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Discontinuity and innovation in the history of Jaina meditation*

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The history of Jaina meditation shows a number of discontinuities and innovations that show that there was much uncertainty with regard to the way in which Jaina monastics (and perhaps lay followers) were supposed to meditate, or whether they were supposed to meditate at all.¹ Authors were confronted with canonical guidelines that were difficult to make sense of, and more than once felt free to deviate from these guidelines; they even went to the extent of borrowing elements from non-Jaina schools of meditation. This article will consider some examples.

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The difficulties had started early. The canonical texts of the Śvetāmbara Jainas contain very little information about meditation. The information they do contain can be summarized as follows.²

The earliest road to liberation which is still discernible in the texts, esp. in the *Āyāraṅga*, is a direct response to the idea that suffering is the result of activity. The evil effects of activity are avoided by renouncing activity. In this way no new karma is bound by the soul, and karma that had already been bound is destroyed, as the *Uttarajjhayaṇa* (29.37/1139) explains. Renouncing activity is done in a most radical way, culminating in motionlessness until death. Motionlessness of the mind is but one aspect of this, which does not receive much attention in the old texts. One early passage (*Uttarajjhayaṇa* 29.72/1174) speaks of ‘pure meditation’ (*sukkajjhāṇa* / Skt. *śukla dhyāna*), which is entered when less than the time of a

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¹ “Certainly it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that later Jain writers discussed [meditation] only because participation in the pan-Indian socio-religious world made it necessary to do so.” (Dundas, 2002: 167)

² For details, see Bronkhorst, 1986: ch. 3; further Schubring, 2000: 313 ff. For a brief characterization of the difference between Buddhism and Jainism as presented in the early Buddhist texts, see Bronkhorst, 2009: 44 ff.

muhūrta is left of life.³ In this ‘pure meditation’ only subtle activity remains initially; then — after the activities of mind, speech and body, including breathing, have been stopped — the monk is in ‘pure meditation’ in which all activity has been cut off, and in which the last remains of karma are being destroyed. The ninth (sometimes considered the eighth) chapter of *Āyāraṅga* I indicates that meditation (*jhāṇa* / Skt. *dhyāna*) was not confined to the last moments before death. Mahāvīra is here said to meditate ‘day and night’. He is also said to meditate on objects in the external world.

Beside these few early passages there are more extensive descriptions in later classificatory (but still canonical) texts. These texts enumerate how many kinds of this or that chosen item there are. In conformity with this goal, they enumerate everything that can be covered by the term *jhāṇa* (Skt. *dhyāna*). This is much more than ‘meditation’ alone; also ‘thinking’ or mental activity in general is covered.⁴ The resulting enumeration contains four types of *dhyāna*: (i) afflicted (*aṭṭa* / Skt. *ārta*), (ii) wrathful (*rodda* / Skt. *raudra*), (iii) pious (*dhamma* / Skt. *dharmya*), (iv) pure (*sukka* / Skt. *śukla*). They are described as follows in the *Ṭhāṇaṅga* (4.1.61-72/247), and almost identically in the *Viyāhapaṇṇatti* and *Uvavāiyya*:

Afflicted *dhyāna* is of four kinds: (1) [one] is joined with what is not liked and also accompanied by the thought of separation therefrom; (2) [one] is joined with what is liked and also accompanied by the thought of non-separation therefrom; (3) [one] is joined with disease and also accompanied by the thought of separation therefrom; (4) [one] is joined with the experience of agreeable pleasures and also accompanied by the thought of non-separation therefrom. These are the four characteristics of afflicted *dhyāna*: crying, grief, weeping, lamentation.

Wrathful *dhyāna* is of four kinds: connected with injury, connected with robbery, connected with theft, connected with the protection [of worldly goods]. These are the four characteristics of wrathful *dhyāna*: [one] has abundant hatred, much hatred, hatred due to ignorance, hatred until the end which is death.

Pious *dhyāna* is of four kinds and has four manifestations: examination of the commandments [of the Jinās], examination of sins, examination of the results [of actions], examination of the forms [of the constituents of the world]. These are the four characteristics of pious *dhyāna*: liking for the commandments [of the Jinās], liking for the natural state, liking for the scriptures, liking for pervasive study [of the sacred texts]. These are the four supports of pious *dhyāna*: recitation, questioning,

³ A *muhūrta* often corresponds to 48 minutes, but the term can also be used loosely so as to refer to any short portion of time.

⁴ So Dundas, 2002: 167: “the fact that an early source ... uses the term *dhyāna* with reference to carnivorous birds contemplating fish and heretics considering sensual pleasures suggests that the term in origin implied for the Jains not so much calm meditation as unhealthy and obsessive brooding.”

repetition, reflection. These are the four reflections of pious *dhyāna*: reflection on being alone, reflection on transitoriness, reflection on there being no refuge, reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings.

Pure *dhyāna* is of four kinds and has four manifestations: (i) in which there is consideration of multiplicity and change of object; (ii) in which there is consideration of oneness and no change of object; (iii) in which activity has become subtle and from which there is no return; (iv) in which [all] activity has been cut off and from which one does not fall back. These are the four characteristics of pure meditation: absence of agitation, absence of delusion, discriminating insight, renunciation. These are the four supports of pure meditation: forbearance, freedom, softness, straightness. These are the four reflections of pure meditation: reflection on infinity, reflection on change, reflection on what is inauspicious, reflection on sin.

These four kinds of *dhyāna* came to be looked upon as four types of meditation, enumerated among the different kinds of inner asceticism.⁵ The later tradition, when it looked for canonical guidance regarding meditation, was henceforth confronted with a list of four kinds of ‘meditation’, only the last one of which, viz. ‘pure meditation’, should properly be regarded as such.

The strange confusion described above was followed by an even more dramatic development. ‘Pure meditation’ came to be considered inaccessible in the present age (in this world). Sometimes this is stated explicitly, as for example in Hemacandra’s *Yogaśāstra*.⁶ More often it is expressed by saying that one has to know the *Pūrvas* in order to reach the first two stages of ‘pure meditation’. The fourteen *Pūrvas* once constituted the twelfth major subdivision (*Aṅga*) of the Jaina canon. But they were lost at an early date. Already the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (9.40; see Bronkhorst, 1985: 176, 179 f.) states that knowledge of the *Pūrvas* is a precondition for entering ‘pure meditation’. This means that already in the time between 150 and 350 C.E. ‘pure meditation’ was considered no longer attainable in this world.

Such an early date finds support elsewhere. We have seen that the canonical description of the four *dhyānas* assigns four reflections (*anuprekṣā*) each to ‘pious meditation’ (*dharmya dhyāna*) and ‘pure meditation’ (*śukla dhyāna*), in the following manner (in the case of ‘pious meditation’, the Sanskrit equivalents are here given, for comparison with what follows):⁷

⁵ So *Viyāhapaṇṇatti* 25.7.217, 237 f./580, 600 f. and *Uvavāīya* section 30. The confusion is complete in *Avassaya Sutta* 4.23.4, where the monk is made to *repent* these four types of *dhyāna*; obviously only the first two are such as should be repented, and these are no forms of meditation.

⁶ *Yogaśāstra* 11.4: *duṣkaram apy ādhunikaiḥ śukladhyānaṃ yathāśāstram*. The editor of the *Yogaśāstra*, Muni Jambuvijaya, quotes in this connection (p. 1149) *Tattvānuśāsana* 36: ... *dhyātum śuklam ihākṣamān aidamyugīnān uddiśya* ...

⁷ The order is slightly different in *Uvavāīya* section 30.

- In ‘pious meditation’:
- (i) reflection on being alone (*ekatvānuprekṣā*)
 - (ii) reflection on transitoriness (*anityānuprekṣā*)
 - (iii) reflection on there being no refuge
(*aśaraṇānuprekṣā*)
 - (iv) reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings
(*saṃsārānuprekṣā*)
- In ‘pure meditation’:
- (i) reflection on infinity (*aṇaṃtavattiyānuppehā*)
 - (ii) reflection on change (*vippariṇāmānuppehā*)
 - (iii) reflection on what is inauspicious (*asubhānuppehā*)
 - (iv) reflection on sin (*avāyānuppehā*)

The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (9.7) enumerates twelve reflections. They are:

- (i) reflection on transitoriness (*anityānuprekṣā*)
- (ii) reflection on there being no refuge (*aśaraṇānuprekṣā*)
- (iii) reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings (*saṃsārānuprekṣā*)
- (iv) reflection on being alone (*ekatvānuprekṣā*)
- (v) reflection on the otherness (of body and soul; *anyatvānuprekṣā*)
- (vi) reflection on impurity (*aśucitvānuprekṣā*)
- (vii) reflection on influx (of karma; *āsravānuprekṣā*)
- (viii) reflection on restraint (*saṃvarānuprekṣā*)
- (ix) reflection on the destruction of karma (*nirjarānuprekṣā*)
- (x) reflection on the world (*lokānuprekṣā*)
- (xi) reflection on the difficulty of attaining enlightenment
(*bodhidurlabhānuprekṣā*)
- (xii) reflection on the truth well explained by the doctrine
(*dharmasvākhyātattvānuprekṣā*)

We see that the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* includes the four reflections connected with ‘pious meditation’, but not the four connected with ‘pure meditation’.⁸ This list, in the same or slightly different order, and sometimes substituting *bhāvanā* for *anuprekṣā*, occurs in numerous other works, some of them late-canonical (*Mahānisītha*, *Maraṇasamāhī*) or early non-canonical (Kundakunda, Vattakera, Śivārya).⁹ But the four reflections of ‘pure meditation’ are absent from all these lists. This supports the view that ‘pure meditation’ was no longer attainable when these lists were

⁸ Perhaps *aśucitva-* must be identified with *asubha-* or *asubhaya-*, as it is substituted by the latter in at least one text; see Upadhye, 1960: Intr. p. 14 (*Maraṇasamāhī*).

⁹ See Upadhye, 1960: Intr.

made. Interestingly, Śivārya's *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* (1705, 1710) describes all the twelve reflections as supports (*ālambana*) of 'pious meditation' (*dharmya dhyāna*).

The reasons why 'pure meditation' came to be looked upon as no longer attainable in this world seem clear. It appears to be the almost unavoidable consequence of the gradual exaltation of the Jina, and of the state of liberation preached by him. A comparable development took place in Buddhism, where early already superhuman qualities came to be ascribed to Arhants (see Bareau, 1957) and release was postponed to a next life.¹⁰

Whatever the reason why 'pure meditation' came to be excluded from actual practice, it is clear that all existing practice had henceforth to be assimilated to the descriptions of 'pious meditation'. ('Afflicted *dhyāna*' and 'wrathful *dhyāna*' were, very understandably, considered bad forms of meditation.) This means that two historical developments — (i) the addition of 'pious meditation' under the heading 'meditation' (*dhyāna*); (ii) the exclusion of 'pure meditation' from it — left later meditators with a canonical 'description of meditation' which was never meant for such a purpose.¹¹

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It can cause no surprise that the practice of meditation has often been neglected in the subsequent history of Jainism. Yet Jainism never totally abandoned it. Adelheid Mette (1987) has drawn attention to a legend from the early post-canonical *Āvaśyakacūrṇi*, in which Mahāvīra's main disciple Gotama emphasizes the importance of thought control (*dhyānanigraha*) above outward signs of penance. This tendency persisted. A number of later Jaina works deal with meditation. But how did these later authors treat the subject? One option was to simply repeat the canonical classification, thus simply ignoring the problem. Several authors, however, chose other solutions, such as the following:

(i) An obvious step to take was to drop afflicted (*ārta*) and wrathful (*raudra*) *dhyāna* from the canonical classification, and retain only pious (*dharmya*) and pure (*śukla*) *dhyāna*. This is done in Vīrasena's *Dhavalā* on *Ṣaṭkhaṃdāgama* sūtra 5.4.26 (XIII, pp. 70-88). Another interesting feature of the description in the *Dhavalā* is

¹⁰ In later times the reason adduced for this was often that liberation would become possible after rebirth in the time of a future Buddha, esp. Maitreya; see Kloppenborg, 1982: 47.

¹¹ This is not to say that the canonical description of 'pure meditation' is very satisfactory. Hemacandra (*Yogaśāstra* 11.11), for example, rightly points out that the last two stages of 'pure meditation' concern the body rather than the mind.

that the only difference between ‘pious meditation’ and ‘pure meditation’ is stated to lie in the duration: short in the former, long in the latter (pp. 74-75). It is of course needless to point out that nothing in the canonical description of these two forms of meditation warrants such an idea.

(ii) An extension of the canonical description are the four types of *dhyāna* called *piṇḍastha*, *padastha*, *rūpastha* and *rūpātīta*. They are then looked upon as belonging under the fourth manifestation of ‘pious meditation’: ‘examination of forms’ (*saṁsthānavicaya*). They are mentioned in a number of works, among them Yogīndudeva’s *Yogasāra* (v. 98) and Śubhacandra’s *Jñānārṇava* (ch. 37-40). The lengthy description of these forms of meditation in the *Jñānārṇava* shows that they consist in visualizing objects and mantras inside and outside the body; the *rūpātīta* meditation, more in particular, has as object ‘the highest self’ (*paramātman*) which consists of consciousness and bliss (*cidānandamaya*) and is without form (*amūrta*). Since these are not notions we find in early Jainism, but which *are* common in many forms of Hinduism, suspicion of influence from similar forms of Hindu meditation seems justified. We do indeed find the same four kinds of meditation mentioned and comparably described in a number of Hindu texts, among them the *Kubjikāmata Tantra* ch. 17-19, the *Mālinīvijayottara Tantra* ch. 2 and 19, Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka* 10.241 f., the *Navacakreśvara Tantra* (Mahāprajña, 1978: 9) and the *Gurugītā* (vv. 119 f.).¹² Note that by adopting these forms of meditation the Jainas could interpret *dharmya dhyāna* as a form of real ‘meditation’, not of ‘thinking’.

(iii) A far more drastic departure from the scriptures is made by Haribhadra in his *Yogadr̥ṣṭisamuccaya*. Haribhadra does not deny that what he writes goes beyond the scriptures:¹³

v. 5: This [kind of Yoga] called ‘[Yoga of] competence’ is best; its means have been indicated in the scriptures [but] its range goes beyond them in matters of detail because of the abundance of energy.

v. 6: The precise causes leading to the state called *siddhi* are not in their totality correctly understood by the Yogins from the scriptures alone.

Haribhadra then proceeds to collect information on ‘this best form of Yoga’ from ‘various works on Yoga’, as he admits towards the end of his book (v. 207). The

¹² See further Goudriaan, 1979: 61; 1981: 54; Gupta, 1979: 178.

¹³ *Yogadr̥ṣṭisamuccaya* vv. 5-6: *śāstrasandarśitopāyas tadatikrāntagocarah/ śaktyudrekād viśeṣeṇa sāmāthyākhyo’yam uttamah //5// siddhyākhyapadasamprāptihetubhedā na tattvatah/ śāstrād evāvagamante sarvathaiveha yogibhiḥ //6//*

course of Yoga which he describes consists of eight stages. These stages are said to correspond with the eight stages mentioned in works by other authors, among them Patañjali.¹⁴ All these stages cover far more than meditation alone, but even in the last stages nothing resembling the canonical descriptions of meditation shows up. Haribhadra's break with tradition is complete in this respect.

(iv) Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* constitutes a special case. Hemacandra describes traditional forms of meditation in chapters (*prakāśa*) 7 to 11. He follows here to a large extent earlier texts like, in particular, the *Jñānārṇava*; this means that he includes forms of meditation such as *piṇḍastha*, *padastha*, *rūpastha* and *rūpātīta*. What makes Hemacandra special is his twelfth chapter. It begins with a verse which deserves to be quoted:

What is learnt from the ocean of scriptures [and] from the mouth of the teacher has here been completely shown; now [however] the pure truth as it has been obtained through experience will be explained.¹⁵

From what follows in chapter 12 it is clear that something quite different from what precedes is introduced. Most noteworthy is Hemacandra's insistence on not using constraint. If one exerts no restraint on the mind it will reach peace, not otherwise:

Wherever the mind goes, don't restrain it from [going] there; for what is restrained becomes stronger, what is not restrained becomes peaceful. The mind is like an elephant in rut, which becomes stronger when restrained with effort, but comes to peace after satisfying its needs without restraint.¹⁶

Nothing could better illustrate the remarkability of Hemacandra's views in the context of Jainism than the example of an elephant which must satisfy its sexual needs. Equally remarkable is verse 51, where Hemacandra expresses indifference concerning the question whether the result of these practices is liberation or not:

It may be liberation or not, but it certainly is the highest bliss, in which all forms of happiness appear as if nothing.¹⁷

¹⁴ The authors and their lists of stages are enumerated in Haribhadra's own commentary on v. 16 and tabulated in K. K. Dixit's edition, also under v. 16.

¹⁵ *Yogaśāstra* 12.1: *śrutasindhor gurumukhato yad adhigataṃ tad iha darśitaṃ samyak/ anubhavasiddham idānīṃ prakāśyate tattvam idam amalam//*

¹⁶ *Yogaśāstra* 12.27-28: *ceto'pi yatra yatra pravartate no tatas tato vāryam/ adhikībhavati hi vāritam avāritaṃ sāntim upayāti// matto hastī yatnān nivāryamāṇo'dhikībhavati yadvat/ anivāritas tu kāmān labdhvā śāmyati manas tadvat//*

¹⁷ *Yogaśāstra* 12.51: *mokṣo'stu mā'stu yadi vā paramānandas tu vidyate sa khalu/ yasmin nikhilasukhāni pratibhāsante na kiñcid iva//*

The editor of the *Yogaśāstra*, Muni Jambuvijaya, has found very similar ideas, often expressed in virtually identical words, in a work entitled *Amanaska Yoga*, which is attributed to Gorakṣa Nātha. It seems therefore that Hemacandra introduced again new practices into the Jaina tradition, beside or perhaps rather instead of the traditional practices. These ‘traditional’ practices included in this case the additions made by such authors as Śubhacandra.

(v) One further innovation must be mentioned that has taken place in recent years. Ācārya Mahāprajña (1920-2010) of the Jaina Śvetāmbara Terāpantha tradition introduced, in 1975, what he called *prekṣā-dhyāna* ‘*prekṣā* meditation’. Samani Pratibha Pragma, who prepares a doctoral dissertation on this innovation at the School of Oriental and African Studies (London), points out in a recent article (2013) that this innovation was the result of an encounter with modern Buddhist systems of meditation. Moreover, she clarifies that “*prekṣā* meditation becomes a means of purification rather than liberation”. For details about the precise influences that Ācārya Mahāprajña underwent (the Buddhist *vipassanā* meditation taught by the Burmese teacher S. N. Goenka played an important role) and the way he used them to create this form of meditation, we will have to wait until the completion of Samani Pratibha Pragma’s doctoral dissertation.¹⁸

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These few examples must suffice to show that the history of Jaina meditation is not continuous. The canonical description which came to be held authoritative was itself the result of scholastic activity which had little understanding for the practice of meditation. Those later authors who had a practical interest in meditation felt free to work rather independently from the canonical description, often borrowing elements from non-Jaina schools of meditation.

One of the reasons for this peculiar development was, as we have seen, the hand which people of greater scholastic than meditational capability had in the development and interpretation of the canonical texts. Another factor must have been the relatively minor role played by meditation in Jaina circles. It is true that every now and then there were individuals who had a strong interest in its practice and this might sometimes lead to some kind of ‘revival’ in a certain period and

¹⁸ See, for the time being, the various publications of Yuvācārya Mahāprajña enumerated in the bibliography, below. The ‘revival’ initiated by Mahāprajña may not be unconnected with the interest in meditation among non-Indians; see e.g. Mahāprajña, 1980b: 3.

region, such as we seem to be witnessing today among the Terapanthis of northern India. But these individuals had to start almost from scratch, so to say. They had to look for a teacher, among the Jainas but perhaps more often elsewhere. They also had to decide in how far the canonical guidelines could be considered adequate. This led to the peculiar developments to which the preceding pages draw attention.

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