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# Jain Narrative Literature in Brajbhāṣā: Discussions from an Understudied Field

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**Abstract:** Jain narrative literature in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhraṃśa is rightly recognised as one of South Asia's great cultural heritages and a vital source of material for insight into premodern Jain teachings, practices, and everyday life. However, Jain studies is yet to fully engage with the rich archive of Jain narrative literature in Brajbhāṣā, and a wealth of untapped manuscript material is waiting to be explored. In this article, I argue that by going beyond the too-broad moniker of "Jain Hindī literature" to recognise Jain narrative literature in Brajbhāṣā as a distinct category, we may better understand the Jains of early modern North India as partakers of a wider literary and religious culture. More particularly, by comparing the form and religious outlook of Rāmcand Bālak's *Sītācarit*, a seventeenth-century *Rāmāyaṇa* treatment, with the works of the more well-known Banārsīdās, we see that even amongst the Jains who used Brajbhāṣā, considerable variety of outlooks and approaches existed.

**Keywords:** brajbhāṣā; Jainism; narrative; satī; bhakti; vernacular; Banārsīdās; Sītācarit

## 1. Introduction

When we think of Brajbhāṣā, the vernacular language of the Braj region of North India, the first image that pops up might be that of Kṛṣṇa as the son of cowherders, gobbling ghee or playing the flute. This image is typically linked with the *bhakti* poets of North India.[1] Yet the emphasis on Brajbhāṣā as a supreme vehicle of Hindu *bhakti* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while not at all wrong, is still the product of historical hindsight, clouding the actual diversity of literature that was produced within what was a wider culture of Brajbhāṣā. Through the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Brajbhāṣā poets and audiences across North India composed, performed, and enjoyed Sufi romances, courtly poetry, and advanced treatises on a variety of subjects, from medicine to musicology, and much else besides.[2] Amongst these poets and audiences were the Jains.

In the seventeenth century, Digambara laymen who lived and travelled across the region covering Jaipur, Agra, and the classical '*vraja bhūmi*'[3] of Mathura and Vrindavan shifted from using the mixed Gujarātī-Rājasthānī vernacular of Western India, commonly known as Maru-Gurjar, and took to composing in the by then transregional vernacular Brajbhāṣā. The most famous exponent of this body of Jain literature is the seventeenth-century merchant Banārsīdās, whose diverse body of literary works, including his uniquely intimate autobiography, the *Ardhakathānaka*, remains of constant interest to scholarship. Banārsīdās is also the most visible early exponent of the gnostic-leaning *adhyātmā*

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1   In South Asian religious history, the concept of '*bhakti*' commonly refers to the practice of devotional religion. For an introductory discussion of the concept in the context of early modern North India, see Plau (forthcoming).
2   A defining study of the courtly aspects of Brajbhāṣā literary culture is Busch (2011).
3   'The land of Braj'.

movement, a central precursor to the rise of Terāpanth Digambara Jainism in the following century. The exact causes of the adoption of Brajbhāṣā by Banārsīdās and his contemporaries may not be decisively uncovered, and might not even have been a wholly conscious choice. Indeed, it might simply have been due to the fact that a new group of Jains simultaneously took up composing works in whatever vernacular was more relevant to them. However, this shift to a transregional language not typically linked with Jain literature does allow us to explore the extents to which ideas and motifs circulated across a wider culture religious and literary culture, and help us to think of Jains not as solitary agents preoccupied with their own affairs, but as active partakers in the wider life of South Asian culture and society. While we have some excellent studies of individual Jain Brajbhāṣā poets, the field of Jain narratives in Brajbhāṣā remains, despite a vast manuscript archive, almost wholly untapped.[4]

This article attempts to address this lacuna by interrogating a particular text and using it as a potential entry point into the wider field of Jain narrative literature in Brajbhāṣā. This text is Rāmcand Bālak's *Sītācarit*, a mid-seventeenth century version of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative. The language and religious concepts of the *Sītācarit* are broadly similar to those of Banārsīdās, and may indeed be seen as indications of an *adhyātmā* leaning. That is not to say that all Jain Brajbhāṣā poets were part of the same Banārsīdās-oriented context or expressed the same outlook. Bālak's emphasis on *bhakti* and his broadly popular, humoristic tone, and perhaps even the epic narrative format in itself, indicates a wider audience than the more niche study sessions that seem to have been the core centers of activity for Banārsīdās and his fellow *adhyātmikas*.[5] Yet, this article can only be an initial step towards richer, more exhaustive studies of Jain Brajbhāṣā narratives.

But why does the narrative format matter? I have two reasons. The first is simply due to coverage. As we will see, most studies of Jain Brajbhāsa poets have tended to focus on those who composed shorter works, such as songs or song cycles. Narrative compositions also did circulate, and some of them, like the *Sītācarit*, were popular for centuries. The other, more substantial reason concerns a particular feature of the narrative. While Jains indeed have excelled in the production, and importantly, preservation of narrative literatures in Sanskrit and Prakrit across a variety of genres, their later, vernacular narrative productions have not always met with the same level of interest. The tendency among both Jains and scholars is often to privilege the earlier iterations of the famous story material and go on to assume that later, vernacular tellings represent watered-down "reader's digest" versions. Yet, we know from studies like Lutgendorf (1991) that vernacular narratives in non-Jain traditions could be singularly inventive as well as culturally influential on levels not far removed from their classical forebears. Jain narratives in Brajbhāṣā emerge as an untapped site for studies of early modern Jainism.

## 2. Jains, Maru-Gurjar, and Brajbhāṣā

Any study seeking to engage with Jains' usage of Brajbhāsa meets with the fundamental question of to what extent we can confidently speak of "Brajbhāṣā" as a readily defined mode of language usage in the first place. As Clines (forthcoming) has argued, very convincingly, the emerging vernaculars of North India in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries were closely interrelated. Unlike in the Sanskrit high tradition, formal grammars were few and far between, and irregularity was the norm. Moreover, literatures, like people, circulated widely across regional and geographical boundaries, carrying local markers of speech to new areas and frustrating attempts by later scholars to establish regional-specific trajectories of linguistic development. A case in point is that of Brajbhāṣā itself, which notionally stems from the Braj region, covering Vrindavan, Mathura, and Agra, but which had by its heyday in the

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[4]　I discuss these studies in the following section.
[5]　See Cort (2002a) on the *adhyātma* study groups. It is important to note that *bhakti* has a long history in Jainism; see Cort (2002b).

seventeenth-century, evolved into a transregional literary language cultivated in courts, madrasas, and temples across North India and beyond.

The most universally acknowledged category of language used to delineate the vernaculars seems to have been that of '*bhāṣā*'—simply '[informal] language'.[6] *Bhāṣā*, then, would refer to any and all of the vernaculars that scholars of the last century have attempted to delineate into exclusive categories. More distinct ideas of linguistic boundaries first arose in the nineteenth century, not uncommonly on the back of emerging ideological or nationalistic ideas of the recent past, and attempts to retroactively fit the historical terrain with the map will frequently be problematic. It is perhaps the very association of Brajbhāṣā with the idea of the Hindu *bhakti* movement of the sixteenth century onwards, and in turn, representations of that movement as a proto-nationalism, that has caused the relative invisibility of Jain Brajbhāṣā compositions over the last century. Any attempt to confidently speak of Jain Brajbhāṣā as a readily identifiable entity must acknowledge these crucial difficulties. The "Jain Hindī" moniker, while broad, is indeed a very useful and well-informed notion.

And yet. "Jain Hindī" covers a bewildering array of literary activity, covering everything from songs (*pada*) and song cycles of different types, treatises, and narratives in all kinds of metrical structures. Similarly, "Jain Hindī" was produced by both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras of different persuasions, by *bhaṭṭāraka*s,[7] renunciates, and laymen, and across great swathes of North India. We must acknowledge that even within the '*bhāṣā*' category, particular forms of language use did emerge amongst distinct groups of producers and consumers of literature, and that is what I propose to do when I speak of Jain Brajbhāṣā. The seventeenth-century emergence of Digambara laymen who produced literature in a language that as we shall see, is recognizably Brajbhāṣā, even as it contains many traces of Rājasthānī and Gujarātī, forces us to consider at least this particular milieu on its own terms.

Of course, the delineation of this milieu's use of Brajbhāṣā is far from problematic, and must be discussed in some detail. The starting point here is what is commonly referred to as Maru-Gurjar, the vernacular language of Rajasthan and Gujarat in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As is by now probably not too surprising, the very concept of "Maru-Gurjar" comes with its own set of intractable linguistic and conceptual challenges. I will not attempt to untie this knot here, but rather, for the sake of analytic clarity, simply acknowledge these difficulties and still press on with the "Maru-Gurjar" concept as a moniker covering the early modern, regional vernacular of Rajasthan and Gujarat and their affiliated variations. So what stops Maru-Gurjar from being Brajbhāṣā, and Brajbhāṣā from being Maru-Gurjar? How does one demarcate languages with fluid boundaries?

An aid comes from Ross (1997) concept of *koineisation*. This is the process whereby languages, like the *koinē* Greek of the Hellenistic period, when shifted to new regions, gradually weaken the emblematic features that link them to particular groups or localities, opening the door to features from other languages and dialects, but still not proceeding to level their emblematic features to the point that they become new languages. They are transregional vernaculars, capable of containing features from different streams of linguistic influence, even while retaining their own distinctive grammatical and syntactical features.[8] As we shall see, this is the case of the Brajbhāṣā of the *Sītācarit*; the earliest layers of its manuscripts contain many Maru-Gurjar words, but always employ them within a grammatical structure that is fundamentally Brajbhāṣā. I will, in the following section, give a description of the language of the *Sītācarit* with a particular reference to its relations to Maru-Gurjar features. For now, we must briefly consider Maru-Gurjar by itself.

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[6]　The introductory verses of many early modern compositions, both by Jains and non-Jains, typically state that their work is in '*bhāṣā*', regardless of the actual format of vernacular language in any given work. See, for instance, the Jain medical writer Nainsukh's introduction to his late sixteenth-century *Vaidyamanotsava*: "*vaidyagrantha samasta kau racau subhāṣā ānā*" ("I have gathered all the wise books and made one in good, everyday language") (Nainasukha 1668). All translations are mine.

[7]　The *bhaṭṭāraka* was a class of Digambara scholar-monks entrusted with the care of the tradition's temples and libraries. For a study of the shifts in their influence in the early modern period, see Detige (2014).

[8]　I will not here enter into the debates, following Pollock (2006), surrounding the socio-historical dimensions of the process of vernacularisation in South Asia.

## 2.1. Maru-Gurjar

Bangha (2018) argues that Maru-Gurjar, in fact, represents the earliest literary vernacular tradition to be preserved in North India. The very name of the language—Maru-Gurjar—is a subject of some controversy, reflecting in parts the recurring issue of language boundaries. The language was first described by Tessitori (1914), who labelled it "Old Western Rajasthani". As Bangha (2018, p. 6) notes, Gujarātī scholars have since come to refer to it as Old Gujarātī, whereas their Rājasthānī colleagues have favoured the Maru-Gurjar label—"Maru", referring to the "desert" of western Rajasthan. I follow Bangha in referring to the language as Maru-Gurjar, who argues that the term is more fitting for the later period of the language's history, roughly the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which is what occupies me here.

Bangha (2018, p. 10) further records how the historical development of Maru-Gurjar led to a number of regional variations, and eventual emerging languages, such as Mārvāḍī and a crystallising Gujarātī, with scholars disagreeing on the exact interrelationships of these. Providing a comprehensive linguistic description of Maru-Gurjar consequently falls beyond the scope of this study, but we may, for example's sake, draw on Tessitori (1914) to briefly consider some of its characteristic features. Briefly put, Maru-Gurjar can be approached as embodying the intermediate stage between Apabhraṃśa and later Rājasthānī, Gujarātī, and their related languages, such as Mārvāḍī. For instance, Tessitori mostly defines Maru-Gurjar in its deviations from Apabhraṃśa, indicating their close relation. A case in point is the present tense of the Maru-Gurjar verb, which in the third person singular is identical with that of Apabhraṃśa but omits the Apabhraṃśa *h* in the third person plural (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Present tense of Apabhraṃśa and Maru-Gurjar verb in third person singular and plural.[9]

| Apabhraṃśa 3rd sg | Maru-Gurjar 3rd sg | Apabhraṃśa 3rd pl | Maru-Gurjar 3rd pl |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *karaï* | *karaï* | *karahī* | *karaī* |

In the later stages that Bangha referred to, the third singular develops into Gujarātī *kare* and Mārvāḍī *karai*. Yet, as late as 1631 we see Samaysundar, a Śvetāmbar mendicant and leading Maru-Gurjar poet, employing the distinctive *-aï* ending in his *Sītārāmcaupāī*.[10] Similarly, the phonological inventory of Maru-Gurjar is identical with that of Apabhraṃśa, with the exception that Apabhraṃśa's characteristic initial *ṇ* and medial *ṇṇ* are in Maru-Gurjar replaced by dental *n* and *nn*.[11]

But the forms of Apabhraṃśa, even while continuing the process of morphological reduction typical of the Middle Indo-Aryan languages, were inflected in case clusters (nominative-accusative, vocative, instrumental, locative, and genitive-dative-ablative). In Maru-Gurjar, however, the reduction has evolved further towards the analytic system indicative of New Indo-Aryan languages. Inflected case endings are given for the nominative-accusative, instrumental-locative, ablative, genitive, and vocative. Tessitori (1914, p. 182) acknowledges that these may, on the whole, just as well be regarded as direct and oblique markers. Relationships of case are increasingly expressed through a variety of postpositions with different provenances, many of which survived in the languages that succeeded Maru-Gurjar. For instance, the genitive postposition *taṇaü* may be related to Apabhraṃśa *taṇaü* ("connected"), while the alternative genitive postposition *raü*—most likely a shortened form of Apabhraṃśa *keraü* ("connected")—carries over to Mārvāḍī *rā*.

Maru-Gurjar was predominantly used by Gujarātī Jains already in the twelfth century and expanded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to become a transregional vernacular and later diversified, through encounters with other dialects, into different regional literary vernaculars,

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9   Table adapted from Tessitori (1914).
10   "*E aḍhāra pāpa ehavā je karaï pāpī jīvo re*", (Samaysundar 1959, v. 1.7).
11   Tessitori (1914, p. 55) also posits an *ḷ*, though it is unattested in his manuscript material.

stimulating the development of the equally transregional Madhyadeśī.[12] Today's Rājasthānī and Gujarātī both evolved from Maru-Gurjar, and elements of both appear in the *Sītācarit* manuscript recensions. Early Maru-Gurjar literature typically consisted of hymns and narratives, sometimes including or building on elements of Apabhraṃśa literature, especially in using the *caupāī* metre. Bangha (2018, p. 9) notes that other genres, such as the song format *phāg*, only rose to popularity with Maru-Gurjar, and demonstrates the popularity of this literature by pointing to the many manuscript copies of individual titles and the continuing currency of Maru-Gurjar hymns amongst Gujarātī Śvetāmbara communities. A genre of Maru-Gurjar literature that is especially noteworthy in the context of this study is the *rāso* or *rāsa*, a form of epic narrative that already existed in Apabhraṃśa iterations. In the Jain context, *rāsos* are typically popular narratives elucidating Jain principles through stories of successful Jains. A *Rāmāyaṇa*-based Maru-Gurjar *rāso*, Keśarāja's *Rāmayaśorāsayan*, circulated from the early seventeenth century onwards, and indicates that the tradition of narrative literature in Maru-Gurjar continued alongside the rise of Jain writing of similar narratives in Brajbhāṣā.[13]

### 2.2. Jain Brajbhāṣā Poets

The Jain poet composing in Brajbhāṣā in the seventeenth century that is best known to research is the Digambara merchant Banārsīdās. While his most famous work to scholarship in Western universities may be the autobiographical *Ardhakathānaka*, primarily written in *caupāī* and *dohā* metres,[14] he also wrote a diverse body of verse, including shorter stories on Jain mythological themes using the *kavitt* metre, and even an *Adhyātmā-gīt*, where Rām appears as an analogy for the Jina (McGregor 1984, pp. 203–4).[15] To the Jain tradition, Banārsīdās is primarily remembered for his *Samaysār Nāṭak*, a seminal commentary on the eighth century philosopher Kundakunda's Prakrit *Samayasāra*, a central work to Digambara Jainism. With the *Samaysār Nāṭak*, Banārsīdās became a prominent leader of the *adhyātma*-movement, a loosely organised group of laymen who rejected ritualism in favour of mystic realisation of Jain doctrines. Besides the *Ardhakathāṇaka*, no full-length narrative work is attributed to Banārsīdās, and besides his commentaries, his remaining works, collected in the greatly popular compendium *Banārsīvilāsa*, includes short to medium-length texts in a variety of metres on matters of doctrine. Banārsīdās's Brajbhāṣā shows both Rājasthānī and Avadhī features. In this Maru-Gurjar-inflected usage of the language, Banārsīdās's Brajbhāṣā is emblematic of Jain Brajbhāṣā authors of the seventeenth century.

Cort (2015) points to the importance of translation to Banārsīdās, identifying how particular titles have indexical or iconical relationships with earlier Sanskrit texts, and notes that Banārsīdās himself claimed proficiency in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and vernacular languages, underlining the multilingual and intertextual elements within Jain vernacular literature, as well as the inventiveness embedded in Banārsīdās' translation practice.

Other studies by Cort on various kinds of Jain devotional songs written in Brajbhāṣā are helpful in establishing the spread and influence of Jains' use of that language for literary and religious purposes, and by extension, indicating the contours of the Jain Brajbhāṣā tradition, of which Bālak was a part. Cort (2013a) examines the role of Brajbhāṣā hymns in Digambara *bhakti*, focusing on specimens by the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century poet Dyānatrāy, identified by Cort as the most

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[12] This development of Maru-Gurjar as suggested by Bangha (2018), especially in its intermediate transregional period, corresponds with Ross (1997) conceptualization of koine. In personal correspondence, Claus Peter Zoller has pointed out to me how Ross uses the term "lects" when speaking of koine, so as to avoid engaging with the language/dialect discussion.
[13] A lavishly illustrated manuscript of the *Rāmayaśorāsayan* is available (Keśarāja 1990). Many of its images feature Śvetāmbara ascetics, leading its modern-day publishers to suggest that the manuscript was commissioned by or for a mendicant milieu.
[14] The *caupāī-dohā* combination is a fundamental building block of vernacular North Indian poetry. Snell (2009) discusses Banārsīdās's use of metre, noting its indebtedness to Sufi epics such as the *Madhumālatī* (which Banārsīdās even describes reciting, *Ardhakathānaka*, v. 335–43), which also inspired the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Snell (2009, p. xiii) notes that Banārsīdās mixes his metres more freely than what is seen in these epics, not unlike Rāmcand Bālak.
[15] This *Adhyātma-gīt* is also known as the *Adhyātamapadapaṃkti*.

popular of his kind. The language of the Dyānatrāy songs quoted by Cort indicates a more formally developed Brajbhāṣā than that of Banārsīdās. Another influential poet was Ānandghan, who was active in the latter half of the seventeenth century and whose popular songs, according to Bangha (2013, pp. xxx–xxxi), display a Brajbhāṣā with Rājasthānī and Gujarātī features, whereas his hymns are in "a mixture of Rajasthani and Gujarati". Dyānatrāy and Ānandghan both remain popular and influential, due to the longevity of their songs amongst practising Jains. Cort (2013b) explores Jain poets such as these, including Banārsīdās, who wrote Holī songs that exemplified an allegorical understanding of the celebration, establishing a Jain counter-narrative to established non-Jain equivalent genres. These studies show that Bālak's *Sītācarit* appeared in a context where other Jain Brajbhāṣā poets were actively engaging with a variety of genres and practices that were shared amongst the wider community. Yet the poets Cort and Bangha describe are primary writers of hymns, songs, and similar short works, and the writing of longer narrative literature by these Jains remains insufficiently accounted for.

The only study of Jain narrative literature in Brajbhāṣā is a broad survey by Jain (1976), which encompasses the period from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century. Given the lack of similar works, Jain's title is important, and its arguments must be discussed in some detail. The first thing to note about Jain's study is that it does not enter into the discussion of how and why Jains turned to produce literature in Brajbhāṣā. Jain states that Brajbhāṣā was popular at the time but does not explore the matter further (Jain 1976, pp. 28–47). Jain lists 54 individual titles for this period, 18 of which are available in print. The study then organises the titles into a tripartite categorisation of *mahākāvya*, defined as narrative epics that deal with heroic or sacred subjects, *khaṇḍakāvya*, having neither heroic nor sacred subject matter, and *ekārthakāvya*, which focus on the entirety of a single protagonist's life (Jain 1976, pp. 21–3). This categorisation seems somewhat arbitrary—the *Sītācarit* is registered as an *ekārthakāvya*, but is also described as being of literary quality, pertaining to a *mahākāvya* (Jain 1976, p. 21).

Jain's ensuing analysis of the texts is underpinned by two categorical stances. The first is that Jain narrative literature is intrinsically religious, to the extent that it is "inappropriate"[16] to approach the texts without rooting them in Jain religion (Jain 1976, pp. 20–21). The second is that the period covered by the study was marked by excessive warfare, societal decline, and a Hinduism threatened by Muslim, and later English, rulers (Jain 1976, pp. 28–47). As a result, Jain's readings of the various texts emphasise iterations of Jain identities as demarcated from various threats, be they external aggressors or improper Jain practices. This emphasis does not allow Jain to explore the texts' possible interrelations with non-Jain sites or agents of literary production, or as already mentioned, to ask why they are written in Brajbhāṣā in the first place, beyond pointing out that the language was popular beyond the Braj region (Jain 1976, p. 263). The bulk of the book is devoted to categorising the various features of the texts. The *Sītācarit* is grouped with texts containing elements of Rājasthānī (Jain 1976, p. 265).

It is noteworthy that among the texts and authors highlighted by Jain, Rāmcand Bālak's *Sītācarit*, with its mid-seventeenth century dating, is among the earliest. It is instructive to consider the dates of the other early narrative works (see Table 2).

As the table shows, Rāmcand Bālak was amongst the first wave of Jains to write narrative literature in Brajbhāṣā. Amongst the other authors of the list, we know that Bhūdardās, Nemicandra, and Ayajrāj Paṭnī all were members of the Khaṇḍelvāla Jain community, while Vinodīlāl was an Agravāl Jain; all four being laymen. Their geographic spread included Rajasthan, (Nemicandra was active in Amer, Ayajrāj in Sanganer), Agra (Bhūdardās), and Delhi (Vinodīlāl), covering fields of influence from both the classical Braj region and Rajasthan, were a Maru-Gurjar inflected Brajbhāṣā seems to have been increasingly current amongst some lay Jains authors from the seventeenth century onwards.

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16    '*Anucit*'.

**Table 2.** Early Jain authors of narratives in Brajbhāṣā.[17]

| Author | Title | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Rāmcand Bālak | *Sītācarit* | 1657 |
| Āskaraṇ | *Nemicandrikā* | 1674 |
| Lakṣmīdās | *Śreṇikcaritra* | 1676 |
| Ajayrāj Paṭnī | *Nemināthcarit* | 1678 |
| Vinodilāl | *Bhaktamār Bhāṣā-Kathā* | Born later 17th century |
| Lakṣmīdās | *Yaśodacaritra* | 1724 |
| Bhūdhardās | *Pārśva Purāṇ* | 1732 |
| Nemicandra | *Devendrakīrti* | " |

All this leaves us with a picture where Jain vernacular literary production shifted from its Maru-Gurjar orientation in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries towards a more formal Brajbhāṣā in the later eighteenth century, and where the language of the most researched exponents of Jain Brajbhāṣā literature in the seventeenth century still displays some Rājasthānī and Gujarātī features. Yet the style, scope, and variety of narratives written by these Jains remains unexplored, especially in terms of their interrelations with the genres and tendencies of the wider culture. In other words, the role of narrative literature in Brajbhāṣā amongst these Jains is not sufficiently accounted for, and the *Sītācarit* emerges as one of the earliest specimens of that literature.

## 3. The *Sītācarit*—Language and Outlook

The *Sītācarit* was completed, according to the text itself, in 1657 (VS1713),[18] and it was composed by a Rāmcand Bālak, about whom we know nothing beyond the fact that he was a Digambara. The work is an inventive take on the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative, heavily emphasizing Sītā as a paragon of Jain virtue. It seems to have been popular in its day. In my visits to research archives and temple libraries in Agra, Bharatpur, Jaipur, and Delhi I was able to view eighteen manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, twelve of which were complete. Only four of the manuscripts provide information linking them to specific sites; these are all minor towns outside of today's Jaipur and Agra. Many more manuscripts are listed in catalogues, and even more must have been in circulation. I will here first describe some of the main features of the *Sītācarit*'s language, arguing that it is indeed Brajbhāṣā, albeit with features from Maru-Gurjar. This language is similar to that of Banārsīdās's, even in the names of concepts describing various aspects of religious experience. However, the *Sītācarit* diverges from Banārsīdās in its heavy emphasis on *bhakti* devotionalism, using the unique effects of the narrative format to present a model of practice and reflection, where *bhakti* towards Sītā becomes as potent as the insights and devotion she is seen to embody.

### 3.1. Language

A major challenge when describing the language of the *Sītācarit* is that of manuscript variations. I am here indebted to Cerquiglini (1999) emphasis on the mutability inherent in the early vernacular French manuscript traditions, stemming from the very mutability of the emerging French vernacular itself. While the philological instinct may be to delineate and organise these variations, eventually producing a categorial Urtext, Cerquiglini's insight is that when dealing with highly fluid early modern vernaculars, embracing variation serves us better than abolishing it. The same holds true for the *Sītācarit*. For instance, nasalisations and postpositions routinely vary greatly across the manuscripts.

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[17]　All dates, except from those of Bālak, are from Miśra (1997, pp. 337; 277–78; 422–23; 26; 475; 45). A Jinharṣa (d. 1707) could have been active exactly contemporaneously with Bālak, but Miśra (1997, p. 162) describes his language as being Maru-Gurjar rather than Brajbhāṣā.

[18]　The text dates the completion of the text to the month of Māgha in VS1713. According to Snell (1991, p. 50), Māgha falls in the part of year when 56, not 57, should be deducted to get the AD date.

An illustrative example is the frequent alteration between Brajbhāṣā *kau* and Rājasthānī *ṇai* for the dative postposition, which both occurs between manuscripts and seems interchangeable within others.

There are two major factors for this, besides the fundamentally fluid character of early modern North Indian vernaculars. Firstly, the *Sītācarit* was composed at the juncture where Jains shifted from various iterations of Maru-Gurjar to Brajbhāṣā. As I show in the following, there are lingering traces of especially Rājasthānī influence and these are handled differently in different manuscripts. The second factor is the time span of the manuscripts themselves, ranging from the early eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth. Over time, scribes seem to have developed different ideas, of which forms needed correcting, and how. For instance, the eighteenth-century manuscripts generally show a greater proliferation of *tadbhava* variations than those of the nineteenth century, where consistent tendencies towards *tatsama*s take their place.[19] Moreover, there is a gap of over sixty years between the *Sītācarit*'s composition and the earliest manuscript available to me. Yet some linguistic patterns do appear, and while we may not be able to order the many variations under hard and fast grammatical rules, it is possible to point to general tendencies that are consistent across the manuscripts. As I show, the language of the *Sītācarit* can be described as a Brajbāṣā that wears its Maru-Gurjar influences lightly.

My aim here is not to provide a full grammar of Brajbhāṣā as it appears in the *Sītācarit*, with every single grammatical feature described—that would be a work beyond the scope of this study. It is, instead, an attempt to identify and describe some of the more salient features of the language of the *Sītācarit*, and to do so with sufficient precision to enable us to say where it sits on the spectrum between Maru-Gurjar and its offshoots, as described by Tessitori (1914), and Brajbhāṣā as used by the canonical poets that form the reference point for Snell (1991) Brajbhāṣā grammar. That is not to say that I am unaware of the limitations of grammatical analysis when it comes to the fluid nature of early modern vernacular languages. Yet I would again argue that we may use linguistic categories, also in the form of grammatical rules that cumulatively define a given language and give it boundaries that distinguish it from other languages, even while acknowledging that the borders can be more porous than the grammarsgrammar sometimes allowallows. In the case of Maru-Gurjar, the problem becomes more acute in that its exact linguistic status as separated from entities such as Old Western Rājasthānī or Old Gujarātī is not entirely clear. In fact, in the following, as above, I follow Tessitori's grammar of "Old Western Rājasthānī" when talking of Maru-Gurjar.

The majority of the language of the *Sītācarit* conforms to the typical forms of Brajbhāṣā grammar. A case in point is the pronouns. For the first person pronouns, the *Sītācarit* features *maiṃ*[20] for the singular and *hama*[21] for the plural. In the oblique, the singular is *mujha*, *mujhai/ṃ*[22], or less frequently, *mohi/ṃ*[23] and *mo/ṃ*.[24] The oblique plural first person is *hamai/ṃ*.[25] We note the complete absence of the Old Western Rājasthānī, Gujarātī, and Mārwāḍī forms given by Tessitori, such as *amhe/amhi/ame/me* for the plural.

In the second person, the *Sītācarit* features the singular *tū*, though rarely, and *tuma*[26] and *āpa*[27] interchangeably in both singular and plural. The oblique *tujha* and *tumha*[28] are frequent, but the usage of the latter varies greatly across the manuscripts. A (1729), and especially B (1727), at times, use

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[19]　*Tadbhava* and *tatsama* are classical concepts in Indian linguistics. Whereas *tadbhava* ("coming from that") denotes words that have a traceable origin in earlier Indo-Aryan languages, especially Sanskrit, *tatsama* ("same as that") refers to loanwords that appear unchanged from the Sanskrit.

[20]　"*kachu ika varnana maiṃ kahūṃ*", SC.151.

[21]　"*tāta hukama hama kauṃ karau*", SC. 163.

[22]　"*loka vidita mujha kau tajī*", SC.89. I use "*mujhai/ṃ*" and similar representations to indicate the varied, frequently random usage of nazalisation across the manuscripts.

[23]　"*jīva dāna dyo mohi*", SC.38.

[24]　"*kṛpā kari mo parai*", SC.1471.

[25]　"*kīyo hamaiṃ upagāra*", SC.187.

[26]　"*yaha kanyā tuma vyahau sahī*", SC.798.

[27]　"*maiṃ mana vaṃchita āpa syau e*", SC.398.

[28]　"*tau tumha gunhau karauṃ sava māpha*", SC.812.

*tumha*, even in contexts where a direct sense is intended, such as '*laḍau tumha hamārai sāthi*' (SC.893).[29] The inconsistency is striking, and neither of the two manuscripts seem to operate a full separation between the direct *tuma* and the oblique *tumha*. There is instead a free mixture of both forms.

Greater variation is seen in the possessive pronouns, where we have the first person singulars *merau*,[30] the second person *tumhārau*[31] and both *hamārau*[32] and *mhārau*[33] in the first person plural.[34] Tessitori attests *mhārau* as Mārvāḍī, but *hamārau* is far more frequent in the *Sītācarit*.

We find a similar situation in the interrogative pronouns, where the *Sītācarit* frequently uses Old Rājasthānī forms, such as *kuṇa*,[35] *kavaṇa*,[36] and oblique *kina*,[37] though Brajbhāṣā's direct *kauna*[38] and inanimate *kahā*[39] are equally, if not more, frequent. *Kisa/kiha*[40] also appear.

For the third person pronouns, Brajbhāṣā singular direct *yaha* and singular and plural direct *e* are common, and so is singular oblique *ihi/iha*, also attested as Old Rājasthānī singular ablative, though this appears just as frequently in direct positions and has apparently lost its ablative aspect. Most striking is the high frequency of Old Rājasthānī direct *eha*, but this is anyhow a common feature of Brajbhāṣā, too.

The overall impression is one of Brajbhāṣā usage that sometimes alternates with scattered specimens of Maru-Gurjar derived forms. We might postulate that over times the scribes could have ironed out archaic forms and that the relative paucity of Maru-Gurjar inflected pronouns in the *Sītācarit* is a reflection of such tendencies. A case in point is the still high frequency of *eha*, which is often used as one half of a rhyming couplet and so would be more problematic to change. This would also explain the infrequent separation between categories such as direct, oblique, instrumental, and dative postpositions. The pattern is fluid and individual scribes shape it in individual ways.

The same holds true for the postpositions. For the dative, we find varations of the Brajbhāṣā *kau/ṃ*,[41] but the Rājasthānī *nai*[42] is very frequent. Similarly, the Brajbhāṣā ablative and instrumental *taiṃ*[43] alternates with the Rājasthānī *thaiṃ*.[44] The manuscript B (1727) almost always chooses the latter, while A (1729) chooses the former. Maru- Gurjar and later Rājasthānī *taṇau*[45] is also common, but so is Brajbhāṣā *kau*.[46] The high frequency of these two postpositions emerges as one of the clearest marker of influences from the Maru-Gurjar sphere in the *Sītācarit*.

The verbal forms are on the whole in line with the Brajbhāṣā verbal inventory outlined by Snell, though plural nasalisation is highly irregular in the manuscripts. The Maru-Gurjar 3rd person present tense *–i* ending, familiar from Apabhraṃśa, does not appear at all. Rather than comparing the full array of forms, it is instructive to consider Drocco (2017) comparative work on ergative functions in Old Western Rājasthānī, as Tessitori described it, and in Brajbhāṣā prose texts. Drocco finds that

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[29]  "You fought against us."
[30]  "*bhāmaṇḍala merau vīra*", SC.986.
[31]  "*maiṃ saṃga tumhārai lāgā*", SC.508.
[32]  "*suṣī hamārai desi tuma*", SC.34.
[33]  "*tujha syauṃ na bhalau ko mhārai*", SC.509. The alternative *mahārau* appears in one instance: "*bacana na mānaiṃ mahārau*", SC.1232.
[34]  Tessitori separates between genitive *–au* endings and locative and dative *–aiṃ* endings for *mhār-*. Dative *mhārai* appears once in the Sītācarit (SC.509). *Hamai/ṃ* is otherwise the norm for first person plural oblique.
[35]  "*yaso rāja kuṇa karai*", SC.2191.
[36]  "*rāja kahai kavana hai vāta*", SC.497.
[37]  "*aisau juddha kīyo kina vīra*", SC.1018. This example shows that the distinction between direct and oblique use of the interrogative pronouns is not always maintained.
[38]  "*kahai kauna kavi vacana vicāra*", SC.3.
[39]  "*tuma nāma kahā kuṇa grāma*", SC.1248.
[40]  "*isa vaṇa maiṃ kiha kāma*", SC.60.
[41]  "*namoṃ namoṃ tumha kau*", SC.134.
[42]  "*dehu bharatha nai rāja*", SC.388.
[43]  "*muṣa taiṃ volī vaina*", SC.88.
[44]  "*kavarāṃ kīyo saneha pirathīdhara thaiṃ*", SC.137.
[45]  "*maṃtī sara rāvaṇa taṇau kahai vāta suvicāra*", SC.1663.
[46]  "*tau jaladhī kau nīra na soṣa*", SC.1699.

the latter material does show verbal agreement even with postposition-marked objects in perfective constructions, which is not expected to appear in what he terms "classical Braj", but is indeed a defining characteristic of "Mārvāṛī (i.e., Rājasthānī)" (2017, p. 207). This feature, however, never appears in the *Sītācarit*.[47] If anything, the *Sītācarit* frequently uses the ergative *nai/ṃ* or the objective marker *kau* in perfective constructions, though marked and unmarked constructions are freely mixed, and the perfective verb never agrees with a marked object. This situation enforces the impression of a Brajbhāṣā that draws on individual words from Maru-Gurjar derived languages, but uses them according to the grammatical structures, not of those languages, but of Brajbhāṣā. When they do appear with any degree of consistency, such as the pronoun *eha*, they seem to do so not out of grammatical necessity, but for reasons of metre and rhyme.

As for the vocabulary, the *Sītācarit* primarily draws on the Sanskrit register of Raviṣeṇa's *Padma Purāṇa*, its self-attested main source. See, for example, the following verse, which is quite typical in its Sanskritic register:

| | |
|---|---|
| *eka divasa subha karma prakāsa* | One day joyful karma arose |
| *Sītā geha calyau jinadāsa* | Sītā went to the house of a servant of the Jina; |
| *anauvṛtī chullika paravīna* | Skillful, vow-holding Kṣullaka. |
| *tapa kari vapu kīnau ati ṣīna* | He performed asceticism long and hard. |
| SC.99 | |

We notice how the first line could with only minor moderations have been been reshaped into a Sanskrit locus absolutive compound phrase. Elsewhere, the *Sītācarit* uses a range of both *tatsamas* and *tadbhavas*, more frequently the latter. For instance, variations of *hīyā* ("heart") are plentiful, whereas the *hṛdaya* approximation *hridai* appears only once (SC.95). Manuscript variations also attest to significant levels of confusion and creativity in handling Sanskrit terminology. In the above example, *anauvṛtī* appears in C (Bālak 1711) and D (Bālak 1761), while A (Bālak 1729) gives *aṇodharī*, B (Bālak 1727) *aṇovarī*, and E (Bālak 1751) *aṇovartī*. Similarly, the name of the sage Kṣullaka (Chullika) also appears as *ṣulika* (1729, 1727) and *chulaka* (1761). In other cases, the manuscripts broadly agree on *tadbhavas*, such as in *chohanī* for *akṣauhiṇī* (SC.1385). The overall impression is one of *tatsamas* being treated with varying degrees of awkwardness. It is, of course, impossible to say whether this is entirely caused by manuscript copyists or was present already at the time of composition, but the at times close relationship between the *Sītācarit* and the Sanskrit *Padma Purāṇa* does indicate that Rāmcand Bālak was comfortable with using Sanskrit. The question is then whether he employed *tadbhavas* current in his day, leaving later scribes to modify them into *tatsama*-approximations, or employed a highly *tatsama*-oriented vocabulary that the manuscript tradition struggled to come fully to terms with. In light of the otherwise quite unassuming aesthetics of the *Sītācarit*, discussed in more detail later, my assumption is that the former guess is more correct, but we may probably never know.

Alongside the Sanskrit-derived words in various stages of mutation is also a range of words of Perso-Arabic origin. Examples include *tahakīka* (SC.8),[48] *khalq* (SC.12), *khabar* (SC.124), *sāhab* (SC.92), *qarār* (SC.350), *fauja* (SC.1440), and *qaulah* (SC.1072). Some of these, such as *khabar*, appear frequently, especially when used as fixed adverbial phrases, such "*sitāva de*" (SC.592). Intriguingly, the manuscript scribes have on the whole had far less difficulty with the Perso-Arabic forms than the *tatsama*-leaning Sanskritic forms. Whereas the latter vary widely across manuscripts, the Perso-Arabic are strikingly consistent with variations appearing to only be down to minor spelling preferences.

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47　See, for instance, "*ratanajaṭī ko rāma nai puchī sava hī vāta*", SC.1120, which is close to modern standard Hindī. More common are constructions such as "*usa paṃṣī naiṃ rāma jī rāṣyauṃ*", SC.860, which take the Rājasthānī *naiṃ* as the objective marker and drops the ergative *nai*. In either case, the verb does not agree with the marked object.

48　*Tahakīka* ("truly; truth") is used similarly in the *Ardhakathānaka*, v. 521 (2009, p. 216): "*e kahai e ṭhaga tahakīka - e kahai byaupārī ṭhīka*". ("One said, 'Truly, they are thugs!' The other said, "It's true, they are merchants.") Both Bālak and Banārsīdās have a penchant for rhyming *tahakīka* with *ṭhīka*; the rhyme is used four out of the five times *tahakīka* appears in the *Sītācarit*.

In sum, the *Sītācarit* presents a Brajbhāṣā that wears its at times plentiful Maru-Gurjar elements lightly and that draws on and mixes Sanskritic and Perso-Arabic registers. In Bakhtin (1981) terms, the *Sītācarit*'s range of registers sits closer to the heteroglossic. This indicates that the *Sītācarit* is a reflection of a multilingual context, where effective vernacular works drew on a variety of impulses. At the same time, there is no doubt that this variety of registers is embedded within a grammatical framework that is fully Brajbhāṣā.

## 3.2. Outlook—Bālak and Banārsīdās

Banārsīdās (2009, v. 174) autobiographical *Ardhakathānaka* features a reference to a "Rāmcand Bālak".[49] This Bālak is one of two disciples of a monk of the Śvetāmbar Kharatara Gaccha sect, Abhaydharm, with whom Banārsīdās studied for a while in Jaunpur. Banārsīdās (2009) states that this meeting happened in 1600, and that he himself was 14 years at the time. If the epithet *bālak* ("young") referred to this Rāmcand Bālak's age at the time, indicating that he was of the same age as Banārsīdās or younger, he would have been in his late 60s or early 70s in 1657, when the *Sītācarit* was completed. It is difficult however to connect the allegedly Digambara poet Bālak with the Śvetāmbara monk of the *Ardhakathānaka*. Even so, the possibility remains that the Digambara elements on view in the *Sītācarit* may be comparable with the form of Digambara *adhyātma* mysticism that Banārsīdās himself embraced in his later life. The *Ardhakathānaka* itself can be read as Banārsīdās's spiritual journey towards this goal. While the *adhyātma* movement's main site was in Agra, and included Dyānatrāy, Cort (2002a) has shown that Jain *adhyātma* milieus also arose in Delhi and Multan, and that the latter primarily was composed of former Śvetāmbara monks of the Kharatara Gaccha. This does open the possibility that the poet Rāmcand Bālak might have been the person referred to by Banārsīdās, but we may probably never establish this with any degree of certainty. However, Banārsīdās remains an essential reference point for studies of Jain Brajbhāṣā literature, due to both his relative popularity in modern-day research and to his influence in the *adhyātma*-movement.

The very word *adhyātma* has a long and complex history. It is composed of the prefix *adhi* ("above, over") and the noun *ātman*, which with its range of meanings ("self, soul, essence, etc.") is in itself a central term in the history of South Asian religions. *Adhyātma*, then, can be understood as a "supreme self", but also in the general adjectival sense of "spiritual". An early example of *adhyātma* being used in such terms is *Bhāgavadgītā* (Radhakrishnan 1949, v. 8.3) where it is described as "the true nature of the indestructible, highest *brahman*".[50] Earlier still is its appearance as a member of the classical triad of the physical ("*adhibhautika*"), the divine ("*adhidaivika*"), and the spiritual ("*adhyātmika*"), which appears already in the Upaniṣads and customarily in later philosophical and medical treatises.[51] An influential appearance of the concept is in the title of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, a *Rāmāyaṇa* telling in Sanskrit of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century that sees Rāma not only as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, but of supreme reality itself (*brahman*) itself. This *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is generally acknowledged to have had a defining influence on Tulsīdās and his *Rāmcaritmānas*.[52]

In the Jain context, the concept is closely linked with the *adhyātma* movement of the seventeenth century, which, as we have seen, centered around Banārsīdās and was a mystically inclined movement among Digambara Jain laymen of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Today it is more widely recognized as a historical catalyst for the development of the Terah and Bīsa Panths, the main traditions of contemporary Digambara Jainism. However, Flügel (2006) notes that Digambara mysticism in no way was the invention of the *adhyātma* movement. Indeed, one of the movement's central documents, Banārsīdās's *Samaysār Nāṭak*, is in the main a commentary on the (at latest) eighth century Digambara philosopher Kundakunda's *Samayasāra*, indicating the longevity of the teachings that underpinned the

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[49] I refer to Chowdhury's edition of the Ardhakathānaka (Banārsīdās 2009).
[50] "*akṣaram brahma paramam*», *svabhāvo* «*dhyātmam ucyate*».
[51] See, for instance, *Taittirīya Upaniṣada* 1.7.1 (Angot 2007).
[52] For instance, see Lutgendorf 1991, p. 7.

movement in the seventeenth century. But the word *adhyātma* itself does not seem to have been current in Jain circles prior to Banārsīdās, and remains linked with the movement.[53] Even so, the movement's place in the history of Digambara Jainism, and especially in view of the more formally defined positions that followed in its wake, does mean that it can be difficult to view its seventeenth century iteration on its own terms. Flügel (2006, p. 340) argues that the *adhyātma*-group, primarily centered around Agra, and the beginnings of the Terah Panth-movement, focused in Jaipur, were initially distinct but related lay groups that became close to indistinguishable to later history. So while Banārsīdās was a strong and vocal proponent of *adhyātma*, and a definite group did emerge on the basis of his teachings; it is also true that the exact span of activities and practices of these groups remain difficult to precisely delineate. The same holds true for the reach of its influence into the realms of popular Jain practices and meetings, for which I think the *Sītācarit* primarily would have been intended.

Because of these very difficulties, I believe it is most helpful to approach the *adhyātma*-movement of Rāmcand Bālak's day not as a consistent set of doctrines, but rather as an influential *mood* or *perspective*, not unlike how Hawley (2015) has argued we may understand the contemporary *bhakti* "movement". Through this approach we may recognize *adhyātma*-tendencies without necessarily having to peg them onto a formal, traceable organization, but rather acknowledge them as affinities within a wider current. This *adhyātma* mood involves a general turning away from outward ritual, considered artifice, and towards inner meditation. Here it is useful to turn to Banārsīdās's compositions, especially where he touches on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and see how he himself presents *adhyātma* there, and in turn attempt to square Banārsīdās's position with that of the *Sītācarit*. This will allow us to compare more directly the *adhyātma* mood and perspective with that of the *Sītācarit*, so as to see whether we find direct echoes.

*Banārsīvilāsa* is a collection of Banārsīdās's shorter and medium-length works on doctrine, compiled by one Jagjivan, a fellow poet and *adhyātma* devotee, in 1644, shortly after Banārsīdās's death.[54] It is an important source of knowledge about seventeenth century Digambara Jainism in general, but especially important here in light of the potential linkages between Banārsīdās and Rāmcand Bālak. The references to the Rāmāyaṇa story in the *Banārsīvilās* allow us to directly compare the two poets' vocabularies and perspectives on mutual subjects in more detail. The main appearance of the Rāmāyaṇa story in the *Banārsīvilās* is part of the *Adhyātamapadapaṃkti*, a cycle of songs with affixed *rāgas* that illuminates parts of the *adhyātma* world-view. Its sixteenth song encompasses a refrain and seven couplets in the *vṛndāvanī rāga* and deals explicitly with the Rāmāyaṇa story. It may well be quoted in full:

> *(ṭeka) virājai rāmāyaṇa ghaṭa māhiṃ; maramī hoya marama so jānai, mūrakha mānai nāhiṃ, virājai rāmāyaṇa*
>
> *ātama rāma gyāna guna lachamana sītā sumati sameta; śubhapayoga vānaradala maṃdita, vara viveka raṇakheta virājai . . .*
>
> *dhyāna dhanuṣa ṭaṃkāra śora suni, gaī viṣayditi māga; bhaī bhasma mithyāmata laṃkā uṭhī dhāraṇā āga virājai . . .*
>
> *jare agyāna bhāva rākṣasakula, lare nikāṃchita sūra; jūjhai rāgadveṣa senāpati saṃsai gaḍha cakacūra virājai . . .*
>
> *vilakhata kuṃbhakaraṇa bhavavibhrama, pulakita mana darayāva; thakita udāra vīra mahirāvaṇ setubaṃdha samabhāva, virājai . . .*
>
> *mūrchita maṃdodarī durāśā, sujaga carana hanumāna; ghaṭī caturgati paraṇati senā, chuṭe chapakaguṇa bāna, virājai . . .*

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53  It is tempting to speculate on whether the adoption of the term in the seventeenth century could stem from the general influence of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* from the early sixteenth century onwards.

54  I use the 1905 edition of the *Banārsivilāsa* and give page numbers, not verses.

*nirakhi sakti guna cakrasudarśana udaya vibhīṣaṇa dīna; phirai kavaṃdha mahī rāvaṇkī, prāṇabhāva śirahīna, virājai...*

*iha vidhi sakala sādhughaṭa aṃtara, hoya sahaja saṃgrāma; yaha vivahāradṛṣṭi rāmāyaṇa kevala niścaya rāma virājai . . .*

[Banārsīdās 1905](), pp. 242–43

The Rāmāyaṇa shines in the mortal body. Insightful is he who knows the inner truth; fools do not know it.

Rām of the *ātmā*[55] is knowledge, Lakṣmaṇ is qualities, Sītā the great mind. Auspiciousness is found amongst the band of *vānaras*, the greatest insight on the field of battle.

Hearing the twang of the bow of *dhyāna*, worldly pleasures flee. As the flame of concentration arises, the deluded mind of Laṃkā turns to ash.

The rākṣasas' *bhāv* of ignorance burns as the heroes of passionless minds fight. The general fights the *rāg* of enmity and the fortress of doubt shatters like glass.

The sobbing Kumbhakaraṇa is the illusion of existence; delighting in this illusion causes the mind to fall. The glorious hero, the great Rāvaṇ, is the stopping of actions; equanimity the bridge to Laṃkā.

The unconscious Maṃdodarī is faithlessness, the feet of Hanumān the world itself. The multitude of four legged ones are the humble army, they release the arrows of the *chapakaguṇa*.

Seeing the power and quality of the *cakrasudarśana* Vibhīṣana's faith arose. How could he return to the earth of Rāvaṇ, that jewel-less world of beings?

In this way, in every sādhu's mortal body, rages the battle for *sahaja*. From the perspective of everyday life it is the *Rāmāyaṇa*—from that of absolute insight it is Rām himself.

Banārsīdās presents a vision of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as an inner drama that plays out within the body of the devotee. For those who possess *kevalgyān*, the absolute omniscience achieved by only the most successful Jains, the Rāmāyaṇa story is Rām itself. As indicated by the song's second line, this Rām is the *Ātmarām*—the true, inner Rām, which I here believe is closely akin to the radical self-insight at the core of the *adhyātma* perspective itself. Similar references to the liberating power of *ātma* appear in Bālak's *Sītācarit*:

*jina āgyā hiradai dharī jāgyau ātama bhāva*

*āpa jāṃni vauṃ gyāna hai krīyā āpa ṭharāya*

SC.1541

By holding the commands of the Jina in the heart, the mood of the *ātma* awakened,

You will know by that knowledge to restrain your actions.

This call to "restrain" actions is in keeping with the general *adhyātma* outlook of valuing the attainment of supreme religious insight (*kevalgyān*) over worldly deeds, which only serve to accrue hurtful *karma*. The motif frequently appears in Bālak's *Sītācarit*.

Another important concept in the *Adhyātamapadapaṃkti* is *sahaja*, a term with its own complex history in South Asian religions. While its basic etymology suggests meanings akin to "natural" and "original", it took on elaborate semantic possibilities, especially amongst the Nāth movements, in Tantrism, and the *nirguṇa* mood of *bhakti*. Without going into too much detail, *sahaja* can be said to describe a transcendent or mystic state, often accompanied by or facilitating a perfect union or success

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[55] The concept of *Ātmarām* is complex, and I translate it like this here rather for clarity than precision.

in attaining the ultimate goals of the tradition in question.[56] As we can see from the above quotations from the *Banārsīvilās*, *sahaja* has a similar meaning in the *adhyātma* context. It frequently appears in Bālak's *Sītācarit*, such as in the following example:

| | |
|---|---|
| *yakaṭaka dhyāna dharau bhagavāna* | Steadily focusing on the lord, |
| *hvai niḥścala sāmāyāka gyāna* | that undoubtedly leads to perfect knowledge, |
| *cita maiṃ ora nahī ko bhāva* | when there is no other state in the mind |
| *jānyauṃ ātama sahaija subhāva* | and the *ātma* knows the blissful state of *sahaja*. |
| SC.2250 | |

Note how this passage exemplifies the link between the concepts of *ātma* and *sahaja*, and there are several similar examples in the *Sītācarit*. Finally, the reference to the "inner truth" of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the very first line of Banārsīdās's verse—"*marman*"—is echoed in similar phrases in the *Sītācarit*; just as Banārsīdās exclaims that "fools do not know" these secret interconnections, Rāmcand Bālak states that "the blind do not see the *marman*".[57]

May we then conclude that the *Sītācarit* represents a full-scale narrative representation of essentially the same religious stance that Banārsīdās reveals in the *Adhyātamapadapaṃkti*? Not quite. For the *Sītācarit* weds its *adhyātma* outlook with an equally strong emphasis on *bhakti*, and as we shall see, even goes far in establishing *bhakti* as an equally efficient way to the beatific *kevalgyān* as knowledge of *adhyātma*. While Banārsīdās is no stranger to *bhakti* either, he is primarily occupied with the mystic self-knowledge of *adhyātma*. Moreover, the *Sītācarit* places a strong emphasis on the importance of authority and those who embody it, including the *muni*s,[58] Jinas, and especially, the *satī*s, to the extent that it suggests that worship of these authoritites brings an equal benefit to that of attaining the insights these authorities embody. Rāmcand Bālak himself says as much, in one of the few examples of his own direct words in the *Sītācarit*:

| | |
|---|---|
| *kahai caṃda aisā guru sevau* | Rāmcand Bālak says, Serve such a guru |
| *bhavasāgara sīghara ṣevau* | and you will quickly cross the ocean of existence. |
| *ativīraja muni paravāṇa* | Great and heroic are the commands of the *muni*, |
| *pragaṭyau mahiyala jima bhāṇa* | their words manifest on the earth. |
| SC.766 | |

It is indeed striking that throughout the *Sītācarit*, we hear more about the benefits of the guru's words than the words themselves. This is in line with a general trope of the ideal guru in vernacular Digambara poetry, which Cort (2019) has described as being informed by both the ancient Jain tradition of venerating the Jina and the emphasis on the guru's powers in the energised non-Jain religious traditions of early modern North India. That is not to say that its path diverges from that of Banārsīdās; as we have seen, Rāmcand Bālak frequently uses the same vocabulary as Banārsīdās to speak of mystical experiences akin to that of the *adhyātma*, and Sītā's ultimate ascension to divine status is framed as an experience infused by *sahaja*. Yet, the very concept of *adhyātma* itself never appears in the *Sītācarit*, and we may hypothesise that Bālak, while familiar with and possibly adhering to *adhyātma* tenets, was not a full-blood member of the movement. He did, however, clearly compose the *Sītācarit* within a religious and literary landscape, where Banārsīdās was a looming figure, and he must have been familiar with *adhyātma* sentiments. Another difficulty arises when we consider that the mystical language used by Banārsīdās and Bālak alike might not be particular to them. As Bangha has pointed out to me in personal communication, Bālak's and Banārsīdās's mystic terminology has many overlaps with *sant-bhāṣā*, the vernacular used amongst non-Jain yogic and tantric practitioners, such as Gorakhnāth, and their followers. Cort (2015) has indeed pointed to a piece in the *Banārsīvilāsa* that explicitly and positively discusses Gorakhnāth's teachings. This indicates that the flow of influence

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[56] These meanings are discussed by Callewaert and Sharma 2009, p. 2015.
[57] "*Marama na jāṇai aṃdha*", SC.2310.
[58] *Muni* ("sage") is a common term of reference for a Jain monk.

amongst Jain Brajbhāṣā authors may not only have gone from Jain to Jain, but across a wider swathe of their social and religious context. However, we cannot fully understand Bālak's religious stance if we do not consider the peculiar functions of the *Sītācarit* as a narrative.

### 3.3. Satī and Bhakti in Narrative

I have written elsewhere about the *Sītācarit*'s status as a *satī-kathā*, and can only briefly restate my argument here.[59] While the defining works of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, such as Raviṣeṇa's *Padma Purāṇa* and Vimalasūri's *Paüma Cariya*, all tell the story of Rām, Lakṣman, and Rāvaṇ with special reference to their status as Great Men (*śalākāpuruṣa*) of Jain universal history; the *Sītācarit* is one of several, lesser known Jain *Rāmāyaṇas* that twist the tale to focus on Sītā and her status as a singularly devout and accomplished Jain woman—a *satī*.[60] The final act of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, covering Rām and Sītā's return to Ayodhya, Sītā's banishment to forest exile, and eventual triumph in a public test of her fidelity, is crucial to Sītā's *satī* stature. While the narrative of her enlightened approach to supremely challenging circumstances is present already in the earliest layers of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, the Jain *satī-kathās* typically shift the balance of the story to primarily be that of Sītā, sidelining Rām and Lakṣman. The *Sītācarit* accomplishes this shift by beginning at the very end, with Sītā and Rām's return to court after the battle of Laṅkā, taking great relish in portraying Sītā's heroic composure in the face of her banishment. The recounting of the preceding events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative only appears later as the wandering sage Nārada tells the story to Sītā's twin sons. The final, defining section of the *Sītācarit*—covering about one sixth of the roughly 2500 verse total—details Sītā's return to Ayodhya and the great set piece of test by fire of her fidelity. The fire pit is divinely transformed to a royal throne and the renunciate Sītā emerges as the embodiment of a devotional ideal, while Rām appears confused and unwilling to let go of his desires. It is also on this note that the narrative of the *Sītācarit* ends. Rām and Lakṣman venerate Sītā, their story ending without the closure of the *śalākāpuruṣa*-narrative, while Sītā's insight, asceticism, and *satī*-stature are praised in the hymnal tones of a *chappay* verse.

The *Sītācarit*'s portrayal of Sītā as an embodiment of an ideal worthy of worship encapsulates the composition's emphasis on the power and efficacy of bhakti in religious and literary practice. Its opening verses feature an argument, often found in bhakti-leaning vernacular works, where Bālak explicitly states how it is the practice of bhakti towards the teachers and learnings of Jainism that miraculously endows him with the imaginative power needed to compose "a glorious *Sītācarit*".[61] This model of religious practice, which we may label "attainment through devotion", runs throughout the *Sītācarit* as a constant theme, and is most clearly illustrated in the central figure of Sītā herself. As the pit of fire becomes a royal throne and Sītā announces her decision to renunciate, she is praised by munis and gods alike:

*ava haraṣa bhayau sava saṃta*  
*pragaṭyau sata sīla mahaṃta*  
*jaga maiṃ aha moṭī nārī*  
*tina kai nahī kāma vikārī*  
SC.2483

Now all the *sants* were thrilled  
The true skills of the great beings were manifest  
This great woman was in the world  
She could not act harmfully  

In her radical embrace of the Jain teachings, in this instance encapsulated by her vows of asceticism, Sītā not only aspires to the qualities of enlightened beings but comes to—crucially—"manifest" them in the mundane world. And by embodying these qualities as a *satī*, Sītā also becomes an object of veneration. The *satī* is an ideal in the *Sītācarit* because she recognises the cause and effect of auspicious and inauspicious *karma* in life, the stopping of these processes by applying skilful practice,

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[59] See Plau (2018). My analysis of the *Sītācarit*'s narrative structure draws on Genette's (1997) concept of *transfocalisation*, in which the emphasis of a familiar story is shifted to focus on a new character, theme or motif.

[60] In the Jain context, the *satī* concept does not have any connotation with the ritual self-immolation of the *suttee* practice made infamous by colonial-era discourse. See Kelting (2009) and Fohr (2015, pp. 55–74).

[61] *Sītācarit* vs. 5 (Plau 2018).

and the essence of equanimity and mystic *sahaja*-quality within the *ātman* that characterises the *jīva*'s achievement of this goal. Yet, as the *Sītācarit* repeatedly underlines, perfect devotion for those who achieve the goal has the power to bestow the same gifts on the devotee. Rāmcand Bālak presents a stance that balances between placing ultimate authority in the hands of the enlightened few and offering a path where each devotee may reach the same religious pinnacle through the supremely potent vehicle of *bhakti*.

The implications of Sītā's success are then that we too, as listeners or readers, may gain a similar insight not only by emulating Sītā's example, but by expressing *bhakti* for her too, and it is the *Sītācarit*'s quality as *narrative* that bears this element out. The very emphasis on Sītā over Rām is achieved not simply by stating that this is so, but through Bālak's ingenious reordering of the familiar story's narrative structure, embedding the story of Rām and Lakṣmaṇ's heroics within the context of Sītā's exile. Ultimately, Sītā's clearheaded insight into the workings of *karma* becomes the nexus through which we are invited to view the rest of the story.

The technique is used throughout the *Sītācarit*. Bālak typically does not draw out the religious implications of other events of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story simply by stating these, but rather by rearranging the events of the familiar narrative to highlight interrelations, themes, and insights. In his recounting of the life of Bhāmaṇḍala, Sītā's brother, Bālak, again completely reorganizes the sequence of events in his alleged source, Raviṣeṇa's Sanskrit *Padma Purāṇa*. In the traditional telling of the story, Bhāmaṇḍala was, in a former life, a prince who kidnapped a woman from her lover and committed violence by invading other countries. In the next life, Bhāmaṇḍala is reborn as Sītā's twin brother while the woman's lover is born as a vengeful *asura*, a form of deity, who steals Bhāmaṇḍala the baby boy from the cradle and leaves him to grow up in the forest. As a young man, Bhāmaṇḍala finds an image of Sītā and promptly falls in love. When Rām defeats him in an archery contest for Sītā's hands, an infuriated Bhāmaṇḍala decides to wage war. On his way to the battlefield, however, Bhāmaṇḍala catches a glimpse of the territory he ruled in his previous life, instantly remembers and understands everything, and is reunited with his parents and sister as a brother. The *Sītācarit* follows this outline, but with several chronological twists. Instead of introducing Bhāmaṇḍala's story by recounting his previous birth, Bālak reserves this information to the story's climax, when the enraged Bhāmaṇḍala, about to act harmfully, suddenly remembers his previous lives and is enlightened. As Bhāmaṇḍala's realization dawns, Bālak recounts the preceding the story that explains not only what has happened before, but coming as the climax of Bhāmaṇḍala's narrative, highlights why and how previous *karma* affects the present. The understanding of the purely causal events echo a deeper insight into the workings of *karma*, and it is an effect that is achieved through playful rearrangement of narrative structure.

This playful element of the *Sītācarit* is borne out in its distinctive literary form. Here too, Bālak both correlates with and partially departs from Banārsīdās. Snell (2005) has noted how the relative lack of traditional poetic devices (*alaṅkāras*) in Banārsīdās' *Ardhakathānaka* in no way indicates that the work is lacking in literary merit or artfulness. Banārsīdās' language is frequently oral in tone, but highly alert to the possibilities of metrical rhythm, using one to underline the other. We see a very similar dynamic in play in the *Sītācarit*, where Bālak hardly ever indulges in any kind of imagery but rather emphasises dialogue and bare-bones storytelling, frequently with a tone of informality and directness that approximates contemporary, everyday Hindī. Examples include Sītā's twin sons' parting words as they are about to leave for war—"*mātā jī hama calata hai*"[62]—and Sītā's reaction when she is brought into the forest for her exile:

> *sītā kahai sunau senāpati isa vaṇa maiṃ kiha kāma*
>
> *ihā kahū jinamaṃdira nāhī kahyau kahāṃ tuma rāma*
>
> SC.60

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[62] "We're off, mother", (SC.120).

Sītā said, "Listen commander, what are we doing in this forest?

There is no Jain temple here. What have you said, Rāma?"

The *Sītācarit* here lets Sītā speak directly, using unadorned and colloquial language. At the same time, Sītā's phrases are divided across three of the *dohā* verse's four metrical subunits (*padas*), giving the statements something of the clipped quality of confused speech. It is a striking example of how the *Sītācarit* frequently juxtaposes straightforward language with metrical sensitivity, similar to Banārsīdās's style in the *Ardhakathānaka*.

However, the *Sītācarit* also features an array of poetical meters that are used in a completely free-flowing manner. The typical delineation of a narrative work into shorter segments consisting of *caupāī-dohā* is familiar from early, influential vernacular romances such as Maulana Daud's *Cāndāyan* (1379), Qutban's *Mṛgāvati* (1503/1504), and Malik Muhammad Jāysī's *Padmāvat* (1540/1541). Tulsīdās too makes use of the *caupāī-dohā* pattern in his *Rāmcaritmānas*, though the *dohā* is sometimes exchanged with a *soṛhā*, and further forms are occasionally used to highlight moments of increased emotional intensity.[63] In contrast, the *Sītācarit* is not in any manuscript divided into fixed units, but is instead a single, long composition that alternates between a range of meters, including *dohā*, *caupāī*, *kavitta* (allegedly *savaiyā*),[64] *soṛhā*, *arilla*, *chappay*, *chanda-cāl*, and *karkhā*, as well as several kinds of musical notations in the form of *rāgas*.[65] This range of meters was in line with those used by Banārsīdās and other Jain poets, such as Ānandghan, as well as with the usages of non-Jain Brajbhāṣā poets of the same period. Bālak, however, alternates between these meters completely freely, using the very texture of variation as a building block in his narrative structure. At times, the *dohā* is used to pass comment on narrative events; at others, it is used for long series of sustained narrative action; and at yet others, it is used in alternation with the *soṛhā*, which is the exact inversion of the *dohā* meter, in dialogues to emulate the ebb and flow of conversation. In this, the *Sītācarit* is closer in form to the metrical pyrotechnics of a poet such as Keśavdās, who is emblematic of the period's elaborate *rīti* style of poetry and who similarly used free metrical variation for effect, for instance in his own *Rāmāyaṇa* treatment, the *Rāmcandrikā* (1600). Yet it is more helpful to think of the aesthetics of the *Sītācarit* not in terms of degrees of courtly *rīti* influence, but rather as an expression that shares tendencies but is still distinctive on its own terms. As I have noted, Bālak hardly ever uses any of the elaborate poetical effects (*alaṅkāras*) that permeate Keśavdās's works. We do better in thinking of the *Sītācarit* as representing a distinctive artfulness that draws on a variety of aesthetic tendencies while not fully adopting any of them. This artfulness blends a strikingly informal, unadorned tone, advanced metrical usages, and inventive narrative techniques to create a literary texture that is distinctive, yet clearly informed by multiple aesthetic and religious currents in its day.

Considering the many different aspects of the *Sītācarit* as a whole, it strikes me that it is, more than anything, a text that wants to entertain and be understood. Only rarely and incidentally discussing the finer points of doctrinal matters, it is primarily engaged with the possibilities and insights inherent in storytelling.

## 4. Conclusions

So where does all this leave us? Firstly, it is clear that while we may usefully and confidently speak of Jain Hindī, it is also helpful to zoom in on the particular language characteristics of works like the *Sītācarit* and recognize that particular milieus of Jains existed from the seventeenth century onwards that used a Brajbhāṣā comparable to that of non-Jain poets active at the time. And while

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[63]    See Lutgendorf (1991, pp. 13–18) for a discussion of Tulsīdās's use of meters.

[64]    There is a tendency in the manuscripts to designate verses in the *kavitta* metre as being *savaiyā*s. I am grateful to Hiroko Nagasaki for helping me identify this particularity.

[65]    These metres were for the most part standard elements in the vernacular poet's toolbox. For the use of *rāgas* in the *Sītācarit*, see Plau (2019).

Banārsīdās has had a towering influence on the way we perceive these milieus, the *Sītācarit* indicates something of their actual scope and variety. The *Sītācarit* is a lone example here, but it is far from the only work of its nature. As we have seen, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the production of dozens of narrative Jain works in Brajbhāṣā. Between Banārsidās and Rāmcand Bālak we may hypothesize a Jain Brajbhāṣā cultural field with different views and emphases, consisting of authors and audiences who responded to religious and literary influences from across the entirety of early modern North Indian society, and crafted, enjoyed, and were informed by well-formed, inventive, and unique works. The archives are waiting to be explored.

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