

**Akbar as Shah or Raja? Reimaginings of Encounters with the Mughal Court in  
Jaina Sanskrit Literature**

[Submission for Sanskrit and Regional Languages and Literatures Panel]

In this paper, I seek to map out a hitherto neglected body of Sanskrit texts that record encounters between Jaina leaders and Mughal imperial figures. These works span from the late sixteenth through the early seventeenth centuries, roughly corresponding to the period of sustained Jaina relations with the royal courts of Akbar and Jahangir. The Jains were far from the only members of the Sanskrit metropolis to engage with a Persianate court, particularly under Mughal rule. However, they are the only group to systematically write about their experiences in Sanskrit in more than one or two stray instances. Multiple Jaina authors not only invoke the Persianate world in Sanskrit, but moreover explore the literary and cultural implications of these cross-cosmopolitan encounters.

Some texts focus exclusively on Jaina-Mughal engagements as a discrete unit of study (most notably, *Bhānucandraṇicarita*) whereas many others include episodes of such interactions within other frameworks (e.g. *Hīrasaubhāgya*, *Jagadgurukāvya*, *Jambūsvāmicarita*, *Vijayaprasāstimahākāvya*). Each work formulates a different mode of reimagining Mughal cultural and political spheres within a Sanskrit literary landscape. I highlight this process of negotiation by critically examining episodes and figures that are treated in multiple Jaina texts. I'm particularly interested in how the authors respond in different ways to the challenges posed by representing deeply Persianate cultural notions and Islamicate ideas in Sanskrit poetry. Each author allows for different literary possibilities within their creation in response to the rapidly changing cultural landscape of early modern northern India.

Whereas earlier scholars have mined these writings for nuggets of historical information, I seek to treat the texts on their own terms as moments of literary creativity and innovation that construct a Sanskrit memory of relations with the Persian-speaking world. Jaina authors transcreated what already existed as a historical reality, namely Jaina-Mughal relations, in literature and thereby initiated new types of cross-cultural encounters altogether.