

Nuns in Jainism

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This paper shows the situation of nuns in Jaina church described in a Jaina text called *Vyavahāra sūtra* with commentaries on it. The Jaina canon in general seldom refer to women or nuns, such is also the case in our *sūtra*. This *sūtra* belongs to a group of *āgamas* or canon called *Cheda* in which Jaina monastic jurisprudence is stated and explained. Main target of the jurisprudence is monks and men. But it is also natural that in some portions of the canon we come across references to nuns and women. Of such portions we pick up some and see what position the nuns occupied in the Jaina church during the medieval times. Though we are not sure when the *sūtra* was compiled, it must have had the present form before sixth century C. E.. The first commentary called *niryukti* and over-commentary on it, i.e., *bhāṣya*, therefore are production of the era later than the *sūtra*. Malayagiri, who was active in the 12th century, compose a commentary in Sanskrit on these three works. This means that we can see a part of history of Jaina monastic jurisprudence for some six centuries.

Through out its history the number of nuns in Jainism has been always exceeding that of monks. In the church of Ṛṣabha, the first *tīrthaṅkara* (a founder of Jaina tradition) in this era, there were 3,000,000 nuns while monks were 840,000.¹ Nowadays a report says that the total number of nuns in 1999 is 8951 against 2786 of monks.² Even then, as it will appear in the following explore, monks have taken a decisive superiority over nuns.³

The Jains nuns as well as monks are divided into five groups according to their age or period of their carrier as mendicants: *nava* or novice is a term for mendicant

whose carrier is less than three years. A monk or nun who is four years old or more and 16 years or less is called *ḍaharaka* or juvenile. Those who is under age group between 17 and 40 (inclusive) is *taruṇa* or adult while those between 41 and 69 is *madhyama* or middle-aged. Mendicants of 70 years old or more is called as *sthavira* or elderly.⁴

The Jainas put the nuns into the five groups according to their positions in the church: a leading nun, a sub-leader, elders, the young, and the ordinal.⁵ Of them a leading nun supervises and guide the whole of her group. a sub-leader or *abhiśekā* is a nun who attains the position to be a leading nun. In another word she is a candidate for a leader. She can lead a group by herself. The remaining three categories seem to be classified according to age of nuns, but the ages which distinguish one from the others are not clear. Deo suggests that young nun or *kuḍḍiyā* stands for a female who is not confirmed or still under probation,⁶ and it is said that a boy or a girl (*kuḍḍaga* or *kuḍḍiyā*) under age of eight should not be initiated and allowed to eat together.⁷ Therefore the youngest *kuḍḍiyā* must be age of seven and the youngest ordinal nun must be aged eight.⁸

As a rule all these nuns should be under the protection or supervision of *ācārya*, *upādhyā* and *pravartīṇī*.⁹ But this does not mean that the nuns must always live with *ācārya* or *upādhyā* together. If the nuns have a feeling that the their teachers are great and to be respected, then they are under the control of the preceptors even if they are living far from each other, and the leader of the nuns can easily guide her member by referring to the preceptors who are not with them.¹⁰ There is an exception for this rule. If a nun is old (as we have seen above 70 years old or more), has spent as a mendicant for many years and well-versed at rules of conduct, she need not be supervised by any one of the three mentioned above.¹¹ Though we are not sure why such a nun can behave freely, the Jaina church puts reliability on such a mature nun.¹²

How about the *pravartīṇī* or leading nun herself ? She seems to be always con-

ected with the *ācārya* or *upādhyā* because it is through her that they can advice other nuns even indirectly.¹³

The *bhāṣya* explains the necessity of protection of nuns by the male preceptors referring to the system in ordinal society. When a female is born, she is under the protection of her father and when she becomes a wife, her husband will protect her. Again a widow will be protected by her son. In other case, a girl is taken care by her parents, a wife by husband, parents, a mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and a widow by father, brothers, and sons. In the same manner all the nuns should be under the control of others including *pravartinī*.¹⁴ Here the same rule works for the protection of women.

Sūtras 10 of chapter 6 and first and second of chapter 7 discuss the relationship of nuns or women with monks, and commentaries on them naturally explain the meaning there and some times expand the contents.

The *sūtra* 10 declares that monks or nuns should neither accept a nun coming from other group as a company nor stay with her even for a while unless the nun confesses the faults she had committed before.¹⁵ According to the commentaries this *sūtra* is put here of two reasons: for the one reason, a nun with faults should leave a group and for the second a nun without confession should take a special treaty because she may again commit faults in terms of sex.

The commentaries explain how a woman or nun becomes to live or wonder alone: a woman may be alone because 1) she takes the wrong road, 2) wants to see her daughter because of fondness for her, 3) her country is destroyed, or 4) she wants to learn dharma more.¹⁶ Among these, we have a look at the second and fourth cases at some length.

An elderly mother may take an initiation at some place and belong to a group while her daughter also does so at another place and to another group. So the mother will be eager to see her daughter and leave her group with declaring her intention to her *ācārya*. Even without permission she will leave alone and in impious condition

arrive at the group her daughter belongs to.¹⁷ Such a nun should not be accepted by the group before she confesses her faults.

A lay woman happens to listen to religious talk beside mendicants and becomes pious to learn more, i.e., take initiation, but they leave from her and as a result she is forced to be initiated by “standing by” monks.¹⁸ Not being satisfied with such condition she searches a good *ācārya* (*mūladharmagrāhaka-ācārya*) and if she meets such one, she must be accepted by the *ācārya* according to rules.

The rules are as follows: First the *ācārya* asks a monk in charge of initiation (*pravṛājaka*) whether he is active in monastic conduct. If he is so, the *ācārya* gives her to him, and the monk will take care of her. When the monk is not active or such a monk is not available, the *ācārya* allow her to join to his group. There he asks a female leader to guide her.¹⁹

The first and second *sūtras* of chapter seven regulate the relationship between ordinal mendicants in the group and the nun joining into it. Jaina mendicants in the same group should not have any relation with an nun of bad faulty joining into their group without confessing and atoning her faults.²⁰ If she does them, monks are allowed to guide her to *ācārya* or a leading nun.²¹

In this manner a nun comes under the control of *ācārya* or *upādhyā* of the group which she intended to join. Both of them are naturally male. Here are some regulations in terms of the ages of nuns and their male supervisors. *Sūtras* 18 and 19 of chapter seven declare: a Jaina monk with three years monkhood can teach as *upādhyā* a nun of mendicant career of thirty years or over, and a monk with five years as *ācārya* or *upādhyā* a nun of sixty years or over.²² These are general rules for nuns of under thirty years career regardless of whether they are well-versed on study, young or old. Such nuns should have triple guidance of *ācārya*, *upādhyā* and *pravartinī*. If a nun has been a mendicant more than thirty years, less than sixty years old, well-versed, has many followers (*bahuparivāra*), and of firm belief, she will be under the double guidance, i.e., that of *ācārya* and *upādhyā* or *ācārya* and

pravartini.²³ Moreover a nun of over sixty years old can spend a mendicant life without guidance of *ācārya* when he dies or he is lax in the performance of ascetic duties.²⁴ Here is also the necessity of protection on nuns is explained with parallel examples in our daily life. If there are no protections for them, they will be easily defeated like a creeper standing alone by wind or an unmoored boat by waves.²⁵

Conclusions

Jaina mendicant life is not easy even today. Monks and nuns must move place to place during eight months in a year. In the moving they may come cross various difficulties or accidents. This rule of moving in dry season has been observed for more than two thousand years, and the situation must have been the same in the medieval ages as we have seen above. Under such circumstances nuns are naturally protected by the others, especially by monks, because the formers are physically weak. Without the protection a nun may be easily exposed to risk and as a result forced to give up her religious devotion and the worst is her death. This protection on nuns, therefore, can be regarded as one of the ways to keep nuns pious and active in mendicant life.

A mature nun, however, is allowed to live without supervising by monks. Even then she must have many followers perhaps because in the case of emergency they will help her. As far as our knowledge goes, there is not such case of an independent nun today. Sociological report on this matter will be expected.

Abbreviations and references

Primary sources

Kalpa sūtra = *The Kalpasūtra of Bhadrabāhu*, edited with an Introduction, Notes and a Prākṛit -Saṃskṛit Gossary by Hermann Jacobi. (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, VII. Band. No.1.) Leipzig 1879.

= *The Kalpa Sūtra*. Traslated from Prākṛit by Hermann Jacobi. (Jaina Sūtras Part I. Sacred Books of the East, Vol.22). Delhi 1994. (reprinted)

VS = *Vyavahārasūtra* with Malayagiri's *Vivaraṇa* and *Niryukiti* and *Bhāṣya*. Edited by Muni-candra Vijaya. Surat 2010.

VBh = *Vyavahāra Bhāṣya*. See VS.

VBh M = *Vyāvahāra vivaraṇa* by Malayagiri. See VS.

Drei Chedasūtras des Jaina-Kanons, Āyāradasāo, Vavahāra, Nisiha. bearbeitet von Walther Schubring mit einem Beitrag von Colette Callat. (Alt-und Neu-Indische Studien 11). Hamburg 1966.

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Note

1 Kalpasūtra #214~5. (Kalpasūtra, p.284)

2 Flügel [2006:362].

3 See also Balbir [1994:123]

4 See VBh 1559 and VS 3-12 and VBh M on them. Some time *ḍaharaka* and *taruṇa* are mixed together, so then the age group are four.

5 VBh 717. See also Deo [1955:468~].

6 Deo [1955:471].

7 VS 10-17.

8 To cover the whole nuns various terms are used: *saṃyatī, samaṇī, nirganthī, āryakā*. In this paper we use a term nun to denote any of them.

- 9 VS 3-12: *tisaṃgahiyā samaṇī niggaṃthī, taṃ jahā --- āyariṇaṃ uvajjhānaṃ pavatīṇe //*
- 10 See VBh 1570 which reads *dūrattamma vi kīrai purise gāravabhayaṃ sabahumāṇaṃ / chaṃde ya avatṭamṭi coeṃ-je suhaṃ hoi //* And also VBh M on this verse.
- 11 VBh 1576 *bitiyapade sā therī juṇṇā gīyā ya jai khalu havijjā / āyariyādī tiṇha vi asatīē na uddisāvejjā //* Here the *therī* (Skt. *sthavirā*) refers to a real age and *juṇṇā* (Skt. *jūrṇā*) to a long period as a mendicant because VBh M glosses them as *vayasā vṛddhā* and *cirakālapravrajitā* respectively. See also VBh 3224 quoted below.
- 12 For a male mendicant there are two types of wondering or living style: A *jinakalpa* monk lives alone while in *sthavirakalpa* monk lives in a group. So far as our knowledge goes, there is not such division applicable to nuns. For *jinakalpa* and *sthavirakalpa* see Schurbring [1935:163~].
- 13 See VBh 718 and M on it.
- 14 VBh 1572 and 1573. *jāyā pitivasā nārī dinnā nārī pativvasā / vihavā puttavasā nārī natthi nārī sayamvasā //jāyaṃ pi ya rakkhamṭi mātā-piti-sāsu-devarā diṇṇaṃ / piti-bhātī-putta vihavaṃ guru-gaṇi-gaṇiṇī ya aijaṃ pi //*
- 15 *no kappai niggaṃthāṇa vā niggaṃthīṇa vā niggaṃthim aṇṇagaṇāo āgayaṃ khuyāyāraṃ, sabalāyāraṃ, bhinnāyāraṃ, saṃkiliṭṭhāyāraṃ tassa thāṇassa aṇāloyāvēttā, apaḍikkamāvēttā, aṇiṃdāvētta, aḡaraḡhāvēttā, aviuttāvēttā, avisohāvēttā, akaraṇayāe aṇabbhuṭṭhāvēttā, ahārihaṃ pāyacchittaṃ apaḍivajjāvēttā uvaṭṭhāvēttāe vā, saṃbhujittāe vā, saṃvasittāe vā tiise itariyaṃ disaṃ vā aṇudisaṃ vā uddissittāe vā dhārettae vā.* For detail meanings, see CChed sūtra p. 479 and *Drei Chedaūtras* S.77.
- 16 VBh 2796 *addhāna niggaṃyādī kappatṭhī saṃbharaṃṭi jā bitiyā / āgamaṇdesabhaṃge cautṭhī puṇa maggae sikkhaṃ //*
- 17 VBh 2798 *annattha dikkhiyā therī tiṣe dhūyā ya annaḡim /vāriijaṃṭi ya sā ejjā dhūyāneheṇa taṃ gaṇaṃ //*
- 18 Skt. *pārśvasṭha*, Pkt. *pāsathā* seems to a monk who is standing aside a way to liberation, i.e., a monk of ill character and behaviour.
- 19 VBh 2804 *bhaṇṇaī pavittīṇī vā te:sati visajjeha vatīṇim etaṃṭi /visajjite nayaṃṭi avisa-jjaṃṭiē masalaḡuṃ //* Here the meaning of *visajj* (Skt. *visṛj*) is not clear to present author.
- 20 VS 7-1: *je niggaṃthā ya niggaṃthīo ya saṃbhoiyā siyā, no kappai niggaṃthīṇaṃ niggaṃthe aṇāpucchittā niggaṃthim aṇṇagaṇāo āgayaṃ khuyāyāraṃ bhinnāyāraṃ jāva saṃkiliṭṭhāyāraṃ, tassa thāṇassa aṇāloyāvēttā jāva ahārihaṃ pāyacchittaṃ apaḍivajjāvēttā pucchittāe vā, vāettae vā, uvaṭṭhāvēttāe vā, saṃbhujittāe vā, saṃvasittāe vā, tiise itariyaṃ disaṃ vā aṇudisaṃ vā uddissittāe vā dhārettae vā.*
- 21 VS 7-2: *kappai niggaṃthāṇaṃ niggaṃthīo apucchittā vā aṇāpucchittā vā, niggaṃthī aṇagaṇāo āgayaṃ khuyāyāraṃ jāva saṃkiliṭṭhāyāracarittaṃ tassa thāṇassa āloyāvēttā jāva pāyacchittaṃ paḍivajjāvēttā pucchittāe vā, vāettae vā, uvaṭṭhāvēttāe vā, saṃbhujittāe vā, saṃvasittāe vā, tiise itariyaṃ disaṃ vā, aṇudisaṃ vā uddissittāe vā dhārettae vā taṃ ca*

- nigghaṃthīo no icchejjā, sevam eva niyaṃ thāṇaṃ //*
- 22 *tivāsapariyāe samaṇe nigghaṃthe tīsaṃ vāsapariyāe samaṇīe niggaṃthīe kappai uvajjhāyattāe uddisittae //7-18// paṃcavāsapariyāe samaṇe niggaṃthe saṭṭhivāsapariyāe samaṇīe niggaṃthīe kappai āyariya-uvajjhāyattae uddisittae //7-19//*
- 23 VBh 3223 and 3224: *gīyā:gīṭā vuḍḍhā va avuḍḍhā jāva tīsa pariyaḅgā/arihati tisaṃgahaṃ sā dusaṃgahaṃ vā bhaya pareṇaṃ//vayapariṇayā ya gīyā bahuparivārā ya nivvivārā ya / hojja u aṇuvajjhāyā apavattiṇi vā vi jā saṭṭhī //*
- 24 VBh 3225: *em eva aṇāyariyā therī gaṇiṇī va hojja iyaṛī vā / kālagatosannāe va disāe dhareṃti pvvadisāṃ //*. Perhaps she must be also of such character shown in VBh 3224.
- 25 See VBh 3226 ab and 3228.