

II-26. Jeev Samas Gatha

Pick your fights carefully.

Do not try to defend indefensible.

- Unknown

Origin of the Jeev Samas Gatha is not established. Not even an authoritative text by that name is available. Jeev Samas Gatha(s) are mentioned in several ancient sources. A complete compilation of Jeev Samas Gatha is not available. The content is apparently scattered in derived literature. The largest compilation (ca. 500 CE) of about 286 gatha under the subtitle of "Jeev Samas Gatha" is by Purv Bhrat Suri (see Jeev Samas Gatha on this site). Some of these gatha are also found in *Kamm-Payani Sangahani* by Shiv Sharm. Contents of Pannava-Sutt (Pragyapana Sutr) compiled around 300c also bear remarkable resemblance to Shatkhandagam. These works are from the Shvetambar tradition, and neither mention Pushpdant and Bhutbali. It is intriguing to speculate if this text also comes from the Gatha tradition but entirely independent of Shatkhandagam.

The Meaning of Being

Tatvarth-sutr (literally translated as "Meaning of Being" - in *sutr* form) is from 300 CE. Its content is a terse summary of the key ideas for representation. It has been in continuous use with hundred of scholarly commentaries, and in English as *That Which Is* (Tatia, 1994). This text is a compendium of the key ideas that are elaborated in Jeevatthan. However it does not provide insight in to thought processes.

These compilations are not stand-alone works not do they provide a discernible context. Apparently these were compiled from scattered sources. A relationship of the Gatha to the 12th Ang can only be inferred because the Jeevatthan text (Volumes A-H). The term *Samas* refers to organization and categorization for the analytical search. In the context of *margana* it is for the reconciliation of the attributes and properties of beings (#A2). Thus the emphasis of Jeev Samas would be on the analytical reconciliation. In Jeevatthan the emphasis also includes the *gunasthan* states of augmented perception.

Gatha versus Katha: It is intriguing that the ancient Prakrit literature is a rich source of katha narratives that often conclude gatha in the narrative. According to the compiler (Shalivahan ca. 100 CE, also called Hal in the European versions) of *Sapt-Shati Gatha*, these seven hundred gatha (not in any particular order) were assembled from "hundreds of thousand" circulating at that time among the general public. Although he did not give a narrative for any of the gatha, from the content it is clear that the style and content of these gatha is remarkably similar to those found in the Katha compilations.

Story-telling or Katha narratives communicate experience and insights across the generational boundaries. The tradition probably goes back to the beginnings of the organized family and tribe. Katha-compilations in the written form began to appear in India after around 300 CE which coincides with the introduction and wider acceptance of the written medium. Such linear narratives are difficult to recall, and the details loose relevance with time and place. Therefore it is likely that the more ancient gatha forms continued as the device to summarize and recall the salient motifs that give structure to a narrative. The poetic Gatha

form works within the limitations imposed by language and metre. It limits the terms and constructs that can be used. Isolated Gatha also lose the thematic content. Thought process is also distorted, if not lost, in the fragmented material. Later scholars like Siddhsen and Akhank have made attempts to get around such limitations (See Nay on this site). Their success shows that we must not assume that we understand the idea let alone have a full picture.

Scholarly scrutiny of the Gatha material is a worthwhile goal. Certain insights are better preserved in such lyrical forms. Similarly aphorisms (*sutr* and *mantr*) also focus on motifs. Other inspiring relics and practices from the past need to be recorded in modern forms for detailed examination on the basis of their own merits. Such condensed and coded messages may not invite new inputs, but they do encourage contemplation.

Uses of lyrical form. The term *gatha* refers to the lyrical descriptive form. It is precursor to more recent poetical (*gadd* or *gaddy*) forms. Lyrical forms also facilitate transfer of information. Apparently, the tradition of stringing together ideas and motifs in the form of gatha was in general use for the oral transmission of human experience. The gatha compilations in Prakrit thrived in the central, South and West India. These are also the regions where the groups displaced from the Patliputra region settled.

Dhavla mentions that the material taught by Dharsen was in apparently in gatha form. In the introduction (reproduced in this site in Volume J) to Shatkhandagam (Sumatibai Shaha, 1965) Kakka has shown that the *pad* (steps of text) form of Shatkhandagam has remarkable parallel in certain gatha of *Jeev Samas Gatha*. For example, except for some very small differences the first 10 gatha are clearly developed in the #A1-23 steps of

Shatkhandagam. Of the 286 gatha available now, only 170 appear to have been used in Shatkhandagam. On the other hand, there is considerable amount of material in Shatkhandagam that is not found in the available Jeev Samas Gatha. The flow of the content in Jeev Samas Gatha does not follow the flow of Shatkhandagam.

The lyrical *gatha* form is well suited for oral transmission. On the other hand, the pad form makes the material much more suited for learning from the written text and also for reasoning, discussion, and discourse. The pad form lends itself to teaching the steps necessary to develop a more precise understanding of the way arguments are developed. From this perspective, the overall organization of Shatkhandagam is based on modules of certain clearly defined attributes and criteria applied for the understanding of the states of perception, i.e. how we approach the unknown. Each module is based on algorithmic use of the same kinds of curiosity driven questions starting from what, where, when, how big, how many, and for how long. Resulting information provides a consistent outline of the concern. Such information can be amplified with comparisons with known happenings in a multivariate world. This structure is consistent with the Syad-aneant strategy: It reduces the level of doubt in stages through valid assertions while systematically scanning the complex universe for the similarities and differences to arrive at a deeper and consistent understanding that is likely to be tangible.

This is probably the most important intellectual contribution from the pre-Aryan India. It has withstood the test of time. It has helped in developing a reality-based code of conduct with the key assumption that all actions have consequences. Decisions in effects are the choice of consequences.

Such concerns and strategies also underlie modern methods of inquiry and understanding virtually at all levels of

complexity. It is systematic approach to a concern on the basis of defined generalizations, particulars, assumptions, and criteria. It does not resort to rationalizations or even explanations. It is an effective way to understand the phenomenal and deterministic worlds accessible through sensory inputs.

Possible origins of Jeev Samas Gatha. Available gatha collections have limitations that do not permit detailed scrutiny of the content. The medium of gatha and isolated aphorisms are not suited for self-study by the uninitiated. They do not build the thought process. At best gatha are like detailed notes or catalog of the specifics that make far more sense to the person who already knows the basis for the compilation. Otherwise these are just to remind of the prior experience. Considering such limitations, the original purpose of the rule-based gatha organization would have been to make the material readily available for memorization and recall for oral transmission without deeper understanding of the content.

Preservation and perseverance reconciled. It is also possible that the *pad* and the *gatha* forms may have the same origins but progressed along different trajectories for different audience. A possible scenario is that the both forms have their roots to the original group in Patliputr. The Gatha remained just so with the group that did not develop the thought further.

As the hard time fell, the focus of both the displaced groups shifted from growth and development to perseverance and preservation of the scattered legacy in their possession. It continued several centuries. It continued until Dharsen took the major step brought to fruition by Pushpdant and Bhutbali.

The other group out of Patliputr retained its legacy as such in the Gatha form. The geographical separation was also resulted

in schism on the issue of practice, but not the belief. The two groups never joined together again, although they seem to have had contacts through the conventions. The group that went West came to be known later as the Shvetambar sect, with Sthulbhadra as its leader after Bhadrabahu. In response to the changing condition is adapted to a different dress code for the monks. It formalized the rituals mediated by the priests. It encouraged belief in omniscience and miracles as form of faith. Such devices are useful for social coherence, a critical consideration in a region of India that was for 2000 years in the path of the marauding armies from the Northwest.

Slowly, the leadership of this group was divested from the monks. Often leaders at the places of worship (*bhattarak* and *mahant*) were Brahmins, who maintained the status quo with little credentials of scholarships. During his travels to India, even Huen-Seng noted the grip of such unsavory characters on the Buddhist places of worship in North India. In the stratified environment, the Shvetambar traditions placed ever more reliance on gatha and aphorisms for the occasional insights in their past.

The other group (*Mool Sangh*) that went South with Bhadrabahu retained the original practices. Probably it also thrived for several centuries. It came to be known as the Digambar sect because these monks remain unclothed and without possessions in the tradition of Mahaveer. The Mool Sangh also retained the practice of regular conventions, such as the one which sent Pushpdanta and Bhutbali to Dharsena. The leadership of the group of monks came from their scholarship, and only for the purpose of the scholarship. Even to this day the leader is recognized as the Acharya or *the one who practices what he teaches*. With such codes of conduct the tradition established in Shravanbelgola focused on the integrity of knowledge.

Shravanbelgola as a major center of Prakrit learning for almost 15 centuries as that part of South India remained relatively undisturbed by armies or religious fundamentalism.

Looking back, it is remarkable that both the sects have preserved and maintained the material in their possession. Except for some "spins" on the historical facts, it is to the credit of both the groups that they retained the integrity of the tradition and practices in the face of great odds against survival. Based on the acrimony of the last century, it is also clear that time has come for accommodation and reconciliation. Both groups have more in common than the superficial differences.

To recapitulate, for its viability, sustainability and vibrancy shared knowledge relies on intellectual climate with wide ranging inputs. It also requires pluralistic modes of expression and retention with diverse range of interactions. The word legacy in the undiscovered pandulipi materials remains to be discovered.

Insight: Longer the time since the original telling, the more motivations creep into recounted tales. Everyday sheds a new light on the tale, and opens a different door for discussion and perception. Ultimately, through such interactions we learn to appreciate that many of our cherished notions about every problem having an "answer" are about the existence of the "best" choice among a set of courses of action. With such realizations the power of rational analysis emerges from growing collection of shattered illusions.

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