

Tragedy as a motive for renunciation in Jain narratives

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As a reminder, *saṃvēga* and *nirvēda* are basic orientations of “religious stories” in the Jain tradition, where in their earliest mention (the *Daśavaikālikaniryuktiḥ*) they refer to a story’s capacity to generate excitement for spiritual attainment and detachment from everyday life, respectively:

1. *Daśavaikālikaniryuktiḥ*, 194, 200–204

*dhammakahā boddhavvā caivvihā dhīrapurusapannattā
akkhēvaṇi vikkhēvaṇi saṃvēgē cēva nivvē ~ 194*

[...]

*āyaparasarīragayā ihalōē cēva tahaya paralōē
ēsā caivvihā khalu kahā u saṃvēyaṇī hōi ~ 200*

*vīriyavīvvaṇiḍḍhīnāṇacaranādaṃsaṇāṇa taha iḍḍhī
uvaissai khalu jahiyam kahāi saṃvēyaṇī rasō ~ 201*

*pāvāṇam kammāṇam asubhavibhāgō kahijjāē jattha
iha ya parattha ya lōē kahā u nivvēyaṇī nāma ~ 202*

*thōvam pi pamāyakayam kammam sāhijjai jahim niyamā
paiūrāsuhapariṇāmam kahāi nivvēyaṇī rasō ~ 203*

*siddhi ya dēvalōgō sukulappattī ya hōi saṃvēgō
naraḡō tirikkhajōṇi kumāṇusattam ca nivvēō ~ 204*

The story about *dharma* has four varieties according to wise men: the attracting, the confuting, the exciting, and the distressing.

[...]

The **exciting** story has four types: it pertains either to one’s own body, or another’s, and it pertains to either this world or the next.

An exciting story has flavor (*rasa-*) when it presents the attainment of heroic transformations and the attainment of knowledge, conduct, and insight.

A story where bad things are apportioned for evil actions, either in this world or in the next, is called a **distressing** story.

A distressing story has flavor (*rasa-*) when an action performed carelessly, however minor it may be, is described as necessarily resulting in an excess of bad things.

Excitement is magic power, the world of the gods, and being born into in a good family. Distress is hell, being born as an animal, or as a low human being.

In later centuries *saṃvēga-* comes to mean “shock,” and *nirvēda-* “detachment,” and they usually occur as a pair.

Śīlānka, author of *Caṅṅpaṅṅamahāpurisacariyaṃ* (*The Deeds of the Forty-Five Great Men*), a Jain “universal history.” He lived in the later 9th century and wrote, besides, a number of commentaries on the Śvētāmbara canonical texts. He was from Gujarat. This story comes from the story of Mahābala, a previous birth of the first Tīrthaṅkara, Ṛṣabha.

2. Śīlānka’s *Caṅṅpaṅṅamahāpurisacariyaṃ*, Bhojak ed. p. 16

[Gujarat, ca. 870 CE]

uvayārāṅgaṃ ya ēsa paramōvayārō jam aviṅṅāyaparamatthō duggaṃmaggapatthiō saṃsārasahāvāsattō paramakallāṅga-paramparākāraṅē ṅiravāyasoggaṃmaggē jṅavayaṅṅē bōhij-jai. ēsō u accantabhōgāsattō pekkhaṅṅaruṃ ya. tā vēragga-jāṅaēṅaṃ ṅāḍaēṅaṃ ēyaṃ bōhēmi.

And of all the help I can render, the greatest is this: that this king, who doesn’t know the truth, who has started out on the wrong path, who clings to *saṃsāra*’s essence, is awakened to the Jinas’ words, which are the cause of waves of the highest good fortune, and which infallibly indicate the path to liberation. But he is extremely attached to pleasures, and **likes watching performances**. So I will awaken him with a stage play that generates detachment.

The one-act play, *Vibudhānandam*, is included in Śīlānka’s book, and in fact Śīlānka is described as its author. It is about the marriage between princess Bandhumatī and the prince Lakṣmīdhara. (It has some very interesting allusions to Bhavabhūti’s *Mālatīmādhavam*.) Just after their marriage, Lakṣmīdhara dies of a snakebite, and Bandhumatī immolates herself on his pyre. The prince’s father, Rājaśekhara, renounces the kingdom to seek liberation.

See Christine Chojnacki & Basile Leclère, “Interpreting New Literary Forms in Jain Mediaeval Literature: The *Vibudhānanda* Play in Śīlānka’s Novel *Caṅṅpaṅṅamahāpurisacariya*,” in Jayandra Soni (ed.), *Jaina studies: proceedings of the DOT 2010 panel in Marburg, Germany*, pp. 167–200. Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2012.

3. Śīlānka’s *Caṅṅpaṅṅamahāpurisacariyaṃ*, Bhojak ed. p. 28

taō rāṅṅā garuyasaṃvēgāvaṅṅahiyaēṅaṃ mantiṅṅō vimalamaiṅsa muhaṃ palōiyaṃ taō laddhāvasarēṅa bhaṅṅiyaṃ mantiṅṅā — mahārāya ṅisuyaṃ jam aṅṅēṅa saṃsārasarūvaṃ ṅivēiyaṃ? rāṅṅā bhaṅṅiyaṃ — kiṃ suēṅaṃ? paccakkhaṃ cēva diṅṅṅaṃ aṅṅhavijjai ya.

Then the king’s heart was gripped by an enormous shock, and he looked into the face of his minister Vimalamaī. When the moment arrived, the minister said to him: “King, have I heard rightly that this play has informed you of the nature of *saṃsāra*?” “I haven’t just heard about it,” the king said, “I’ve seen it for myself, and I am experiencing it now.”

Jinasēna composed his *Ādipurāṇam* sometime in the 9th century. He was a Digambara monk, a student of Vīrasēna (with whom he co-authored the *Jayadhavalā* commentary on the *Kaṣāyaprabhṛtam*, completed in 837 CE), and associated with the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Amōghavarṣa (r. 814–878 CE).

Jinasēna’s story of Rṣabha’s renunciation has no parallel in the *Caiṣṣaṇṇamahāpurisacariyam*, where Rṣabha’s renunciation is occasioned by his awareness through clairvoyance (*avadhijñāna*) of the highest pleasures that any living being is capable of experiencing (p. 39). And Jinasēna, for his part, includes the story of Mahābala, but the ministers try to educate him by discussion rather than through a stage-play (chapter 5).

4. Jinasēna’s *Mahāpurāṇam*, 10.5–8 [Maḷakheḍa, ca. 850 CE]

*tan nṛtyam suranārīṇām manō ’syārañjayat prabhōḥ ~
sphāṅikō hi mañiḥ śuddhō ’py ādattē rāgam anyataḥ ~ 5
rājyabhōgāt katham nāma virajyēd bhagavān iti ~
prakṣiṇāyurdaśam pātram tadā prāyukta dēvarāt ~ 6*

*tatō nīlāñjanā nāma lalitā suranartakī ~
rasabhāvalayōpētām naṭantī saporikramam ~ 7
kṣaṇād adṛśyatām prāpa kilāyurdīpasamkṣayē ~
prabhātaralitām mūrtim dadhānā taḍidujjalām ~ 8
saudāminīlatēvāsau dṛṣṭanaṣṭābhavat kṣaṇāt ~*

*rasabhaṅgabhayād indrah sandadhē ’trāparam vapuḥ ~ 9
tad ēva sthānakam ramyam sā bhūmiḥ sa parikramah ~
tathāpi bhagavān vēda tattvarūpāntaram tadā ~ 10
tatō ’sya cētasītyāsīc cintā bhōgād virajyataḥ ~
parām **samvēganivēdabhāvanām upajagmuṣaḥ** ~ 11*

*ahō jagad idam bhaṅgi śrīs taṭid-vallarī-calā ~
yauvanam vapur ārogyam aiśvaryam ca calācalam ~ 12*

The heart of the lord (i.e., Rṣabha) took delight in the dance of the *apsarases*. For even though it was pure, it took on feeling from another source, like a clear crystal takes on color from another source. Indra, King of the Gods, called to the stage someone who had but little life remaining, to somehow have the lord feel detachment from the enjoyment of his kingdom.

Then the divine dancer Nīlāñjanā, full of grace, was dancing with *rasas*, *bhāvas*, and *layas*, ambling across the stage, when the lamp of her life was snuffed out, and she suddenly disappeared: her body flashed with light, bright as lightning. And like a wisp of lightning, she was seen one moment and gone the next.

For fear of destroying the *rasa*, Indra put a new body there: the beautiful position was the same, as was the character, and her amble. But the lord nevertheless knew, at that moment, that who it was had changed. As he started to feel detachment from enjoyment, the following thoughts occurred to him, and he approached the highest realization of **shock** and **detachment**:

“My god, this whole world will fall apart. Splendor is gone in a second, like a flash of lightning. And so, too, is youth, beauty, health, and majesty, absolutely everything in the world.”

[Rṣabha goes on for another 24 verses about how nothing ever lasts; pleasure is momentary, while pain is immense and compounded by hell, before concluding:]

5. Jinasēna's *Mahāpurāṇam*, 10.37–42

*ramaṇīyam idaṁ matvā strīrūpaṁ bahirujjvalam ~
patantas tatra naśyanti pataṅgā iva kāmukāḥ ~ 37*
kūṭanāṭakam *ētat tu prayuktam amarēśinā ~
nūnam asmatprabōdhāya smṛtim ādhāya dhīmatā ~ 38*
*yathēdam ēvam anyac ca bhōgāṅgam yat kilāṅginām ~
bhaṅguram niyatāpāyam kēvalam tatpralabhyakam ~ 39*
*kiṁ kilābharaṇair bhāraiḥ kiṁ malair anulēpanaiḥ ~
unmattacēṣṭitair **nṛttair** alam **gītaiś** ca śōcitaiḥ ~ 40*
*yady asti svagatā śōbhā kiṁ kilālanḁṛtaiḥ kṛtam ~
yadi nāsti svataḥ śōbhā bhārain ēbhis tathāpi kim ~ 41*
*tasmād dhig dhig idaṁ rūpaṁ dhik saṁsāram asāarakam ~
rājyabhōgam dhig astv ēnam dhig dhig ākālīkīḥ śriyaḥ ~ 42*

Lustful men think that the female form, dazzling on the outside, is a source of pleasure, and fall for it, to their ruin, like moths. But in reality this is just a **false play** that the King of Gods has put on — clearly to wake me up, skillfully joggng my memory. Anything else that beings might enjoy is like this: fragile, subject to disaster, something that can only ever deceive them. I'm done with jewelry, that useless burden, and with ointments, that filth. And with **dance**, with its grotesque movements, and **song**, which distresses me. If beauty was innate, then what purpose would ornaments serve? And if it wasn't, what's the point of all this bother anyway? So damn you, beauty, and damn you, *saṁsāra* — there's nothing to you at all. Forget about enjoying kingship. And forget about splendor, which only lasts for a second.



“Dance of Nīlāñjanā” (?) from Kankali Tila, Mathurā, 100 BCE or so?

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rishabhdeva_-_Dance_of_Nilanjana.jpg

Pampa was a Kannada poet who composed his *Ādipurāṇam*, using the model of Jinasēna's work, in 941 CE.

6. Pampa's *Ādipurāṇam*, 9.18–20, 25

*kaḷagītaṃ vādyam nṛ-
tyalīḷe perarg' oppad' ikeg' allade gaṇikā-
tīlakam ivaḷ nartanarasa-
doḷe niccaṃ meccuḷoḷvaḷ indrana kaiyoḷ ~ 18*

*enisida nīḷāñjane ka-
rbina billiṃ maseda madanan' alargañe bardukitt'
enisutt' oḷapokkaḷ bhōṅk-
ene nikhiḷajanāntaraṅgaman raṅgamuman ~ 19*

*niltuvu rasaṅgaḷ illi ma-
ḍalt' ene bhaṅgiyoḷ anaṅgajaṅgamalate vol
niltu javanikeya maṛeyoḷ
pōḷtaḷ avaḷ mugila maṛeya vidyullateyan ~ 20*

[...]

*rasabhāvābhinayaṅgaḷ
posave puḷil posave calligaḷ posave nayaṃ
posave karaṅgaḷum ni-
pposav' ene posayisidaḷ āke nāṭyāgamaman ~ 25*

[...]

*aṅgōpāṅgaṅgaḷoḷ esev'
āṅgikamaṃ gānapāṭhyadoḷ vācikamaṃ
tuṅgakuce meredaḷ ā divi-
jāṅganeg' āhāryasātvikaṃ nijame valaṃ ~ 28*

Melodious singing, instrumental music, and dance is fit for nobody besides her, the *tilaka* of courtesans, who always finds approval from Indra for the *rasa* of her dance.

This is the reputation that preceded Nīḷāñjane when she suddenly entered the stage, and the heart of everyone present, as if Madana's sharpened flower-arrows from his sugarcane-bow had come to life.

It was as if, in her contrapposto pose, the *rasas* had spread out, like an animate vine of the god of love, before coming to a halt. As she stood behind the veil of the curtain she resembled a wisp of lightning veiled by clouds.

[...]

The *rasas*, *bhāvas*, and *abhinayas* were new; the entrances were new; the steps were new; the glances were new; the *karaṅgas* were totally new: she renovated the tradition of *nāṭya*.

[...]

That high-breasted woman exhibited the *āṅgika-abhinayas*, apparent over her entire body, the *vācika-abhinaya* in her singing and recitation. That divine woman naturally possessed the *āhārya-* and *sātvika-abhinayas*.

7. Pampa's *Ādipurāṇam*, 9.41–43

*ā madhurākāralatā-
kōmaḷe tanag' āgaḷ āyurantaṁ bare sau-
dāmini vol bhōṅkene sura-
kāmini raṅgadoḷ adṛśyey appudum āgaḷ ~ 41*
*rasabhaṅgabhayadin indraṁ
posat' ond' ā doreya pātraman tand' anusan-
dhisuvudum adan aṇam ariya-
lke surāsurasamitiḡ' ādud ill' ā kṣaṇadoḷ ~ 42*
*ā nīlāñjaney ende ma-
nōnayanōditavimōhadind' ire sabhe vi-
dyāñīlayan arid' adam dē-
hānityateg' intu nāḍe cōdyambaṭṭam ~ 43*

When the time ran for that woman,
tender as a vine and of lovely form,
like a lightning bolt, the divine dancer
suddenly disappeared from the stage. Then
Indra, fearing that the *rasa* would be destroyed,
addressed the situation by replacing her
with a new character who resembled her.
Nobody in the audience of *suras* and *asuras*
could even notice. But in that moment,
when the court continued to think it was Nīlāñjane
out of the delusion that gripped their eyes and hearts,
the Abode of Wisdom noticed,
and was utterly shocked at the impermanence of the body.

8. Pampa's *Ādipurāṇam*, 9.45

*kōṭi teradindam esev' ī
nāṭakamaṁ tōri māṇḍaḷ illaḷ bageyoḷ
nāṭuvinaṁ amari saṁskṛti-
nāṭakamuman enage neṛeye tōriḍaḷ īgaḷ ~ 45*

Far from *ceasing* to show this *nāṭaka*,
resplendent in a million ways,
she has entered into my deepest thoughts,
and put on full display for me
the *nāṭaka* of *saṁskṛti* as well.

9. Pampa's *Ādipurāṇam*, 9.55

*tanuge pore tuḍuge navalē-
paname maḷam gītam alke nṛtyam bageyalk'
enage dal unmattaviḷā-
sanam int' initaroḷam ondarol puruḷ uṅṅē ~ 55*

The way I see it, putting on ornaments
is just weighing down the body, and so-called
“fresh ointments” are filth. Song is lamentation,
and dance is just grotesque movements:
In all of this, is there anything of worth?

Takeaways:

- Jains had noted *saṁvēga-* and *nirvēda-* as possible (and intended) effects of storytelling as early as the 1st/2nd c. CE.
- They were probably not thinking of stage-plays at that time, partly because they were very suspicious of the genre.
- By the 9th century, stage-plays, and the theatrical tradition in general, came to be integrated into the stories of the first Tīrthaṅkara, Ṛṣabha, and his previous lives:
 - The story of Mahābala in Śīlāṅka's *Caṁppaṇṇamahāpurisacariyam*, where the main character renounces after experiencing *saṁvēga-* and *nirvēda-* on seeing a stage-play with a tragic ending;
 - The story of Ṛṣabha himself in Jinasēna's *Ādipurāṇam* — famously and beautifully recast into Kannada by Pampa — where Ṛṣabha renounces after experiencing *saṁvēga-* and *nirvēda-* on seeing the on-stage death of the dancer Nīlāṅjanā.
- The “shock” (*saṁvēga-*, note the shift in meaning) in each case is heightened by the *expectation* of an uplifting and generally positive aesthetic experience.
 - This is of course one of the main concerns of the mainstream theatrical tradition, represented by the *Nāṭyaśāstram*, which banishes almost everything inauspicious from the stage. Our three authors (Śīlāṅka, Jinasēna, and Pampa) were very familiar with this tradition.
- The resulting “aesthetic shock” is even more powerful than the *saṁvēga-* produced by stories, and leads the spectator almost immediately to a sense of detachment from worldly life, followed by renunciation.