

DISENTANGLING POETRY FROM PROFIT IN JAIN MONKS' LITERARY WORKS

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Greed (*lobha*) is one of the four passions (*kaṣāya*) that are the primary causes for the soul's bondage by karmic matter. Medieval Jain literature is brimful with stories and accounts where greed is condemned and ridiculed. This article looks at some of these literary instances, in which court poets attempt to uncouple the production of poetry from the monetary reward of a patron. The malleable and complex relationships between kings and poets in the Indian context have been an important subject of scholarly thought. For instance, Phyllis Granoff (1995) translates and examines certain medieval biographies of poets in order to demonstrate that poets were often imagined as morally superior to their patrons and as possessing a considerable measure of freedom, despite of their apparent financial dependence on the patron. David Shulman (1992) discusses the explicit hostility of the Tamil Bhakti poets towards the practice of praising a king in order to secure patronage. He shows that the poets eventually resolve the tension between their loyalties to a king and a god by either seeing God through their royal patron or placing the king in the position of a humble devotee.¹

More recently, Lawrence McCrea (2010) has argued that in his *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* the eleventh century poet Bilhaṇa pointed to “the critical role of poets in crafting kings’ reputations,”² a position that, as I have shown elsewhere, also appears in a thirteenth-century court epic called the *Vasantavilāsa* of the Śvetāmbara monk and poet Bālacandra, who served at the Vāghela-Caulukya court in Gujarat and likely had access to Bilhaṇa’s works.³ While McCrea (2010) demonstrates that Bilhaṇa had a rather skeptical view of kings as being devoid

¹ See also Granoff 1994a, 1994b, 1998; Peterson 1992; Shulman 1985.

² Restifo 2019b, 7. On Bilhaṇa’s *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*, see also Bronner 2010.

³ Restifo 2019b, 7; note 47.

Bilhaṇa stayed at the Caulukya court during the reign of King Karṇa (ca. 1064-1093) and composed the *Karṇasundarī* under his patronage. Further, Bālacandra mentions Bilhaṇa in his *mahākāvya*:

bilhaṇasya kaveḥ prāptaprasādaiva sarasvatī |
nīyate jātu kālūṣye durjanair na ghanair api || Vasantavilāsa 1.17

of virtue and needing poets to present them in a good light for a monetary reward, Bālacandra states the opposite:

Poets delight in kings' good conduct, not generous donations. Did the first poet Vālmīki ever get anything from Rāma, the moon of the world?"⁴ (1.13)

As such, unlike Bilhaṇa, Bālacandra believed that poets did not act simply out of the desire for money and Vālmīki exalted Rāma for his true virtues. This further implies that Bālacandra, too, had genuine motives in crafting an impeccable reputation of his patron Vastupāla (d. c. 1239) in his *Vasantavilāsa*.

In discussions about the goals of poetry, Sanskrit theorists do not always agree with one another. The eleventh-century Kashmiri scholar Mammaṭa (1.2) famously suggests that there are the following goals (*prayojana*) for the production of poetry: fame, wealth, knowledge of the world, removal of evil, immediate and highest happiness, and counsel of a lover. In composing his *Kāvyaṇuśāsana*, Hemacandra heavily relied on Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaṇuśāsana* among other works, such as those of Abhinavagupta. Garry Tubb (1998) rightly describes Hemacandra's *Kāvyaṇuśāsana* as an amalgamation of the earlier and contemporaneous ideas. Hemacandra did not aim to create a novel conception of aesthetic experience or introduce considerable changes into the discipline of dramaturgy, expounded in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the early centuries of the common-era. This suggests that the choice of where Hemacandra chose to deviate from the earlier sources must have been a matter of some importance to him. One of the distinctions that we find in Hemacandra's text pertains specifically to the goals of poetry. Hemacandra (1.3) disagrees that wealth, or *dhana*, should be included in the list of the poetic goals, as poetry does not guarantee money (*anaikāntikam*, i.e. *vyabhicāri*). To Hemacandra (1.3), joy (*ānanda*), fame (*yaśas*), and counsel of a lover constitute the three goals of poetry.

A later Jain author named Vāgbhaṭa, who lived in circa thirteenth-fourteenth centuries and also named his own work on poetics the *Kāvyaṇuśāsana*, took Hemacandra's words still further. Vāgbhaṭa states that while others consider pleasure, removal of evil, knowledge of the worldly ways, acquisition of the threefold fruit (religious law, wealth, and love), counsel of a lover, and fame to be the causes of poetry, he believes that only fame is its true cause:

"The goddess of poetry, having attained clarity for the poet Bilhaṇa, cannot be tainted even by a crowd of bad men" (Tr. McCrea 2010, 505, n. 8).

⁴ See Restifo 2019b, 7-8.

śīlena tuṣyanti mahīpatīnāṃ na bhūridānaiḥ kavayaḥ |
vālmīkimukhyaḥ kim u kiñcid āttam āste mahīndo raghunandanasya || Vasantavilāsa 1.13

But I consider only fame alone to be the cause of poetry, because pleasure is indeed easy to get through prosperity, etc.; removal of evil occurs through other means; knowledge of the worldly ways, through Cāṇakya's *Arthasāstra* and other sciences; acquisition of the threefold fruit by serving a teacher or god and performing penance (i.e. religious law, or *dharma*), by engaging in different types of business (i.e. wealth, or *artha*), and by speaking etc. with your beloved (i.e. love, or *kāma*); and the counsel of a lover may or may not occur. Therefore, the cause of poetry is fame alone.⁵

Vāgbhaṭa rejects the inclusion of the three ends of man into the poetry goals and states that wealth, as one of them, must be attained through other means such as work and business. Further, he takes the audience's interests out of the picture, as fame pertains only to the poet, while the counsel of a lover or joy are the benefits that the audience receives in the course of watching a drama or listening to a poem. Fame was recognized as a valuable asset in a variety of ways. For instance, fame lies at the root of the value of independence for the twelfth-century Jain monk Rāmacandra. Each of his six extant dramas ends with a verse dedicated to independence or freedom.⁶ As I conclude elsewhere:

Fame, as he suggests, precedes and promises freedom from dependence on others. That Rāmacandra establishes a connection between fame and independence may reflect a culture in which a poet's fate was in the hands of his patron, often the king. And while the patron's donations may end at any moment, fame will always stay with the poet and protect him even after his death.⁷

Rāmacandra becomes particularly critical of those who are after the king's money in his *Nemi-jina-stava*, a hymn of praise ascribed to him. In it, he states:

He is the poet who makes a resolution to sing your true story (*vāstavaṃ caritraṃ*). Fie on those who praise only the unreal (*avāstavaṃ*) stories of women, the moon, and kings. (2)

⁵ Autocommentary, p. 2. Vāgbhaṭa calls the goals (*prayojana*) of poetry causes (*hetu*).

⁶ Restifo 2019a, 5-7.

⁷ Restifo 2019a, 7.

People, wanting something, turn to kings whose miserable vow is only to humiliate others. If they turn to you instead, what could they not attain in this world? (6)

With their eyes blinded by a desire even for a little wealth, people are reduced to the contemptible state of begging from others. Some are indifferent to the purity of your teachings (*vacana*), while others even harbor hatred for them. (14)

Fie on them and their ancestors, they have lost everything, those who having plunged into the ocean of your true knowledge, still beg, as they fall to the king's feet as if pulled by heavy iron chains, their eyes lifted to the sky. (15)

Control of the senses and mind is even better than furthering the faith through wealth. Won't this principle of your teaching continually astonish even an enemy? (18)

If I have the power to conquer the mind, then what's the use of worrying about the constant misfortunes of a householder? What is the point in other teachings about making money with their talk about actions that only lead to birth after birth? (19)⁸

This selection of verses tells us something about Rāmacandra's views on the relationship between kings and poets. He begins by describing a true poet, not a poet who portrays the loveliness of a woman, whose beauty is fleeting and deluding; not a poet who sees the nectar *amṛta* in the moon, when it is not there; and not someone who praises the king's non-existent virtues and accomplishments for money. A genuine poet, Rāmacandra says, tells the

⁸ *sa kaviḥ khalu vāstavaṃ caritraṃ tava parikīrttayituṃ kṛtāgraho yaḥ |*
dhiḥ tāṃs tu narendracandrayoṣiccaritam avāstavaṃ eva ye stuvanti || 2
paraparibhāvādīnadīkṣiteṣu kṣitinātheṣu yathārthino bhavanti |
bhavati yadi tathā bhavyur asmin kim asulabhaṃ bhuvane tadāstu vastu || 6
vibhavalavamadāndhanetrapātrair avagaṇitāṃ kvacid arthitāṃ vahantaḥ |
tava vacanapavitratāvirāgaṃ dadhati vahanty apare 'pi roṣaṃ uccaiḥ || 14
dhiḥ tān iha hā pīṛṣṣ ca teṣāṃ ye bhavato 'pi vigāhya tattvasindhū |
ghananigaḍaviṣṅkhalāṅghripātaṃ gagananiveśitanetram arthayante || 15
vibhavaḥ samayaprabhāvakatvād api hṛdayendriyaśaṃvaro varīyān |
..idam tava tattvasūtrakatvaṃ dviṣam api kaṇ na ciraṃ camatkaroti || 18
śaktir yadi mānaśaṃ vijetaṃ kim akhiladuḥkhagrhashtacintanena |
janakajanakakarmaṇo vacobhiḥ kim iha parair vibhavārjanāvabodhaiḥ || 19

true story, in this case the story of the Jina Nemi. Rāmacandra then proceeds to elevate the Jina above the king, suggesting that there is no need to ask for anything from the king, because he is always mean and disrespectful and because Nemi is the one who could grant every desire. The next verse points to non-Jain court poets who have assumed the despicable roles of supplicants and are ready to adore the king and serve him in any way for even a little money. Such poets do not recognize the Jain teaching, and some of them even despise it. The following verse appears to describe Jain poets, who although know about the Jain dharma, still fawn over a king, humiliate themselves, and recognize him as the highest authority. Verse 18 points to the fact that self-discipline, attained through the Jain teachings, generates more contentment than wealth through which one can spread the Jain faith by building temples and making pious donations. And the final verse repeats the same idea that once one can control their thoughts and emotions, he or she will not be worrying about wealth and other mundane things. At the end of this hymn of praise, Rāmacandra states that his undertaking to compose it is successful, because it is one's inner attitudes, not gods, that generate a good outcome (*phalanti nahi devatāḥ kim uta bhāvanāḥ svāḥ satām*) (24).

Rāmacandra uses the genre of the panegyric to express his thoughts about the poet's position at court and the relation of the poet and patron. He reproaches those who kowtow to kings, compose lies about them, and are willing to humiliate themselves for a little money. This position of Rāmacandra finds confirmation in his other works. For instance, in none of his play does he mention a patron, which is not in itself an unusual occurrence, but he does however emphasize his religious affiliation in each play by describing himself as the disciple of Hemacandra. This indicates that his loyalties were largely located in the domain of his monastic lineage. His penchant for independence is further confirmed in later *prabandha* collections, where Rāmacandra is described as a rebel who often goes against the crowd. As such, for Rāmacandra - the poet - fame, not the king's money, gives freedom and happiness; and for Rāmacandra - the monk - the Jain dharma, not the king's benevolence, is the best protection.

Moreover, similar to verse 2 in the *Nemi-jina-stava*, in his play called the *Mallikā-makaranda* the protagonist Makaranda discerns what is real (*vāstava*) from what is fake by pronouncing a verse that is central to the overall message of the work:

Others can be entertained by a fake show, but I can only be satisfied by things
that are real (*vāstavair*). (2.17)⁹

As Makaranda is constructing a *maṇḍala*, he admits that all of these external ritual activities are meant to distract others, but to truly protect himself he would need something real,

⁹ *kṛtrimair ḍambarair bāhyaḥ śakyas toṣayitum janaḥ |
ātma tu vāstavair eva hrto 'yaṃ parituṣyati || 2.17*

such as the *ṇamokāra-mantra*. It is what is real that eventually proves to be effective and useful. The wisdom of Makaranda is not tainted by the fact that he is a thief and a gambler. In fact, we know that thieves and criminals can be heroes in Jain stories. Some of the well-known examples are Rauhiṇeya, a thief, Nala, a gambler, and Arjunamali, a bandit.

I wish to end this article with one more example of a thief from a story about the addiction to wealth, included in Nemicandrasūri's contemporaneous (twelfth-century) collection of stories called the *Ākhyānakamaṇikośa* (pp. 263f.). While it doesn't expand upon the relationship between the poets, kings, and money, it relates what Jains thought about the role of wealth in people's lives, summarized in merchant Sāgaradatta's words: "There is nothing in this world that people will not tolerate out of greed for money" (*dhana-lobheṇaṃ taṃ natthi jaṃ na visahaṃti iha jīva*).

In the city of Kusuma of King Ḍamarasiṃha, there lived a merchant called Sāgaradatta, who was very wealthy and had a son named Guṇacaṃda. One day Sāgaradatta said to his son that he had gained a lot of wealth with great difficulty and stored it in the house, where a fire, friend, spy, king, or thief could take it away. Therefore, they needed to hide it in the ground in some empty burial ground (*sunna-masāṇammi*). Thus the father and son hid the money (*davva*) in the ground and made a sign at that place. While doing that, they were spotted by a beggar (*kappaḍiya*), who was sleeping nearby. He thought to himself that he would later dig out the money and enjoy the pleasures he desired.

The father though told his son to look around and see if there was anyone in the vicinity. The son noticed the beggar lying on the ground. He came to his dad and said that there was someone sleeping like a dead man. The son was not convinced that the man was dead and thought: "He is sleeping like a dead person (*maḍaya-sāriccho*), trying to trick us (*kavaḍa*) out of the desire to get our money." So, he decided to test the man and cut both of his ears. After that he went back and reported to his dad that the man was indeed dead.

His dad still did not believe it and said that there was nothing living beings would not do in this world for money, so he sent the son back to confirm the man was dead. The son then cut off the tip of his nose. This way, they knew with certainty that the man was really dead and finally went home.

The beggar instantly dug out the money and hid it in a different spot. He then took a little, bought clothes and ornaments, and had fun with the courtesan Aṇaṃgaseṇā. He arranged a gathering (*ujjāṇiyā*) in the best of gardens and gave donations to the poor, for which he was praised (*vitthāriyaṃ*): "Today in the city a new rich person was giving donations. He has holes for his nose and ears and wears beautiful silken clothes." As Sāgaradatta heard that, he realized that it was the man they had seen in the burial ground (*masāṇa*): "He must have taken my money!"

Sāgaradatta then decided to report him to the king: “The man who set up the gathering today has stolen my money (*davvahārao*); he has taken everything. My Lord, stop him.” The king got angry, and his appointed men brought the beggar before the king. The beggar told everything to the king. The king asked the merchant what the beggar took from him, and the merchant replied: “A jar filled with golden coins.” The same question the king posed to the beggar, and he said: “He cut my ears and nose... I took the wealth as a pay for selling parts of my body. Why should I have to give it back to him? (*taṃ kaḥam appemi*).” The king then said to the thief with sarcasm: “Good man, if the merchant gives you his ears, you should pay him back.” Both the merchant and the thief had to go home, and the thief continued enjoying his life as he wished (*jahicchāe*). The merchant, however, because of the attachment to his own wealth, was reborn in a lower birth after death.

The clever thief in the story outwits the merchant and is allowed to go on living on the stolen money. The merchant, however, is accused of being addicted to his own wealth and is said to be reborn in the lower births. This tale is one of the many Jain narratives about the consequences of greed, and its message is aligned with the positions of the Jain authors discussed above: a desire for money should not lie at the heart of any undertaking. Seeing wealth as the goal of poetry is detrimental for the poets and worrying about wealth too much, as Sāgaradatta did in the story, is also dangerous. It appears Jain monks such as Rāmacandra and Bālacandra used their criticism to set themselves apart from other non-Jain poets, who engaged in what they suggested was the foul practice of making money from writing poetry. Rāmacandra’s attempt to elevate himself above the others can be also seen in the image that later *prabandha* collections create for him as a rebellious and independent poet, who even lost his one eye by going against the crowd to correct two errors in a verse at the court of Siddharāja Jayasiṃha.

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