

RECEPTION OF JAINISM & JAIN PHILOSOPHY IN GERMANY

Jyotsna Phanse

Department of German, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda,
Vadodara, Gujarat, India

Abstract:

This paper examines the reception and development of Jainism and Jain philosophy in Germany within the broader context of German engagement with Indian thought and culture. From the late eighteenth century onward, German intellectuals such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Arthur Schopenhauer were deeply influenced by Indian literature and philosophy, which led to the establishment of Indology as a major academic discipline in Germany. Within this tradition, Jain Studies emerged as a significant field of research, contributing substantially to the understanding of India's religious and philosophical heritage.

The study traces the origins of Jain Studies in Germany beginning with Henry Thomas Colebrooke and highlights the pioneering contributions of Hermann Jacobi, who established Jainism as an independent and original religious-philosophical system distinct from Buddhism and Hinduism. The paper further analyzes the scholarship of eminent German Indologists and Jainologists including Albrecht Weber, Ernst Leumann, Walter Schubring, Ludwig Alsdorf, Adelheid Mette, Klaus Bruhn, Karel Werner Zydenbos, and Patrick Krüger, whose work on manuscripts, canonical texts, philology, art, philosophy, and comparative religion laid the foundation for modern Jain Studies.

The paper also explores the role of major German universities such as University of Bonn, University of Hamburg, Free University of Berlin, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, University of Tübingen, and University of Göttingen in institutionalizing Jain Studies, as well as the importance of manuscript collections preserved in libraries across Germany. In addition, it discusses the contribution of cultural organizations, museums, and modern advocates who have promoted Jain principles such as ahimsa, non-violence, vegetarianism, and ecological ethics to European audience.

nces.



By examining the historical, academic, and cultural reception of Jainism in Germany, this study demonstrates that Jain philosophy has had a lasting influence on German scholarship and intellectual life. The paper argues that the German engagement with Jainism represents one of the most significant examples of cross-cultural philosophical exchange between India and Europe, and continues to foster global appreciation of Jain ethical and spiritual values.

Introduction

India has always been the land of mystery for the western world and Germany was no different. The German scholars, philosophers, thinkers, intellectuals were influenced by the Indian culture, thinking and philosophy. In the earlier times when there was almost no or very rare opportunity to travel to India due to no jet flights, the German scholars were introduced to India through the translations of books, scripts, articles done by British, French, Dutch, Persian, Arabic and Portuguese visitors to India. German scholars like Schlegel brothers, Herder, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Hegel etc. had read German translations of either the English translations or directly from Sanskrit the valued literary epos and manuscripts. Most of these scholars were in awe of Indian literature and philosophy. Later when the German scholars could visit India they admired Indian brain and ancient Indian philosophy but were critical of some of the Indian customs, traditions and rituals.

This liking and admiration of Indian philosophy and literature led to requirement of understanding and studying India i.e. Indological Studies. Indology or Indian Studies having various integral studies is a part of Asian Studies concentrating on academic study of history, culture, languages, literature, traditions etc. of India. Indological studies have old tradition in Germany. The first chair for Indology was founded in 1819 in Bonn and had later spread to many other cities and places in Germany. August Wilhelm Schlegel became the first Professor of Sanskrit in Bonn in 1819.

Jain Studies was an important integral part of Indology along with Buddhist Studies. German Indologists were considered to be pioneers in receiving and understanding Jainism and Buddhism. For some time Jain Studies was prominent of all indological studies in Germany. It was never studied in isolation. In course of time it emerged out of Indian life and thought. According to

German scholars understanding Jainism has led to addition of knowledge of Indian genius. Writings of these scholars were mostly in German language, which was for long time not so easily accessible to common Indian people.

First Step in Germany

Jain Studies started in Germany in 1808, H. Th. Colebrook is considered to be the pioneer of Jain studies in Germany with the book “Observations of the sect of Jains”. Jainism was introduced to the western world by German scholar Dr. Hermann Jacobi. He said in one of his articles “In conclusion let me assert my conviction that Jainism is an original system, quite distinct and independent from all others, and that therefore it is of great importance for the study of philosophical thoughts and religious life in ancient India”. He has critically edited and translated canonical and post-canonical texts on Jainism. In his “Introduction to Kalpa Sutra” he mentioned and described Jainism independent. He discovered most valuable Jain texts when he visited India in 1913-14.

Another Jainologist Albrecht Weber had published a monograph “On the Shatrunjaya Mahatmayam”. He led emphasis on critical study of Jainism in general. In his two texts “On the sacred texts of the Jains” he brought to light the first authentic information on Shventambara canon. 259 Jain MSS were listed in his catalogue of Sanskrit and Prakrit MSS of the Royal Library of Berlin. These were listed, analyzed and edited in specimens.

Ernst Leumann saw Jain traditions in context of Indian traditions. Klaus Bruhn discussed several problems related to the relationship of Jain legends and Brahmanas and Buddhist legends in “A contribution to the study of Jain universal history”. Joseph Friedrich Kohl studied textual relationship between cosmographical upangas. Charlotte Kruse was highly impressed by Jainism and started closely following on the principles of Jainism. She listed Jain manuscripts of the Scindia Oriental Institute of Ujjain. In her treatise “Jain Literature and the Mahakala Temple” she focused on clearing the misconceptions about two Jain legends. She critically reviewed 08 Shvetambara shlokas, 07 in Sanskrit and 01 in Apabrahmsha.

Gustav Roth and Klaus Fischer wrote books on Jain philosophy, Tirthankaras, art and architecture, which were published by Jain Academy Publication and World Jain Mission respectively. Klaus Fischer’s book surveyed Jain art and 104 pictures of well known Jain temples and caves. Otto Stein



had written treatise on Jainism based on lists of names occurring in the Agama. Walter Schubring's book "Isibhasiyaim" was one of the oldest text providing references and utterances to the Rishis. Theodor Zachariae provided information on Jains, which he had received through the readings of 16th-17th Century Dutch, Persian and Portuguese authors. This information was and is received by many Indian students with great interest. Prof. Ludwig Alsdorf wrote about the Jain problems. During his research on "Harivamspurana" he found the so far unnoticed "Brahatkatha", the famous fables, in the "Vasudevahindi". After the war he started reconstructing and publishing the works on Vedic religion, which were damaged or destroyed during the war. Along with these he published various works on literature, philosophy, historical religion within Buddhist and Jain literatures. After extensive research he came to conclusion that Shvetambara and Digambara have a common source, which is independent from Mahabharata and Harivamsapurana. Mette published book on Jaina Soteriology: Legends, Parables and Narratives.

Lothar Wendel compared the Jain philosophy with the western philosophy in his book "Thought, life and humanity". He saw common features in the basic philosophical conceptions of Jainism, of Goethe and even of and eminent protestant theologian Paul Tillich. Kurt Titze, Hermann Kuhn, Markus Moessner were inspired by Jainism and studied various facts of it. Kurt Titze wrote a small book "Keine Gewalt gegen Mensch, Tier, Pflanzen, Worte Mahavirs". Part of this book was included in the curriculum of some of the schools of Nordrhein-Westfalen, a state in Germany. He also authored the book "JAINISM, The religion of Non-Violence". Markus Moessner brought out a magazine "JAIN-PFAD" in German language. Jain Association International (Germany) was founded to spread universal principles of Jainism. Hermann Kuhn translated part of "Tatwartha Sutra". Prof. Zydenbos published a book "JAINISM – today and its future. In his book he traced the questions and problems of an ancient in new age. The book described almost accurate picture of Jainism the way it is practiced. He made clear observations on subject ranging from Jains vis a vis Hindus and Buddhists, Jainism vis a vis Science, Jainism vis a vis Non-Violence, Vegetarianism and analysis of Jain self image. Wilfred Noelle studied the situation of Indology and Jaina Studies in the post-war Germany.

Bochum's Kaete Hamburger Centre had included for the first time a project on Jain religion in to its portfolio. Dr. Patrick Krueger, a scholar of Jainology and South Asian Art History, from Leipzig University had been given research project on Jain art, history and religion with the title "The

visualization of dharma – new perspectives of the origin and the meaning of the Jaina image and the beginning of Jain image worshipping. Raulenstrauch- Joest Museum of Cologne exhibited Jain miniature paintings in India. It was the first of its kind in Germany dedicated entirely to Jainism. It introduced the doctrines of Jainism.

Collection of Manuscripts and other Academic Programs

Europe has largest collection of Jain Manuscripts outside India but major part of these manuscripts is in private possession. Royal Library of Berlin, Prussia State Library in Berlin, Goettingen University Library – Kielhorn Collection, Leipzig University Library in Germany and Vienna University Library – Buehler Collection Austria has large number of manuscript collections from 19th and 20th Century. An extensive collection of Jain printed book collection is in Pianarosa Library of the University of Bonn Germany. Many conferences and symposiums on Jain Studies have been held in University of Marburg, Bonn, Hamburg etc on regular basis.

Many universities in Germany have included Jain Studies a part of their academic program.

1. Centre for Jain studies (CfJSFU) of the Free University of Berlin focuses on art, history and culture of Jains as well as religious studies. Klaus Bruhn was associated with this centre.
2. University of Hamburg focuses on Jain philology and metrical studies and has large library with good collection of printed books. Walter Schubring and Ludwig Alsdorf were associated with this university.
3. University of Munich focuses on Jainism in Karnataka and Jain Philology. Adelheid Mette and Prof. Zydenbos were associated with Jain Studies Research.
4. University of Tuebingen focuses on Jain philosophy. Klaus Butzenberger and Andrea Herdenberg were part of this research studies
5. University of Goettingen studies middle Indian languages and Jain texts, anthropology of Jainism. Thomas Oberlies was associated with this university.
6. University of Bonn focuses on History of Jain art and architecture. Julia A and B. Hegewald worked at this university.

One can find some traces of interest in Jain Philosophy and way of life in Switzerland. A group of swiss doctors had visited Palitana, Patan, Santalpur, Jamnagar, Mt. Abu, Ahmedabad, Udaipur on

a study tour to study health secrets of Jains. There they studied the life style practices of a specific religion. They interacted with Jain Munis (Monks) and experts to study in libraries of scriptures.

Expansion through famous personalities

Many famous personalities from Europe were attracted to the Jain Philosophy and have contributed to the expansion and understanding of the Jain Philosophy in their native countries through translations of books, articles etc in their native languages and some have gone ahead and have imbibed/adopted the Jain Philosophy in their daily life. To name a few:

Pop Singer Claudia Pastorino – Italian pop singer was attracted to Jainism and had dedicated herself to study Jainism. She has translated many books on Jainism in Italian Language and had learned Prakrit to understand them. She is a staunch vegetarian.

Patrick Krueger – Founder Head of Centre for Jaina Studies at Freie University of Berlin. He is committed to spread the knowledge of Jainism and Ahimsa to general public. In 2010 he joined the Jaina web portal and online magazine HereNow4U.net. He was the student of some of the leading German Jainologists.

Pierre Amiel a French Jain – retired public administrator from France. He decided to promote Jainism in France post retirement in French language. He translated books on Jainism and its philosophy in French language. He delivered lectures on Jainism in various seminars.

Dimitris Gf Jain: A Jain from Greece – His way of thinking and his ideology matched with Jain philosophy and its teaching very early. He adapted to the Jain way of living. He is a Vegan Jain, knows Hindi and is probably the only Jain in Greece.

Conclusion

The reception of Jainism and Jain philosophy in Germany represents one of the most remarkable examples of intellectual and cultural exchange between India and Europe. What began as a broader German fascination with Indian literature and philosophy gradually developed into a serious and sustained academic engagement with Jainism. Through the pioneering work of scholars such as Hermann Jacobi, Albrecht Weber, Walter Schubring, Ludwig Alsdorf, and many others, Jainism

was recognized as an independent and profound philosophical tradition deserving of rigorous study.

German universities, libraries, museums, and research centers have played a crucial role in preserving Jain manuscripts, translating canonical texts, and promoting scholarly research on Jain philosophy, literature, art, and ethics. At the same time, modern scholars and practitioners have helped extend Jain principles such as ahimsa, non-violence, vegetarianism, and environmental responsibility to wider European audiences.

The enduring German interest in Jainism demonstrates the universal relevance of Jain thought and its capacity to inspire dialogue across cultures. The study of Jainism in Germany has not only enriched Indological scholarship but has also contributed to a deeper global appreciation of India's philosophical heritage. In an age increasingly concerned with peace, ecological balance, and ethical living, Jain philosophy continues to offer valuable insights, and Germany remains one of the most significant centers for its study and dissemination outside India.

References:

1. <https://jainismberlin.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/indology-and-jaina-studies-in-germany/>
2. [HereNow4U.net :: Magazine | Culture | .Miscellany \[Jainism\] | Jain Diaspora - A German View](#)
3. [HereNow4U.net :: Article Archive | Jain Studies in Germany \(Part 2\)](#)
4. https://www.jainsamaj.org/content.php?url=Jain_Organization_-_Germany
5. <https://jainismberlin.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/indology-and-jaina-studies-in-germany/>
6. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/French-Swiss-doctors-to-study-health-secrets-of-Jains/articleshow/50391065.cms>
7. <http://www.jainpedia.org/>
8. <https://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Some-Western-Converts-to-Jainism>
9. <https://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Some-Western-Converts-to-Jainism>

Terminologies

1. Kalpa Sutra - The *Kalpa Sūtra* (Sanskrit: कल्पसूत्र) is a [Jain text](#) containing the biographies of the [Jain Tirthankaras](#), notably [Parshvanatha](#) and [Mahavira](#).^[1] Though traditionally ascribed to [Bhadrabahu](#), it is a 7th century CE text, as it was believed to be only orally

transmitted.^[2], it was probably put to writing only after 980 or 993 years after the *Nirvana*(*Moksha*) of *Mahavira*.

2. *Shatrunjaya Mahatmayam* - The late Jain traditional work **Shatrunjaya-Mahatmaya** of *Dhaneshwara* describes *Shiladitya* as the *Yadavas* of *Lunar* race, has a prophetic account of one *Śíláditya* who will be a propagator of religion in *Vikrama Saṃvat* 477 (420 CE). The work is comparatively modern and does not correspond to chronology and dating of *Maitraka* kingdom. Although no reliance can be placed on the date still his second name *Dharmáditya* gives support to his identification with the *Śíláditya* of the *Máhátmya*.
3. *Apabrahmsa* - is a term used by *vyākaranin* (native grammarians) since *Patañjali* to refer to languages spoken in north India before the rise of the modern languages. In *Indology*, it is used as an *umbrella term* for the dialects forming the transition^[1] between the *late Middle* and the early *Modern Indo-Aryan languages*, spanning the period between the 6th and 13th centuries CE. However, these dialects are conventionally included in the *Middle Indo-Aryan* period.^{[2]:p.42} *Apabhramśa* in Sanskrit literally means "corrupt" or "non-grammatical language", that which deviates from the norm of Sanskrit grammar.
4. *Agama* - is a Sanskrit word which is a term for scriptures in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism