

Report of the evening talk by Prof. Nalini Balbir on “Jain Encounters and Jain Manuscript Collections in Europe” on 17th June, 2016 at IIC, New Delhi

On 17th June, 2016, ISJS and ICPR jointly organized the evening talk on “Jain Encounters and Jain Manuscript Collections in Europe” by Prof. Nalini Balbir at IIC, New Delhi. This is the first talk of the series of “Evening talks by Two Distinguished overseas Professors of ISJS visiting ISJS to teach ISSJS participants.”



Given below in a brief synopsis of her presentation and talk:

The richness of the Jain literature has been captured in thousands of manuscripts, some over a thousand years old that are scattered in museums, libraries, temples and private collections throughout the world. This lecture, illustrated by slides and concrete examples, was focus on how people in the West came to know progressively about the Jain tradition. In the 16th-17th centuries, there was no question of anything such as ‘Jainism’. Meetings in India between Western visitors and Jains were recorded from the early 16th century. Europeans who visited the subcontinent to carry out business or to evangelise Christianity sometimes met Jains, whom they initially found almost impossible to understand. A fascination with the most visible differences from their own customs is the hallmark of European records of these encounters.

As Europeans became more familiar with India over the following centuries, they often documented in great detail what they noticed about the people and places they met. They were strongly struck by the holy places of Jainism and centres of pilgrimage, especially the colossal statue of Bahubali at Shravana Belgola and the huge temple-city of Shatrunjaya. However, close contact with Jains, their scriptures and their religious practices took place chiefly in the context of the European colonisation of India, especially British India. Western merchants, missionaries, scholars, soldiers and civil servants built up their knowledge of what they found in India in large part from their encounters with local people. This was probably the most decisive factor in the Europeans' dawning recognition of the unique nature of the Jain faith

European travellers met persons who had specific customs and saw them as embodying foreignness. Slowly, then, encounters with representatives of the Jain faith led Westerners who were posted in South India or Western India to the awareness that there was a tradition of scriptures. Yet, it took time before it was clearly demonstrated that this tradition is distinct and not to be confounded with that of the Buddhists, even though there are numerous points of contact. The systematic search for manuscripts which was organized especially in the Bombay Presidency from 1870 onwards was crucial in this slow process. It was then that Jain manuscripts started to enter western libraries massively, helped by institutional agreements. But institutions are not abstract entities. They are managed by individuals.

She had discussed the Transmission of Jain manuscripts in which she touches:

- Existing evidence that manuscripts, were available to the Jain commentators (9th cent. CE+), although they complain about their condition and quality:
- Divergences among manuscripts
- “Imperfection of mss.” (*pustak n m a uddhi*)
- Earliest Jain mss. date back to the 11th c. (Gujarat)

After discussed above points she dealt Encounters of European traveller's with Jains, in which

- Banians” – “Vartia”, “Vertea”.
- Mouth-mask, broom, plucking out of the hair, prohibition to eat at night, fasting unto death.
- Monastic Equipment (Alexander Hamilton).

- “Putcheson” (Henry Lord).
- Thomas Ovington, *A Journey to Surat in the year 1689*.

After discussed these points she focused on Jain manuscripts form Colebrooke. In this she touches some milestone in which the encounter of Jains with Europeans. Encounters with living Jains, who had direct access to their tradition, have been decisive factors in helping Europeans understand that there is a specific Jain identity. These encounters mostly took place within an official context. British officers posted in India from the 18th century onwards had Indian informants and assistants for the various tasks they had to fulfill. Scholars of south Asian cultures also met Jains while researching their work.

The 18th century French Jesuit Abbé Dubois is considered ‘the first missionary who came into personal contact with a member of South India’s Jain community’. Posted to south India, Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819) was in direct contact with the chief guru of Shravana Belgola in Karnataka. In Calcutta at the beginning of the 19th century, Henry Thomas Colebrooke was in close contact with a member of the prominent Jagatseth family, Jains who later turned Vaiavas. The Jagatseth connection was the main source of the Jain manuscripts that later formed the Colebroke collection at the India Office Library, now part of the British Library.



In 1802 the Scottish soldier Alexander Walker was appointed the first political resident at the court of Baroda in Gujarat and wrote Narratives of the Mahrattah

History and an Account of the Jeyn or Shravacca Religion. In this book he refers to

information from members of the vet mbara monastic community. He shows sympathy towards the Jains and a rather intimate knowledge of the Gujarati Jains of his time. In his still unpublished work (see Luithle-Hardenberg, forthcoming), he also rightly insists on differentiating the Jain religion from the ‘Hindoo faith’.

European scholars who travelled in western India during the 19th century refer to various vet mbara mendicants as having introduced them to temple-libraries or having informed them about the past and present of Jains in the region. An example is James Tod, who travelled in Gujarat and Rajasthan between 1819 and 1823 and mentions Yati Jñ nacandra from the Kharatara-gaccha monastic order.

In this period individual Jains were important contacts for Westerners in India, either as assistants to scholars and administrators, or as sources of information. Among the assistants in South India to Colin Mackenzie, Surveyor General of India from 1784 to 1821 was a Jain physician called Durmiah and, later, his son. They were instrumental in deciphering inscriptions, providing information about their faith’s past and present and introducing the right people.



When the search for Jain manuscripts was organized systematically in western India in the 19th century, Jain individuals played an important role. One such case is that of Bhagavandas Kevaldas (1850–1900). He was employed by the Department of Education of the Bombay

Presidency for tours undertaken in search of Jain manuscripts all over Gujarat and Rajasthan during the 1880s. As a learned Jain from Surat, he had several helpful connections with local owners. Not only did he work officially for the Bombay Presidency, but he also helped individual scholars and libraries in Europe to buy manuscripts.

Finally she ends her lecture with some deep information the manuscripts found in Europe:

- London, British Library, ca. 1500
- Cambridge Univ. Library, ca. 300
- Royal Asiatic Society London, ca. 55
- Oxford University, ca. 160
- Strasbourg Univ. Library, 193
- Paris, French National Library, ca. 260
- Florence Univ. Library, ca. 295
- Udine Civic Library, ca. 215
- Leipzig University Library, ca. 200
- Berlin, National Library, ca. 1000
- Göttingen Univ. Library, ca. 15

After end of the lecture the paper open for discussion . This lecture provides lot of details about the manuscrip



ts which belong to European library now and connection with Indic manuscripts with reference to Jainism. In this talk more than 50 guests were participated including Dr. Purushottam Billimoria, Gr.Cp. Vimal Jain, Prof. Kamla Jain, Prof. P.C. Jain, Prof. Ravindra

Vashsishth, Prof. R. P. Jain, Prof. Veer Sagar Jain, Prof. YP Anand, Dr. Shalin Jain, Sh. Nirmal Kumar Jain, Sh. K.L. Jain, Mrs. Anu Bhatia, Dr. Danesh Jain, Mrs. Sunita Jain, Ms. Bharti Jain, Sh. Shamlal Jain, Sh. DK Jain, Mrs. Uma Jain etc and 25 foreign students. This talk was appreciated in academia and philosophy world. This lecture was conducted by Dr. Navin Srivastav, Joint Director, ISJS and giving vote of thanks by Dr. Shugan C Jain, Chairman, ISJS to ICPR, Prof. Nalini Balbir and distinguished guests present for making talk a resounding success.