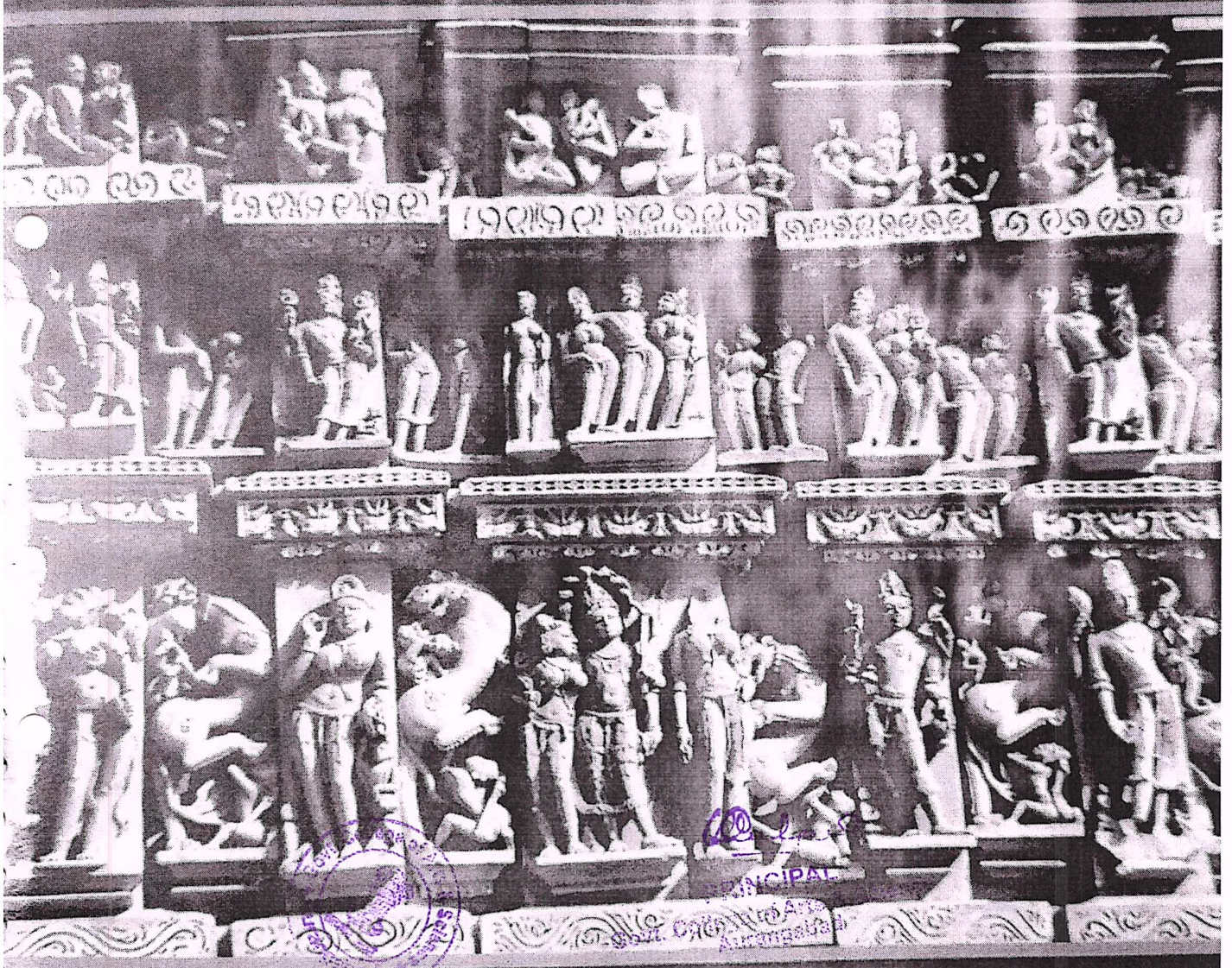


ISSN NO. 2454-8871

Proceedings of
INDIAN ART HISTORY CONGRESS

XXV Session, 2016, Pune



Editors

Shyamalkanti Chakravarti ■ Sudipa Ray Bandyopadhyay

Indian Art History Congress, Guwahati, Assam

Government of
& Science, Aurangabad:

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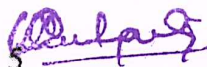


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Murti Submerged in Ghee & Sugar: Interpretation of Holiness of Jaina Images Through Popular Narrations From Marathwada

Rupesh Madkar

Stories are, from generation to generation, being told and re-told. They have become an inseparable part of imaginary mind-space of the Indian subcontinent. The very mobile and easy to formulate and reformulate nature allows them to be used for various purposes. From *Jātakakathā* to *Rāmāyana* and from *Mahābhārata* to *Pañcatantra*, they are widely used to entertain people, to teach them, to exercise and maintain power relations (and also to open up spaces for resistance that seeks to challenge the status quo if not to overthrow it completely).

From one story unfolds the other and from that, yet another and this goes on and on. This enables them to be embedded with many layers of changes that they make into themselves from time to time. If we hear them with 'critical ear', we can peel off these different layers and thus we might be able to produce multiple interpretations of the same. In Indian subcontinent, all religions used stories, narratives as chief instrument in propagating their tenets, to maintain sacredness, to hold the faith of lay followers, to spread to new geographical horizons and to expound, extend and exercise inherently patriarchal nature of religion. Jaina religion is not exception to this.

Storytelling is very important aspect of Jaina literature. As in Buddhist tradition, they too, have some historical flavour to their narratives (Thapar 2002: 472). In

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this paper, I would be trying to read and interpret popular narratives, which keep Jaina image at its centre and are widely, told and re-told from generations in the region of Marathwada and which by now have reached the corners of Maharashtra and to a great extent, of India too. By keeping Jaina image to the central place, these narratives assert holiness of the Jaina image, on the one hand, and express the need that women be excluded for 'those' four days (of menstruation), from entering the temple site. While juxtaposing these narratives with textual sources, it appears that they go hand in hand. Unlike this, citing an example from Karnataka in a different context, Aloka Parasher-Sen shows that, regional practices can chart their own path and may not follow the strictures imposed on women by textual sources (Parasher-Sen 2011: 151).

The Jaina literally means, "Follower of a Jina", and also a member of India's most ancient *śramaṇa* or non-Vedic religious tradition (Jaini 2014: 01). The Sanskrit word Jaina derives from 'Jina', 'conqueror'. However, it is not clear when this term 'Jain' was first used to designate the followers of this specific religious path (Dundas 2002). The narratives which I have taken here for interpretation, are from Kachner, nearly 25 kilometres south-east of Aurangabad, Maharashtra. This place is considered as miraculous (*atiśaykṣetra*) by Digambar Jaina followers for the image of twenty third *tīrthaṅkara* of the pantheon, Pārśvanātha, found here in a miraculous manner, as story portrays.

Kachner Narratives

Nearly 300 years ago, the village headman, Sampatrao and his family were the residents of Kachner. Sampatrao's grandmother used to perform her *pūjā* and Sampatrao was looking after his farmland. Everyone was doing his/her own duties; crop yield was excellent. Sampatrao was helpful to the needy villagers. One day the cowherd of Sampatrao, Krishna complained about erratic behaviour of their cow named Gaurī, whose milk Sampatrao liked the most. Gaurī was

pr
 eating anything nor producing milk. Grandmother took this matter
 y and asked Krishna not to take her for grazing the next day. Next day
 broke the chain and ran away, grandmother saw this and after some time
 Krishna came running and told the grandmother and Sampatrao's wife that Gaurī
 is pouring her milk on *purāṇaṭilā* (old mound). At the same night grandmother
 saw in her dream that someone was calling her from old mound, someone was
 there under the old mound and asking her to 'take me out of this', she woke up and
 looked towards old mound and it was shining. Next day Sampatrao, with the help
 of villagers dug the old mound and an image of Pārśvanātha was found there. All
 were happy. They started worshipping this image.

As there was no Jaina family staying in the village, they did not know that the
 image is of a Jaina tīrthānkara, so, they were calling it as Chintamani Baba. One
 day, a merchant came with his son, who was speech impaired by birth, he heard
 about this miraculous image. After seeing this image he identified it with Jaina
 Tīrthānkara Pārśvanātha, and asked Sampatrao to give this image to Jaina
 families of nearby village but Sampatrao refused to do so and said that he would
 take care of the image. He constructed a temple there. Now this image was called
 as Chintāmaṇi Pārśvanātha Bābā.

Mūrti Submerged in Ghee & Sugar

After few years, one newly married couple came here for *darśan*. After reaching
 Kachner, couple waited for three days as Lajjo (the wife) was going through her
 menstrual cycle. On the fourth day, Lajjo insisted on going into the temple but her
 husband resisted, after her persuasion they went into the temple. As they reached
 the doorstep of the temple, Lajjo fell unconscious and lost her vision, at the same
 time in the temple, the head of the image fell down on the ground. This was seen
 as a grave calamity (*upasarga*). All the people decided to abandon this image of
 Pārśvanātha, and to install a new image of Mahāvīra. But when this was

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attempted, the new image got stuck in . . . doors itself, upon consulting some other followers, one of the follower from nearby village told the people he had heard, 'by submerging the broken image in ghee and sugar for eight days, it could re-join automatically'. They did the same and after eight days, doors unlocked automatically. Everyone witnessed that image had re-joined on its own.

One must ask why these narratives surfaced. Why they are being told and re-told from generations to generations? While explaining the reasons behind use of Marathi language for composition and translations into, of the biographies, chronicles, narratives of high ranked Jaina devotees during 13th and 14th centuries, Dr. Subhashchandra Akkole states, "Muslims were equally devastating for both Jaina and Vedic sects. But Mahanubhavas and Varkaris were also the contenders of Jaina faith. So in case the tenets of Jaina philosophy [in that situation] could not penetrate deeply, they had to hold on to whatever they had, to keep intact the very faith in Jainism. They used stories, chronicles and narratives" (Akkole 1964: 31). This general understanding of "Muslim invasion" was shared by many regional historians. Attack by Alauddin Khalji (1294 CE) on Devagiri's Yadavas was seen as a grave situation. This was followed by series of attacks by Malik Kafur and then the rule of Bahamanis, who were seen as the 'other' rulers. They were strong opponents of image worship, so they broke many images. In their rule, at many places, they destroyed the temples and out of them they constructed mosques (Kulkarni Khare 2013: 46). On this backdrop, if we again turn to our narrative, we understand in what circumstances this story got formulated. Daulatabad or Devagiri is roughly 50 kilometres from Kachner. There is a possibility that out of fear of a probable *upasarga*, this image must have been kept in hide for some time. In contrary to above views, K. N. Chitnis states that, Bahamanshaha rulers were under the influence of Hindu nobles. They tied knots with Hindu women. During their rule, many temples used to get handsome donations. (Chitnis 2003: 64) Our narrative starts roughly 300 years before the



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present, which means; anyhow this image must have been brought out of its hide during the rule of the Muslims itself. Here we must remember that this region of Marathwada was ruled by Nizams until 1948 CE.

Another story unfolds in this narrative. It is the story of Lajjo. This is a classic example of denial of soteriological agency to women. This tendency, on the one hand, is deeply rooted in the scriptures, and on the other hand, in a 'gynophobia'-for women's bodily processes such as menstruation, reproduction and their sexuality. This resulted in the codification for different rules for nuns and male mendicants (Sethi 2010). This narrative expresses the same view which was penned by Kundakundacārya in *Sūtraprabhṛta*, datable to around the mid second century CE.

Women have no purity of mind; they are by nature fickle minded.

They have menstrual flows. [Therefore] there is no meditation

For them to get free from anxiety. [25] (Jaini 1992: 35)

This 'debate on spiritual liberation of women' was centered on this 'gynophobia' and they were denied from attaining their own spiritual liberation in Digambar Jaina tradition. While, on the one hand, spiritual liberation is out of reach, on the other hand, this narrative depicts, they are denied with daily ritual of *darśan*. Women are not allowed to enter temple for four days.

Although, 'looking at image' (*darśan*) is considered the simplest and the most common form of devotional expression. This *caityavandanā* is seen as one of the obligatory action performed by lay followers (Dundas 2002: 205). Contrary to this, no such rule has been prescribed for male lay followers.

It is very interesting to explore this notion of impurity connected with menstruation. One reason of this innate impurity was seen in the fact that women were the recipient of the guilt of brahmicide, when Indra killed Viśvarūpa, he

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Principals

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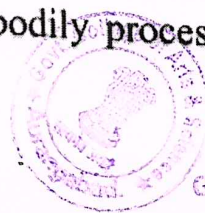
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79 shifted this [sin] on them along with earth and trees. Thus menstruation, according to this myth, is connected with women's participation in *brāhmaṇa*-murder (Chakravarti 2012: 145). This also gives insights into how the Jaina religion, over the time, became a carrier of Brahminical patriarchy.

In this 'debate on spiritual liberation of women' women were seen as fickle minded by nature due to their sexuality, and were denied entry into temple during menstruation. Contrary to this, Śāsanadevatās, which are mostly females, are always present in a temple. Yakṣī, who was incorporated into Jainism through the tribal cult of mother goddess, became increasingly important over the time. It was widely believed that she possessed supernatural powers. She was even considered to be a symbol of sacred womanhood. She even could bless progeny to the childless (Iyengar 2011: 245).

Conclusion:

This regional narrative reveals, how Brahminical patriarchy operates (considering the Jaina affinity apparent in the above narratives to adopt the status-quoist doctrines and narratives of the Brahminical religion in the subcontinent, I use the term Brahminical patriarchy in this context), uses popular narratives to exercise its control. Narratives are also used to maintain strictures codified in textual sources, which are essentially biased against women. Popular narratives being deployed in this way, deny day to day rituals to women, and religious biases thus produced are nurtured and transmitted from generation to generation. Narratives are being used not only to maintain Brahminical patriarchy but also to deny women their spiritual rights (which would help them resist it) and at the same time, they also seek to maintain the holiness of images by employing the notions about impurity related to woman's bodily processes, derived from Brahminical patriarchy.



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