarāiccha-kahā</i>	Haribhadra	Prakrit	8th C.
<i>Trīśatīlakṣaṇa-mahāpurāṇa</i>	Jinasena	Sanskrit	9th C.
<i>Tisatṭhathi-mahāpurisa-Guṇālaṅkāra</i>	Pushpadanta	Apabhramsha	10th C.
<i>Jasahara-cariu</i>	Pushpadanta	Apabhramsha	10th C.
<i>Yaśastilaka-campū</i>	Somadeva	Sanskrit	10th C.
<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	Vadiraja	Sanskrit	11th C.
<i>Yaśōdara-kāppiyam</i>	?	Tamil	11th C.
<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	Janna	Kannada	12th C.
<i>Yyaśodhara-carite</i>	Padumanabha	Kannada	15th C.
<i>Yaśodhar- carite</i>	Chandravarni	Kannada	15th C.
<i>Jīvadayāstami-nōmpi</i>	?	Kannada	16th C.
<i>Yaśodhar- carite</i>	Jinachandra Suri	Gujarati	16th C.

<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	Devendra	Gujarati	16th C.
<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	Lavanyaratna	Gujarati	16th C.
<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	?	Kannada	16th C.
<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	Manohara Dasa	Gujarati	17th C.
<i>Yaśodhara-carite</i>	Lakshmi Dasa	Hindi	18th C.

Details

The details of these texts are given in Table below.

The availability of texts from several languages suggests the high degree of popularity of the vow, its ritual enactment and narration in medieval India.

Relevance of Nonviolence

The story of Yaśōdhara and the vow of jivadāyastami may not be of much significance to us, if we are not practicing Jainism today.

However, the concept nonviolence as a tool of resistance and respect for life has provided one of the most significant cultural tools of resistance.

The concept of ecosystem and environmental ethics have generated important issues that are central to nonviolence. Ecosystems

Ecosystems have to be conceived not just as environmental sciences but also as cultural systems that exists within their environments. Some ecologists tend to think that ecology as a science deviates significantly from the general scientific tradition of the West and is concerned with the whole (systemic) rather than its parts.

At the same time, ecosystems are perceived as local and self-sustaining systems.

Gadgil 1998

“As such, ecological thinking is sympathetic to the mode of thinking of the ancient traditions of the East, in particular Asian, African and

Amerindian cultures. Especially important in this regard, ecology is concerned with diversity and adaptiveness.” (Gadgil 1998)

It is here that the scientific traditions and the cultural practices of the communities merge together rather than becoming separate and symptomatic.

A Holistic View

Such representations not only suggest that everything that exists within an ecosystem, be it animate or non-animate, has an importance of itself with in the system but also makes them mutually dependent on the other by linking them together in a web of relationships.

Such a holistic view takes into account all components of an ecosystem, their interactions, whether such components are animate or not.

Cultural Behaviour

It is not even necessary that the conventions of such systems have to be codified linguistically, through a textual tradition or orally; they can as well exist in the cultural behaviour of the community itself.

In fact, the insights for ecological concerns and resource management have come from remote and unexpected sources and from nonverbal representations.

The vow of jivadāyastami belongs to such an ecosystem.

Gandhi and Nonviolence

It has been often pointed out by different biographers of Gandhi the intimate relationship that Gandhi had with his goat.

The mutual relationship between the two was so strong that in the midst of important political negotiations with senior British officials, Gandhi would take the time to tend to his goat.

In this connection, commenting on the Gandhian views regarding ecological concerns, Lal (2000) points out as follows:

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Lall (2000)

“...we shall have to go well beyond the ordinary implications conveyed by the categories of ‘ecology’ and ‘environment’; indeed, we may not even find much in these words, as they are conventionally understood, to bring us close to Gandhi, unless we are prepared to concede that ethics, ecology, and politics were all closely and even indistinguishably interwoven into the fabric of his thought and social practices.”

“If, for instance, his practice of observing twenty-four hours of silence on a regular basis was a mode of conserving his energy, entering into an introspective state, and listening to the still voice within, it was also a way of signifying his dissent from ordinary models of communication with the British and establishing the discourse on his own terms.”

Implications

Thus the biological, sociological and political dimensions of an ecosystem clearly become evident here.

Apart from establishing a clearly marked autonomy for cultural traditions in ecosystems, issues like nonviolence can also insulate the communities and their environments from all pervading universalistic concept of environment.