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The Origin and Development of Manuscript Writing in Terāpantha

Dr Vandana Mehta

Every soul in this universe holds some qualities in itself. The one who recognizes his or her qualities can make his life artistic. It is special to live an artistic life. In Jain religion they even have an artistic approach to attain death. Art is of various types. Some indicate spirituality whereas some express the outer world. But some arts are important which present the creative aspect as well as defend the spiritual aspect hence they are invaluable. One such art is Manuscript writing.

Writing is living history of humanity. Writing is weights and measures of a man's experiences and reflections. It is difficult to tell clearly the time of beginning of script writing. Modern historians believe that script writing began during the Veda period but Jain archeology reaches beyond.

According to Jain archeology the history of manuscripts in India is very old. Lord Ṛṣabha taught script writing and mathematics to both his daughters Brāhmī and Sundarī. Before the 6th century of the Vikram Era the entire Jain and Buddhist literature was passed on verbally from teacher to students. After which Jain Ācārya Śrī Devardhi Gani Kṣamāśramaṇa, bearing the future in mind converted the entire literature formatted by Lord Mahāvīra and narrated to Gaṇadharas, ācāryas and Sthaviras into books. It is difficult to say what was the procedure of paper-making at that time but apparently it was lack of availability of paper that the palm leaves came into the picture. The available ancient manuscripts prove that the art of script writing was par excellence in that era. Along with beautification of the scripts the various ways they used for security and durability matched the reflections and experience of the modern day artists. We can assess from the manuscripts of past one

thousand years that script writing was a major art of some era. The manuscripts of 10th to 12th century are found on palm and bark leaves. It is said that the tradition of writing on paper began around 13th or 14th century. Important contribution has been made by Jain monks and script writers in the field of manuscript writing. Millions of copies are preserved till date in the Jain Bhāṇḍārās. Two traditions came into existence after almost 500-600 years of Lord Mahāvīra. One was Swetāmbara and the other Digambara. One sect of Swetāmbara tradition originated in the form of Terāpantha.

History of Terāpantha is the history of religious revolution. Ācārya Bhikṣu laid the foundation of Terāpantha on the basis of characteristic purity. Terāpantha was established on Vikram samvat 1817 (*Āṣād Pūrṇimā*) (29th June, 1760 AD). Terāpantha was not something established suddenly, but at that point of time it was a demand that was essential and non-prohibitive. That was such time when the Indian population believed more in the blind traditions and conventions. Many types of social and political differences pervaded. Even the religion sector could not stay untouched by the poor conditions. The conduct and thoughts related flabbiness generated a hard to be fulfilled vacuum in the monk societies. Due to all the circumstantial suffocation the seeds germinated of a religious revolution and came afore in the form of Terāpantha.

In Vikram samvat 1817 (Caitra Śuklā Navami) Saint Bhikhan severed his relations with Ācārya Raghunāth Ji. With him Tokar ji, Harnāth ji, Vīrbhān ji and Bharmal ji four saints also followed. Ācārya Bhikhan ji lead and guided this religious revolution. The reestablishment of right conduct and right consideration was the sole purpose. He completely succeeded in that. Initially many people opposed his ideologies strongly but later accepted finding them true and appropriate. Whereas Terāpantha may be called as sunny cure organization for Jain religion, it may also be called the cream of the religious revolution in the field of pure conduct.

Rajasthan stands high when it comes to ancient style of art. The manuscripts found in Kalu, Lunkaransara, Pungala, Suratgarh, Udaipur, Chaadwas and Kheenvsara (Marwar) are most beautiful, clear and visible. Looking at the ancient bhāṇḍārās we can say that those people had strong psychology, seasoned hands and acknowledged thoughts.