

Importance of Library and Information Centres in Jainism

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Abstract

The phrase ‘Jaina,’ which means ‘Conqueror,’ is where the term ‘Jainism,’ first appeared. What a way to describe someone who has mastered their desires and passions. Those who have defeated their passions and cravings and achieved freedom are referred to as “liberated souls.” 24 Tirthankars, or ‘Founders of Faith’, are considered by Jains. Risabhadeva was the first, followed by Mahavira, the last of the prophets, whose name was Vardhaman Mahavira. However, it’s also true that he wasn’t the father of Jainism, as there were Jaina doctrines around long before him. To that religion, Vardhaman Mahavira brought a new perspective. As a result of his teachings, modern Jainism can be considered to be modern Jainism for the most part. 23rd Tirthankar Parshvanath was a historical figure who lived in the eighth or ninth century BC and is worth mentioning in this regard.

We believe that Jain Bhandars, which house Jain texts in Jain temples, is the oldest in India when it comes to the importance of libraries in Jain religion and philosophy. The Jain libraries, in fact, play a unique role in the religious dynamics of Jainism. An arrangement of Jain philosophy, which is the oldest surviving in India, is depicted in this concept Jain libraries include the Svetambara and Digambara collections, both of which contain a significant number of well-preserved texts.

Keywords- Library, Well-preserved texts, Doctrine

The first Tirthankara Rishabhanatha’s teachings, according to the Jain tradition, were in existence millions of years ago. A divine preaching hall named “Amavasarana” was where the Tirthankara’s taught, where they were heard by the gods, monks, and commoners alike. Known as shrut Jnana, these divine discourses consist of eleven Angas and Fourteen Purvas. The Gandharas (principal followers) remember and transmit these divine dialogues, which are comprised of

twelve Angas (parts, limbs). It is depicted as a tree with twelve limbs. Svetambara Jains think that the spoken spiritual language is Ardhamagadhi, while Digambara Jains believe that it is a form of divine music or acoustic resonance.

The Tirthankara, or twenty-four spiritual gurus, are credited with spreading Jainism throughout India. There are two major schools of thought in Jainism: Digambara and Svetambara. There are numerous sub-sects and traditions within each of these groups.

Role of Libraries in Jain Religion-

The Jains, a small but powerful religious minority in India, deeply appreciate the written word and over the years have amassed valuable manuscripts libraries. During the 19th century, the labor of three Europeans and one Indian brought to life the depth and variety of contents amassed in the Jain temple libraries. Through their efforts, essays, and catalogs of these collections, researchers both in India and in the west not only learned of the libraries but also borrowed manuscripts through an intercontinental interlibrary loan scheme supported by the Government of Bombay and the India office library.

Regarding Jain religion, it is imperative to say that it is closely associated with principles of asceticism and renunciation. It has been a religion of temples and temple worship. Jain temples are actually diverse visual implements of sculpted and adorned Jina images, monastic robes, meditational aids, books, manuscripts, and myriad other objects. These temples have created a rich material culture that has dispensed specific ritualistic functions of interaction between Jain monks and the laity.

Major duties of worship (deva puja) in the life of a Jain Murtipujak (idol worshipper) inculcate dedication of Jina image, donation of sacred books, building Temple-libraries and construction of temples. Jnan (as known as salvific knowledge) has special significance in Jain Philosophy. In the Jain religion, the books of wisdom are worshipped. It is a central activity in the Jain temple ritual. As per the statement of renowned scholar John E. Cort, “Jain cosmological doctrines are the texts containing the teachings of Mahavira which are essential for the guidance of humanity. It became more relevant in the absence of any living enlightened teacher after the liberation of Mahavira over 2,500 years ago. Therefore; material objects are, no doubt, written manuscripts, and books in Jainism, also, they have taken on a ritual and symbolic life of their own. There was growing concern about preserving the faith’s

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written authority. Apart from it, the Jain tradition of textual knowledge led to the building of Bhandars (monastic libraries). It formed an integral part of temple complexes. Great depositories of Jain textual knowledge, these temple Bhandars in places like Jaisalmer and Patan actually contributed as the most invaluable sources of reconstruction of the history of Jain religion, its social institutions' philosophy, and art.

As the Jain monks were peripatetic and the temple's repositories of the faith's knowledge system, the temple libraries played a crucial role for the Jain laity to improve both their worldly and spiritual lot by managing, and donating, dedicating, and collecting books for the Jnan Bhandars. The temple libraries are run mostly by the congregation of laymen of the community. The management works at different levels at city or neighborhood levels or is hereditarily managed by a single-family.

Scope of Library in Jain Religion-

Winternitz (1972) "Sanskrit was widely used in the works of Prakrit by Svetambara Jain writers after 8th century. The Digambaras also began to adopt Sanskrit earlier. Additional notable works are definitely 'Sanmatitarka (The logic of the true doctrine)' by Siddhasena Divakara (c. 650 CE). It was taken as the first major Jain work on logic written in Sanskrit. When we go through the texts of Jain libraries, one question creeps into our minds. This question is concerned with the libraries of Buddhist texts. One additional question is also associated with this question. No doubt, this additional question is about the collection of Buddhist texts by Jainas in South India.

These inquiries naturally take us to some general information warehousing investigations on Jaina libraries in India: Traditional libraries in India by John E. Cort. His primary focus is on the Jaina library in Patan (Gujarat) and his research has focused on the library's last century. It has long been a tradition in Jain intellectual, ceremonial, and community life to produce written copies of manuscripts. Even though Mahavira's death and subsequent liberation made it impossible for the Jain community to have any live enlightened instructors, the scriptures that embody Mahavira's teachings remain vitally important to the Jain faith. "Jain urge that a book, any book, should be handled with respect," explains the reason for collecting non-Jaina works. A Jain festival known as Jnan Panchami honors both the information contained in manuscripts and the actual manuscripts themselves once a year, on the day following the New Year which is known as "a fifth of knowledge" (Jnan

Panchami). Tables are stacked with both modern printed books and handwritten manuscripts. Hands clasped in a sign of reverence, the laity chant hymns to wisdom in their native tongues. On metal trays on the tables, library activists place offerings of the sacred sandalwood powder known as vaskep (as well as money) before the powder is sprinkled over the books and manuscripts themselves, a practice sure to send shivers down the spines of any library activist. Respect and adoration for books and texts as physical artifacts are regarded as an Astana, or moral blemish.

If Jaina libraries in India are to have any chance of survival, it is important that the laity fulfill their responsibilities to the monastic community by arranging for manuscripts to be copied for their use and finding locations to store them. An important source of donations for medieval Svetambara laity was the collection of Jinas' images, as well as the temples that housed them and the Jain scriptures that were found there. Some manuscripts also have colophonies that suggest that the copying of a document generated merit that might be dedicated to a living or deceased relative. Because of this, it's not unexpected that medieval Jain people and merchants were known for their libraries. Hence, it would not be hyperbole to say that Jainas were fond of collecting books, manuscripts, and religious documents giving due respect and value in their life.

Libraries in Jain Religion- A Brief Overview

Jain manuscript libraries are reported to be housed in Bhandars inside Jain temples, which are the oldest in India. The Svetambara collections in Patan, Gujarat, and Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, are the most important Jain libraries. A considerable number of well-preserved manuscripts are found in the Digambara collections in Karnataka temples. Web-enabled society is now commonplace. As a result, the Jain library website provides a digital repository for ancient and modern Jain texts in English, Hindi, Gujarati, and other languages, as well as dictionaries and encyclopedias, which are written by Jain scholars. This collection includes the Svetambara Agamas, Digambaras, the Shastra's, Four Anuyogas, Commentary Literature, Prakrit and Sanskrit Literature, and ancient and modern literature encompassing all elements of Jainism. Also included is literature from many Jain groups. In any case, this collection is more interesting because of the variety of Jain texts in various Jain libraries.

Conclusion-As far as the library in Jain religion is concerned, it is not complete without its Jnan Bhandar. What we realize today is that the Shri Neminath Ji Bhandar temple of Azimganj is probably a remnant of a vast collection that is damaged, lost, dispersed, or stolen over time, making it imperative to document and record what exists of this invaluable piece of history. Since the Jain monks were peripatetic and the temples repositories of the faith's knowledge system. The libraries of the temples also played a significant role for the Jain commons to improve both their worldly and spiritual lot by managing, donating, dedicating, and collecting books for the Jnan Bhandar. Last but not least we can say that the libraries did contribute a lot to the development of the Jain religion.

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