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The other Side of Infidels: Jain Intelligentsia and the Indo-Muslim Dialogue

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Abstract:*This article examines the intellectual and religious life of Jain communities under the Delhi Sultanate (c. 1206–1526 CE) and Mughal Empire (1526-1857), focusing on eminent Jain monks and scholars who interacted with sultans and several emperors. Through the analysis of prabandha literature, monastic chronicles, inscriptions, and comparative studies with Persian sources, the paper explores how Jain intellectuals maintained scholastic vitality while negotiating their position within an Islamic polity. Figures such as Jinaprabha Sūri, Jinapati Sūri, Jinabhadra, Hiravijaya, Siddhicandra and others exemplify the adaptive strategies of Jain mendicants who engaged in diplomacy, intellectual exchange, and religious advocacy in the courts of the Sultans and the Mughal emperors. These encounters illuminate a vibrant yet cautious Jain presence within the cultural mosaic of the Muhammadan rule in Hindustan.*
Keywords: *Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Empire, Minorities, Muhammadan, Religion etc.*

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Introuction

The Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526 CE) has often been portrayed primarily through the lens of Persian chronicles and Islamic historiography. Yet, parallel to these courtly narrative, Jain monastic and lay intellectuals developed their own interpretive frameworks to understand the new political order. Far from being isolated, Jain religious figures often interacted with Sultanate rulers—sometimes as envoys, moral interlocutors, or respected sages. Their writings and remembered deeds, preserved in *Prabandha* collections and monastic

genealogies, reflect a sophisticated intellectual and spiritual engagement with power, society, and interfaith coexistence.

The Jain text titled *Nemi-Jina-Carita*, written by poet Dāmodara of Gurjaradesa (Rajasthan) in vikram sambat 1287 (1230-31 CE), tells us that the Muhammadans under Sultān Iltutmish brought mighty destruction to Jainism in the regions of Rajasthan and Malwa[2].

During the reign of Alauddīn Khiljī, Pūrna Candra Agrawal was a mighty opulent of Delhi. At the emperor's advice, he requested the Digambara saint Mādhavasena to visit Delhi from the south and established the seat of the Kāsthāsamgha in the capital. The Sultān was greatly influenced by saint Mādhavasena[3]. Another intellectual figure we find during Alauddīn's reign was Lalitakīrti, author of the Sanskrit commentary of the Mahā Purāna. He was a mantra-tantra expert. Being influenced by his intellectual and spiritual aura, the Sultān gave him thirty-two farmāns[4]. Alauddīn was also influenced by the teachings of Jinaprabha Sūri.After the Khiljīs, the sultanate went to the Tughlaqs. The most notable and glamourous reign was of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq, son of the first Tughlaq ruler Giyāsuddin. He was quite exceptional and a little bit experimental in every aspect of the empire that he held. Religious periphery was such a theme he had interacted with his explorative mindset. Not only he conversed with the Muslim mystics, but he also did it with Brāhmanical yogīs and Jaina saints. It is known from the text *Bāhubali-Carita Prasasti*, written by Dhanapāla in 1397 CE, that Digambara Jaina saint Prabhāchandra defeated his opponents in a logical discussion and pleased with this incident, Sultān Muhammad Bin Tughlaq honoured the saint[5].

Sultān Muhammad also respected and acknowledged the Svetāmbara Ācārya Jinaprabha Sūri, author of *Vividha Tīrtha Kalpa*, who was the most historically visible Jain intellectual of the Sultanate era also. According to Jain narratives, Jinaprabha visited the court of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq around 1328 CE[6], where the Sultan “treated him with wealth, land, horses, elephants etc. which the saint declined. The Sultan praised him and issued a farmān with royal seal for the construction of a new basādi upāsraya, i.e. rest house for the monks. A procession started in his honour to his residence to the accompaniment of varied music and dances of young women, and the saint was seated on the state elephant surrounded by Maliks.”[7] He reportedly accompanied the Sultan on campaigns to Gujarat and

the Deccan. With the help and direct support of the Sultān, Jinaprabha built a temple around 1328 CE and repaired the tīrtha (holy place) of Kanyānayana[8].

The next ruler, Firoz, had a close relation with a group of Jain intellectuals resided in Yoginīpura i.e. Delhi. From a Prasasti of the *Holirenukā-Carita* by Jinadāsa, it is known that Haripati, a jain scholar in the field of science of medicines, was honoured by the Sultān[9]. Sultān Firoz invited the Jaina pundits for deciphering the inscriptions engraved on the Ashokan pillars located in Delhi[10].From Jinapati Sūri's audience with Iltutmish to Jinaprabha Sūri's celebrated exchange with Muhammad bin Tughluq, Jain intellectual as well as religious personalities under the Delhi Sultanate reveal the dynamism of medieval Indian pluralism. Their intellectual contributions—rooted in philosophy, narrative art, and moral advocacy—illuminate the possibilities of cultural coexistence in a period often characterized by conquest and conflict. The Jain experience, recorded in rich textual traditions, stands as a testimony to resilience, adaptability, and the enduring dialogue between dharma and political power.

Jain Intellectuals and Religious Personalities under the Mughal Empire (1526–1857 CE)

The advent of the Mughal Empire inaugurated new forms of imperial cosmopolitanism. Compared to the often regional and militarized governance of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, beginning with Babur and reaching a cultural zenith under Akbar (r. 1556–1605), cultivated a more consciously ecumenical vision of sovereignty. This shift opened unprecedented opportunities for Jain intellectuals to participate in imperial discourse.

While the Sultanate-era monks such as Jinaprabha Sūri had negotiated protection through moral diplomacy, Mughal-period Jains moved further — engaging in direct philosophical dialogue with emperors, influencing policy, and producing an extraordinary corpus of multilingual scholarship in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Brajbhasha, Rajasthani, and Persian.

Under Babur (r. 1526–1530), the Mughal empire was still in consolidation, and there is little record of direct Jain–imperial interaction. However, in regions like Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Malwa, where Jain communities were economically prominent, they continued to maintain temple networks and educational centers. During Humayun's reign (r. 1530–1556), some Jain lay leaders acted as financiers to regional Mughal officials. Notably, the monk

Hiravijaya's predecessors in Gujarat maintained cordial relations with local governors, preparing the ground for more formal engagement under Akbar.

The reign of Akbar the Great marked the golden age of Jain–imperial interaction. Trauskey argues that a political reason was behind this newborn interaction, and that was the Mughal takeover of Gujarat in 1572-73[11]. She further shows that those Jain intellectuals were often divided into two or more groups in Mughal court as per their traditional sectarian division and different practices[12]. Padmasundara was, in all probability, the first Jain intellectual to appear at the court of Emperor Akbar. Although very little information about him is available, it is certain that he had earlier served in the court of Maldeo of Jodhpur. At Akbar's request, in the year 1569, he composed a Sanskrit work entitled *Akbarśāhī Śṛṅgāradarpaṇa* (The Mirror of Akbar's Splendour)[13]. Akbar's religious pluralism, expressed in his policy of *Sulh-i Kul* (universal peace), found an intellectual counterpart in the Jain ideal of *Ahiṃsā* and *Anekāntavāda* (non-violence and pluralism).

The next major and the most celebrated Jain personality of the Mughal period was Ācārya Hiravijaya Sūri, a leader of the Śvetāmbara Tapā Gaccha order. In 1582, he was invited to Akbar's court in Fatehpur Sikri after the emperor heard of his wisdom from Gujarati merchants[14]. Over the next few years Hiravijaya solicited several imperial concessions that benefited his regional and religious interests. According to contemporary Sanskrit and Persian sources alike, Hiravijaya impressed Akbar with his discourse on non-violence and compassion, leading the emperor to:

• Issue orders banning animal slaughter during the Jain festival *Paryuṣaṇa*[15],
• Free prisoners captured during the Mughal invasion of Gujarat[16],
• prohibit fishing in Damara (or Dabara) pond located near Fatehpur Sikri ,
• Abolish certain meat taxes,
• and promote vegetarian days at court.

These actions were widely celebrated in Jain chronicles such as *Hirasaubhāgya* and *Prabhāvakacarita*. Akbar honored Hiravijaya with the title *Jagatguru* (World Teacher).

During Akbar's reign, we can notice a Jain politician named Karmacandra, who elicited many favours from the badshah, including the return of Jain idols that had been looted during Mughal campaigns in Rajasthan. He is remembered even today in jain folk

histories for his involvement with the imperial Mughals. Thus, Jainism, with its doctrine of non-violence, made a profound impression on him and influenced his personal life[17] Apart from the religious section, the two Jaina teachers Mānsimha and Bālacanda enjoyed royal hospitality under Akbar[18].

Following Hiravijaya's precedent, his disciples and successors continued to enjoy imperial recognition. Ācārya Vijayasena Sūri (late 16th century) maintained Akbar's policy of non-violence in Gujarat and secured imperial protection for major Jain pilgrimage centers like Shatrunjaya. He became the leader of the Tapa Gaccha after Hiravijaya's death in 1596. Later, during the 5th regnal year of Jahangir (1610 AD.), he acquired an order from the emperor that barred animal slaughter during Paryushan[19].

Ācārya Jinacandra Sūri was received by Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) and continued moral dialogue with the Mughal court, particularly on religious toleration and economic reforms. He was from the Kharatara Gaccha sect, one of the two sects in *svetamvara* tradition, and also the leader of that very sect. One Jain text describes how he spent a monsoon season in Lahore instructing Akbar in Jain theology and metaphysics.

Modern historians (e.g., Paul Dundas and Audrey Truschke) argue that Akbar's engagement with Jain monks influenced his evolving spiritual philosophy and his creation of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* (Divine Faith). While Jains never joined the syncretic order, their doctrines of non-violence, compassion, and many-sided truth (*anekāntavāda*) resonated deeply with Akbar's ecumenical ideals.

Under Jahangir, the Mughal court retained a measure of religious openness. Jain envoys, particularly from Ahmedabad and Rajasthan, maintained their privileges through imperial firmans. Dundas states "Jahangir's behavior was unquestionably erratic since there is no doubt that at other times he viewed svetāmbara monks very favourable, appointing one to teach his son and in 1616 issuing an edict granting Jains freedom of worship."[20] The emperor took interest in the philosophical discussion with the Jaina teachers and had a long contact with Siddhicandra, Sanskrit biographer of Tapa Gaccha ascetic Bhānucandra, who was known for his discourse with Jahangir and Nurjahan on the Jain sadhu's vow of celibacy[21]. In deference to the Jain community of Agra, who observed sacred fasts, Jahangir in 1610 banned the slaughter of all animals throughout the Mughal Empire for twelve days[22].

During the reign of Shāhjahn, Banārasīdāsa was a prominent Jaina intellectual figure. He was musāhiba of the emperor and used to play chess with him[23]. Not only that, but he was the

author of the book titled *Ardhakathānaka* also, which is regarded as a crucial authority in deciphering the socio-economic and cultural history of northern India of that period.

However, the atmosphere shifted under Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), who imposed stricter Islamic norms. There was no freedom to the Jainas in his empire. Some Jain temples, particularly in Gujarat, faced taxation or restriction, though outright persecution was rare. Jain chronicles recall Upādhyāya Yasovijaya, Ānandagana, Devabrahmacārī, Bhaiyā Bhagavatīdāsa, Jagatarāya, Siromanidāsa, Jīvarāja, Laksmīcandra, etc. as prominent literary figures during that time. Despite Aurangzeb's orthodoxy, Jains continued to operate within the Mughal administration as treasurers, financiers, and record-keepers.

Conclusion

From the moral diplomacy of Jinaprabha Sūri under the Tughluqs to the philosophical influence of Hiravijaya Sūri under Akbar, Jain intellectuals transformed their relationship with political authority from peripheral negotiation to central participation. The Mughal court became not merely a site of protection but a space for interreligious ethics, epistemological dialogue, and mutual learning.The Mughal period thus marks the maturation of a Jain political theology of coexistence- one that combined moral idealism with pragmatic engagement. These Jain intellectuals were not passive subjects of empire but active contributors to the ethical imagination of Indian kingship.

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