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ANCIENT TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: *SUBHĀṢITA RATNA SANDOHA* AS A NATIONAL JAIN TREASURE

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Ancient Traditional Knowledge System: Characteristics and Contemporary Relevance

The relevance of traditional Indian knowledge system in the modern society can be explored through some of its characteristics. Firstly, ancient Indian knowledge system is universal in its themes and appeal. It explores human concerns like nature of truth, reality, the meaning and purpose of life, and the pursuit of happiness. Its timeless wisdom appeals to the population across cultures and generations. Secondly, it is based on very strong ethical foundations that explore the dilemmas and problems that human beings go through and offers guidance, justice and helps them navigate through life. The principles it is based on primarily involve truthfulness, non-violence, dutifulness etc., which are much needed in every society irrespective of the time period. Thirdly, traditional Indian knowledge system is very holistic in its approach. This implies that it does not only deal with physical well-being but also delves into the depths of mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of an individual. This holistic approach makes it very relevant in the 21st century because it makes the individuals introspective, guides them and makes them capable enough to deal with the crisis that one encounters in day-to-day lives. Fourth, its scientific and practical approaches need to be looked up to by the modern scholars. Time and again it has been proven that the treasure of ancient Indian canon is very scientific and practical especially when it comes to mathematics, astrology, medicine etc. Also, it is very sustainable and in accordance with nature and human society. Its means are such that they would sustain for longer lengths of time as compared to the modern ways of utilizing resources that end up depleting them. Lastly, literary and cultural value that it upholds is of utmost importance. Mythology and folklores bring down traditional wisdom through artistic ways and hence help in the preservation of culture. It inspires artistic expression and deliberation on profound issues through dialogues presented creatively so that they become interesting and comprehensible to humanity in general. Also, the study of ancient languages like Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali connects one with the humongous literary wealth of the nation and helps in inspiring feelings of pride in ones' national identity.

Jaina Literature in the Ancient Indian Literary Canon

Jaina literature occupies a major portion of the entire Indian ancient literary canon. Prem Chand Jain in his essay "The Jaina Contribution to the History of Ancient India" talks about the authenticity of the sources and expresses the importance of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina community texts as an important source of ancient historical information apart from archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics and foreigners' accounts. He claims, "Jaina sources are remarkable for their variety, vastness and chronological sequence. They are spread over the whole range of historical times and are connected with practically every part of the country and with almost every phase of its past history." (Jain, 41)

However, he says that Jaina texts are not that much explored compared to Buddhist and Hindu texts and the works that are explored show promising results regarding their reliability and their possibility of becoming impressive sources that mirror ancient Indian society. Therefore, it is necessary that these texts are studied and explored by scholars and translated in better numbers so that they could become available to scholars and researchers across the globe, without much language barriers.

In his *The Jainas in History of Indian Literature*, the author, Dr Maurice Winternitz, gives a survey of the Jaina literature in Indian history, its characteristics, genres, connection with other literatures and scope including the narrative literature, poetic literature, lyrical and didactic poetry, scientific and technical literature and literature related to politics. Winternitz employs the term "Ascetic Literature" which he characterizes as- its disregard for caste system, its heroes being kings or merchants or śūdras and not just gods or saints, the stories being taken from popular tales, fairy stories, fables and parables, and insists on the sufferings of samsara and teaches morality and compassion and ahimsa (4). To quote Winternitz, "In the sacred texts of Jainas, a great part of Ascetic Literature of ancient India is embodied which has also left its traces in Buddhist literature as well as the Epics and Purāṇas." (9). Hence, it is observed that Jaina literature is a storehouse of literary genres and styles, is interdisciplinary, and has a give and take relationship with other contemporary religious literatures.

Jaina literature is multifaceted and encompasses various fields which are divided into various genres. As explained in *Mokṣamārgaparakāśaka* by Pt. Todarmal Ji, Jaina literature is broadly divided into four genres or 'Ānuyogas' namely *Prathamānuyoga*, *Caraṇānuyoga*, *Karṇānuyoga* and *Dravyānuyoga*. *Prathamānuyoga* comprises of stories of kings, monks, eminent religious personalities, art, literature, poetry and history. Major works include Raviṣeṇa's *Padma Purāṇa*, Jinasena's *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, etc. *Caraṇānuyoga* contains texts that deal with right conduct, principles of observance, behaviour according to Jīva's *guṇasthāna* and similar literature. Examples include Samantabhadra's *Ratnkaranda Śrāvākācāra* and Vaṭṭakera's *Mūlācāra*. *Karṇānuyoga* deals with description of the universe and entails geography, mathematics, astronomy, astrology and the philosophy of Karma and similar literature. Prominent examples include Vīrasena's *Jayadhavalā Ṭīkā* and Nemicandra's *Gommaṭasāra*. *Dravyānuyoga* focuses on the philosophical doctrines, theories and *tattvajñāna*, basically about the dichotomy between the soul and the other. Major works include Kundakunda's *Samayasāra* and *Pravacanasāra*. A study of these genres reveals how each of them contain themes which are of great help to contemporary global audience.

Characteristics and Contemporary Relevance of Jaina Literature

Jaina literary canon is diverse and in order to examine its contemporary relevance, its characteristics and pillar principles must be pondered upon.

Firstly, it is based on ethical principles that are timeless and universal. The vow of *Ahimsā* actively propagates the idea of non-violence against any living being- not just through actions but also through words or thoughts. It encompasses all living beings and thus could cure today's world that is grappling with issues of animal cruelty, environmental degradation, and armed conflicts. *Aparigraha* means non-possession and mindful

consumption of resources and restrains from hoarding materials more than what is needed. It could cure the problems of sustainability and bring in ethical consumerism. *Anekāntavāda* emphasizes on the multifaceted nature of reality and promotes tolerance, understanding, and open-mindedness in navigating diverse perspectives and complex situations.

Secondly, Jaina literature explores psychological well-being and mindfulness. Its philosophy of karma and birth-death-rebirth cycle invokes introspectiveness and self-reflection in humans. Its unique practices of meditation and search of the 'self' have gained widespread recognition and are beneficial in managing stress, improving focus, and enhancing emotional well-being.

Thirdly, Jaina literature is scientific and practical. It includes Mathematics to which the Jaina mathematicians have made significant contributions (for example, the number theory which has had a profound impact on mathematics and science); Astronomy to which the Jain astronomical texts have revealed sophisticated observations of the celestial bodies, offering valuable insights for contemporary astronomy and understanding the universe; and, Logic to which Jain texts have contributed a rigorous system that emphasizes on truth and non-contradiction, and can be applied to critical thinking and problem-solving in various fields.

Lastly, the social, economic, environmental, political and literary insights that Jaina literary canon has, holds immense value for the contemporary audience and is truly a treasure if its potential is tapped in the appropriate ways.

Ācārya Amitagati II and His *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha*

Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha is a verse collection of 922 verses written in the tenth century A.D in Sanskrit language by Ācārya Amitagati II. The work is of immense value and needs to be translated, circulated and promoted in the contemporary world because it is valuable for the scholars and researchers as well as the common folks because of its diverse content and universal appeal.

Ācārya Amitagati- II is one of the most prominent saints in Jaina lineage of saints and writers. He was a saint of the Mathur Sanga. The time period of the author is mentioned in some of his works including *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha*, *Dharmāparīkṣā* and *Pañcasamgraha*. From the account of Indian Historian Vishweshwarnath Reu in his *Bhārata Ke Prācīna Rājavamśa- Bhag 1* (1920) it can be deduced that Ācārya Amitagati created *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* in Vikram Samvat 1050, i.e., 993 AD and *Dharmāparīkṣā* in Vikram Samvat 1070, i.e., 1013 AD during the reign of King Munj. (Reu, 101) Hence, Ācārya Amitagati's time period can be traced to the tenth and eleventh centuries AD. He is best known for his works *Dharmāparīkṣā* and *Bhāvanādvātriṃśatikā*; while the other works that are undoubtedly authored by him include *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha*, *Amitagati Śrāvākācāra*, *Upāsakācāra*, *Pañcasamgraha*, *Ārādhana Samgraha*, *Candraprajñapti*, *Sārdhadvayaprajñapti*, *Vyākhyāprajñapti* and *Jambūdvīpaprajñapti*

Dr Maurice Winternitz in his *The Jainas in History of Indian Literature* elaborately gives the contribution of the Jaina literature, with its various genres, in the history of Indian literary tradition. He talks about the representation of didactic poetry in the Jaina literary canon, and amidst the various examples that he quotes, he refers to Ācārya Amitagati's poetic works and writes, "Well known are the didactic poems of Amitagati. He wrote in his *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* in 994A.D, a work of great importance for our knowledge of Jaina ethics, and 20 years later in 1014A.D, the *Dharmāparīkṣā* which contains not only moral maxims but also a great number of interesting and amusing stories" (19).

Pandit Kailash Chandra Shastri in "Preface" to *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha*, asserts that Ācārya Amitagati was an efficient writer and had exceptional command over Sanskrit language. His prowess as a poet was unprecedented. His simple and honest writing style can clearly be experienced through his available works. On experiencing his enriched, heart-warming, easy and impassioned poetry collection, heart gets over flooded

with joy. As he was the principal of the Mathur sangha, his works are mainly didactic. He has warned human beings from the malpractices and has inspired them to embrace good deeds” (Shastri, 6).

Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha: A Treasure for the Contemporary Era

Firstly, *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha's* historical and cultural significance can be observed as the author is considered to be authentic and recognised by several historians and scholars. Pt. Kailash Chandra Shastri mentions Dr A.N. Upadhye in “Preface” to *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* according to whom Ācārya Amitagati’s name and works were included in book lists published by scholars such as Lumen, Weber, Peterson, Bhandarkar between the years 1886 to 1903. (Shastri, 6) Ācārya Amitagati mentions the time period of his texts in various works which helps the scholars allocate him chronologically. Also, he mentions the kingdom and the king under whose reign he wrote “when one thousand and fifty years had passed to the death of King Vikarm, and King Munj was ruling the land” the book was written (Jaina, 289). He gives reference of his *Guru-paramparā* as well which becomes significant when it comes to the historical study of the text, both in terms of Indian history as well as Jaina religious history. Moreover, intertextuality can be observed in his works where the author has borrowed from his predecessors and contemporaries and the later writers seem to have been inspired from his works. An example can be Ācārya Hemacandra’s (d.1229 A.D.) *Yogaśāstra* which is influenced by Ācārya Amitagati’s *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* and *Śrāvākācāraa* that talks about the broader nature of Yoga, the pious behaviour of the saints of which meditation is just a part. Lastly, *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* uses examples and instances that could be used as a mirror to study his contemporary society. Hence, it can become a lens through which ancient Indian culture, values and practices could be viewed at.

Secondly, the literary value of the book can be evaluated through a study of the writing style, literary devices, language and content. *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* is written in poetic form and has 922 verses which are beautifully woven together and add on to the immense wealth of *Subhāṣita Sandohas* that exist in Sanskrit literature- Bhartṛhari’s *Nītiśataka*, *Śṛṅgāraśataka* and *Vairāgyaśataka* and particularly in Jaina literature, Guṇabhadra’s *Ātmānuśāsana*. It is written in several *chandas* some of which include Anuṣṭup and Śikhariṇī, and is predominated by Śāntarasa because its content instils *vairāgya* or mortification. It is filled with similes and metaphors, for instance in the text, Ācārya very beautifully writes about his motive behind writing this text in the opening verse and says-just like the rays of the sun end darkness to brighten up everything and make the lotuses grow, similarly these *Subhāṣitas* will do away with the darkness of ignorance regarding the living and the non-living and will make the hearts of the readers filled with joy (Jaina, 1)

Moreover, the writing style of Ācārya Amitagati is very clear and simple and such that it could be understood by everyone. He, being the leader of the Mathur Sangha, has a didactic bend to his writing, but what makes him stand apart is his style of amalgamating principles and examples. This makes his philosophy and the knowledge that he wants to impart very clear to his readers. Also, like a dexterous artist and reader of human mind that he comes out to be through his works, he himself raises questions that he thinks would come to the minds of the readers and then answers them tactfully. Due to his diplomacy, the book is filled with the questions and solutions that are general to mankind and hence becomes a text that imparts essential lessons.

Thirdly, psychological and emotional value of the text must also be evaluated. It deals with human emotions like anger, greed and lust and through comparisons and analogies the writer explains how they are hazardous to one’s peace of mind. Issues of pain and deep grief and extreme indulgence in pleasures of senses leads to ill decision making by humans and prevents them from experiencing the joyous nature of the soul. For instance, he writes, “intoxication of any one of the senses also makes the living beings lose their lives, then what to say about those who are vehement in the material pleasures of all five sense organs? They will definitely get destroyed, that is why rational men never get controlled by materials of sense organs and keep on renouncing them” (Jaina, 31). Hence, this text can cater to the needs of understanding human nature, trauma management, anger management and stress management pertaining to excessive desire for materialistic pleasures.

Fourthly, the religious and philosophical significance of the text lies in the fact that it is written by an eminent saint who happened to be the principal of an entire sangha. His prowess as a scholar of diverse range of topics is evident through the mass of his available works. *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* is predominantly a text of *Caranānuyoga* which implies that it deals with the right conduct and behaviour by shravakas or householders. It has a blend of *Karnānuyoga* and *Dravyānuyoga* as well which implies that it contains the philosophy of karma and destiny, and the nature of the soul and the means to experience its complete purity, respectively. Moreover, it sheds light on the nature of knowledge, guru, religion, pain, death, transience of materials etc in great detail with examples and instances from common human lives.

Fifth, the environmentalist view point can also be examined while looking at the contemporary relevance of the text. *Ahimsā*, *Aparigraha*, abstinence from honey, meat and alcohol consumption, and the ideal conduct for householders that is described in the text could greatly uplift the 21st century society. The vow of *Ahimsā* actively propagates the idea of *Ahimsā* which entails non-violence against any living being- not just through actions but also through words or thoughts. In *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* shloka 213, the author summarizes the classification of Jīvas from organisms of single sensory organ to organisms of five-sensory organs in accordance with the Jaina literary canon. He writes that, “all worldly living beings come under the five categories of living organisms and not making them suffer through one’s thoughts, words or actions is the vow of *Ahimsā*” (75). Hence, it is evident that not harming the environment and the society on the whole is very intrinsic to the Jaina philosophy and way of life. *Aparigraha* means non-possession. It is a restraint from one’s own greed, avarice and the habit of hoarding more than what is required for sustenance. It requires to keep in check or give up all such pleasures that come by harming, hurting or killing other living organisms according to one’s stage in life (Jīva’s *guṇasthāna*). This Jain vow is the principle of limiting one’s possessions (*parimita-parigraha*) and limiting one’s desires (*iccha-parimana*). Ācārya dedicates an entire chapter to the sermon to restrain from greed, wherein he explains the demerits of greed and hoarding through several metaphors and asserts on giving it up. While looking at it through the frame of environmentalism, this is a pivotal principle as all the activities that cause the destruction of environment have human greed as their root cause.

Lastly, personal and social upliftment could also be brought about through the understanding and application of this text as it makes individuals understand oneself as well as the society better. Practices such as illicit sexual affairs, alcohol, honey and meat consumption, and too much indulgence in pleasures of senses drive humans into wrong judgements and malpractices that disturb the functioning of the society and lead to crimes and infringe peace. In *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha*, shloka 53-594 in the discussion on lust, author encourages to give up upon lust and illicit sexual desires where he writes, “as much harm as is caused to a human by lust cannot be caused even by a vengeful ruler, lion, elephant, snake or poison... therefore rational humans try to control enemy-like-lust at the soonest” (198). There are three independent chapters dedicated to abstinence from alcohol, meat and honey consumption. Discussing abstinence from alcohol consumption, shloka 507 mentions the infinite number of micro-organisms that reside in it and shloka 508 mentions the physical, and psychological ill effects of alcohol consumption and how it leads humans to take reckless actions which are hazardous to their surroundings. The chapter pertaining to abstinence from Meat consumption, in shloka 533 defines that meat is the body of organisms with 2-5 sense organs and not of the ones with single sense organ. Shloka 530 sheds light on how vegetarianism is better than consuming animal-based food because of the stark difference in the number of organisms residing in both their bodies. Shloka 535 mentions the physical impacts of non-vegetarianism and how it causes lethargy, lust and induces greed and reckless behaviour. Next, abstinence from consumption of Honey is discussed in the following chapter wherein in shloka 550 and 552 acharya mentions how honey is obtained through killing of numerous organisms, has several organisms living in it and procuring it is a cruel process as the secretion collected by bees through hard labour is snatched away unjustly by humans. Shloka 560 and 562 acharya insists on giving up of the usage of honey by oneself, helping others in its production or utilization or appreciating others over its usage as any of these three acts promotes the production of honey and leads to miserable death of innumerable organisms. Also, Ācārya talks about

śrāvakā dharma or the conduct of the householder that should be practiced in order to lead an enriched life, which in turn leads to a well-functioning society.

Hence, *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* is a comparatively lesser-known text by Ācārya Amitagati whose value has not yet been explored and acknowledged. Hence, there is a need to translate it into English language so that it becomes accessible to scholars as well as common people without any language barrier.

Conclusion

Taking a glimpse of the entire tapestry of Indian traditional knowledge system it can be deduced that its humongous canon is filled with wealth that if wisely utilized, can prove to be a boon for the 21st century society. Jaina literature, that forms a major portion of it is spread over a wide range of themes that can act as a cure to contemporary global problems- social, political, economic, psychological, environmental, legal and so on. Particularly, *Subhāṣita Ratna Sandoha* as a representative text of the traditional literary canon is proved to be a treasure for the contemporary society and the universal knowledge that it contains, if critically examined, understood and applied could help humanity navigate through much of the contemporary global issues as a society as well as personally.

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