

An Analysis of the Play ‘Vikrāṭakaurava’ in the Light of Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

Vikrāṭakaurava, one of the most popular poetic dramas written by the Jain poet Hastimalla, is a rich poetic drama whose elements of a romantic and heroic story are interlaced with philosophical dimensions and undertones of the Indian Knowledge System. Focusing on the svayaṃvara the wedding of Princess Sulochana and Prince Jayakumara the story carries themes of bravery, heroism, and the triumph of dharma over adharma. The study covers the epistemology of the play (Indian epistemology or pramāṇa-śāstra) and the six orthodox structures of Indian thought (the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy or Ṣaḍdarśana), exploring the philosophical and moral considerations reflected in the characters, plot, and dialogues of the play. The paper dwells upon the presence of the six methods of knowledge pratyakṣa (perception), anumāna (inference), upamāna (comparison), śabda (verbal testimony), arthāpatti (postulation), and anupalabdhi (non-cognition) in the structure of the play.

Through Jayakumara, a representative of Jain ideals and logical behavior, the attributes of non-violence (ahiṃsā), pluralism (anekāntavāda), and ethical leadership are revealed. Furthermore, the paper draws connections between the play and the philosophies of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta, showing how each system’s principles are reflected in the drama’s progression and character arcs.

Keywords: Vikrāṭakaurava, Indian Epistemology, Āstika Darśana, Nāstika Darśana, Theory of Knowledge (Pramāṇavāda), Theory of Action (Karma), Pluralism (Anekāntavāda)

Introduction:

Epistemology, a key branch of philosophy, is known in Indian thought as pramāṇa-śāstra the science of valid knowledge. It deals with the sources, nature, scope, and justification of knowledge. In Indian philosophy, epistemology plays a foundational role across various schools of thought.

Indian philosophical systems are broadly categorized into two major streams: Āstika (orthodox) and Nāstika (heterodox). The Āstika systems accept the authority of the Vedas and include the six classical schools: Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. In contrast, Nāstika schools reject the Vedas as authoritative texts and include Cārvāka, Buddhism, and Jainism.

Jain thinkers have made substantial contributions to Sanskrit literature, particularly in the field of drama. Vikrāṭakaurava, a poetic drama by the Jain poet Hastimalla, exemplifies this intellectual and artistic tradition. It is not merely an entertaining narrative but a deeply philosophical work rooted in Jain morality and epistemology. Centered on the heroic deeds of

Prince Jayakumāra and the svayamvara (self-choice ceremony) of Princess Sulochanā, the drama portrays Jayakumāra not only as a valiant warrior but also as a symbol of non-violence, virtue, and wisdom.

The play reflects critical Jain philosophical doctrines such as Pramāṇavāda (theory of valid knowledge), Karmavāda (theory of action), and Anekāntavāda (doctrine of manifold viewpoints). These principles are subtly woven into the dialogue, structure, and character development throughout the narrative.

Literature Review

Vikrāntakaurava, written in classical Sanskrit by Hastimalla, occupies a unique position in Indian dramatic literature for its philosophical depth and ethical sophistication. While earlier assessments have highlighted its poetic excellence and dramatic structure, there exists a notable gap in scholarly analysis focusing on its epistemological dimensions.

The critical edition by Pannalal Jain (1969) serves as a foundational text, primarily offering philological and literary annotations. While it provides insight into the textual integrity and literary devices employed in the drama, it gives limited attention to the philosophical content, particularly its epistemological framework.

Most existing scholarship on Vikrāntakaurava has centered on the aesthetic aspects, emphasizing the interplay of śṛṅgāra (romantic) and vīra (heroic) rasa. However, deeper analysis of characters such as Jayakumāra from an epistemological perspective remains underdeveloped in current academic literature.

As Sen (1955) notes, the pramāṇa-śāstra tradition is essential to classical Indian philosophy. Each of the six Āstika schools presents unique methods of acquiring valid knowledge such as pratyakṣa (perception), anumāna (inference), upamāna (analogy), śabda (verbal testimony), arthāpatti (postulation), and anupalabdhi (non-cognition). These methodologies are discernible in the logical structure and dialogue of Vikrāntakaurava, especially in Jayakumāra's character, who embodies Jain ideals of rationalism and ethical conduct.

Scholars such as Bidyanidhi Bhattacharya (1971) have edited and commented on works like Sāhityadarpaṇa, which are central to classical Indian literary theory. However, these texts largely focus on rasa and dramaturgy. Similarly, Bimalkanta Mukhopadhyay's critical editions of Dhvanyāloka (1978; Bengali ed. 1390 B.S.) emphasize aesthetic theory but fall short of integrating epistemological readings based on pramāṇa-vāda. Thus, a comprehensive study of Vikrāntakaurava through the lens of Indian epistemology remains a significant scholarly need.

Methodology

This research adopts an analytical and interpretive methodology to examine the play Vikrāntakaurava through the lens of Indian epistemology. The primary source is the edited Sanskrit text by Pannalal Jain (1969), supported by classical Indian philosophical texts and commentaries. The study uses thematic and philosophical analysis to explore epistemological categories such as pratyakṣa (perception), anumāna (inference), and śabda (verbal testimony). Character actions and dialogues are interpreted to reveal underlying concepts like

pramāṇavāda, karmavāda, and anekāntavāda. This interdisciplinary approach integrates literary study with philosophical inquiry, highlighting the play's embedded ethical and epistemological dimensions.

Overview of the Play

Vikrāntakaurava is a six-act Sanskrit play composed by the Jain poet Hastimalla. It is celebrated for its remarkable integration of philosophical depth and literary elegance. Set against the backdrop of ancient Indian royal courts, the play unfolds as an epic narrative woven through the emotive threads of śṛṅgāra (romantic sentiment) and vīra (heroic valor). The central plot revolves around the svayaṁvara (self-choice ceremony) of Princess Sulochanā of Varanasi, who chooses Prince Jayakumāra of Hastināpura for his virtue, wisdom, and ethical integrity. Her decision, however, incites jealousy among the rival suitors, particularly Arkkakīrti, leading to a conspiracy and a climactic battle. Jayakumāra, guided by moral conviction and Jain ideals such as ahiṃsā (non-violence), defeats his adversaries without inflicting physical harm a symbolic portrayal of inner strength and ethical superiority.

Though initial tensions run high, the play culminates in a message of moral resolution and reconciliation. Jayakumāra and Sulochanā are united in marriage, and the reformed Arkkakīrti marries Sulochanā's sister, Ratnamālā. The conclusion emphasizes not only the triumph of dharma over adharma but also the possibility of transformation through ethical reflection and repentance. The characters are imbued with profound moral and symbolic significance. Jayakumāra embodies the ideal hero courageous, modest, and just. Sulochanā represents strī-śakti (female empowerment), asserting her autonomy and wisdom in choosing her partner. Arkkakīrti's evolution underscores the Jain emphasis on self-reform and pluralistic understanding.

Rooted in Jain philosophy and ancient Indian royal ethics, Vikrāntakaurava explores cultural values such as justice, righteousness, compassion, and philosophical pluralism. Thematic richness is expressed through love as mutual respect, valor as moral discipline, and justice as ethical duty. The play stands as a profound synthesis of dramatic artistry and Indian philosophical tradition.

Indian Epistemology in the Play

Indian epistemology, or pramāṇa-śāstra, is a key branch of Indian philosophy concerned with the sources and validation of knowledge. Classical Indian thinkers have outlined six primary pramāṇas means of acquiring valid knowledge namely: pratyakṣa (perception), anumāna (inference), upamāna (comparison), śabda (verbal testimony), arthāpatti (postulation), and anupalabdhi (non-cognition). These are not only theoretical categories but are reflected in literature, including dramatic works like Vikrāntakaurava. Hastimalla, as a Jain poet and philosopher, skillfully embeds these epistemic methods within the structure and dialogue of the play, allowing characters to function not only as agents of action but also as instruments of knowledge.

Pratyakṣa, or direct perception, is the knowledge gained through the senses and mental experience. In the play, this form of knowledge is prominently featured during the svayaṁvara, where Princess Sulochanā observes the behavior, demeanor, and qualities of the attending princes. She makes a conscious and informed decision to choose Jayakumāra, not based on hearsay or reputation, but on her direct observation of his conduct, intelligence, and humility. Similarly, King Akampana and other observers perceive Jayakumāra's calmness and moral stature, affirming his eligibility through firsthand experience.

Anumāna, or inference, involves reasoning from observed signs to reach unobserved conclusions. Characters frequently employ this form of reasoning. For example, Sulochanā infers Jayakumāra's nobility and moral character based on his measured responses and refined language. Jayakumāra, anticipating the jealousy of rival kings, infers that a conspiracy might occur and prepares strategically for the eventual conflict. King Akampana deduces from Jayakumāra's behavior that true heroism includes wisdom and patience, not just physical strength.

Upamāna, or comparison, is evident in the way Jayakumāra is contrasted with the other suitors. He is often likened to epic heroes such as Yudhiṣṭhira and Rāma, whose virtues are idealized in Indian tradition. These analogies made by sages and other wise characters serve not only to elevate Jayakumāra's status but also to establish standards of moral and heroic excellence through familiar references, facilitating comprehension via likeness.

Śabda, or verbal testimony, refers to valid knowledge acquired through authoritative statements either from sacred texts or trustworthy individuals. The play includes many instances where characters invoke teachings from scriptures or moral discourses. Jayakumāra frequently aligns his decisions with scriptural wisdom, and his adherence to Jain ethical principles ahimsā, satya, and brahmacarya is often supported by the verbal affirmations of respected figures, reinforcing his spiritual depth.

Arthāpatti, or postulation, is the assumption of an unseen fact to explain an observed phenomenon. This appears in how the audience and characters interpret the silent restraint of Jayakumāra not as weakness, but as deliberate, disciplined strength. His controlled behavior in moments of provocation is interpreted as indicative of inner wisdom, rather than passivity an understanding arrived at through postulation rather than direct observation.

Anupalabdhī, or non-cognition, is knowledge derived from the absence of something. Jayakumāra's lack of arrogance and vengeance, especially when he has power and opportunity, stands out significantly. His refusal to retaliate unnecessarily and his detachment from pride highlight a conscious moral choice. The recognition of this absence of egotism, impulsiveness, or cruelty offers critical insight into his character.

Philosophical Analysis via Ṣaḍdarśana

The play Vikrāntakaurava is not merely a romantic or heroic narrative it is a dramatic embodiment of the key tenets of Indian philosophical systems, known collectively as the Ṣaḍdarśana or six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy: Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. Hastimalla's integration of these systems into the characters'

behaviors, ethical decisions, and the play's plot architecture reflects his philosophical sophistication and his commitment to presenting drama as a vehicle for conveying deeper spiritual truths.

Nyāya, the school of logic and epistemology founded by Sage Gautama, emphasizes reason, analysis, and structured debate. In *Vikrāntakaurava*, Nyāya is manifest in the court scenes, particularly during the *svayaṃvara*, where King Akampana critically evaluates the suitors. The process of assessing Jayakumāra's virtues through direct evidence, dialogue, and reasoned judgment reflects the logical method endorsed by Nyāya. Characters engage in rational deliberations, drawing conclusions from observed conduct and spoken testimony hallmarks of Nyāya philosophy.

Vaiśeṣika, founded by Kaṇāda, deals with metaphysical categories and the doctrine of karma. It posits six categories (*padārthas*): substance, quality, action, generality, particularity, and inherence. In the play, characters are portrayed with distinct qualities Jayakumāra's patience and valor, Sulochanā's intellect, and Arkkakīrti's arrogance. The consequences of their actions reflect karmic law. Jayakumāra's righteousness brings peace and success, while Arkkakīrti's envy leads to defeat but also eventual transformation, illustrating the ethical dimension of karmic retribution as explained in Vaiśeṣika.

Sāṅkhya, attributed to Sage Kapila, teaches dualism between *prakṛti* (nature) and *puruṣa* (consciousness). The emotional and spiritual dynamics between Jayakumāra and Sulochanā subtly echo this dualism. Jayakumāra represents the stable, conscious *puruṣa*, while Sulochanā symbolizes the dynamic, expressive *prakṛti*. Their union signifies the balance of spirit and nature. Moreover, the inner conflicts of the characters and the interplay of virtues such as love, courage, and detachment reflect the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (inertia) a core concept in Sāṅkhya.

Yoga, as expounded by Patañjali, aims at the control of mental fluctuations (*citta-vṛtti nirodha*). Jayakumāra exemplifies Yogic discipline through his restraint, composure, and focus amidst turmoil. Even when provoked, he chooses contemplation over impulsiveness. His inner strength derives from practices akin to *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the senses) and *dhyāna* (meditation), reflecting a deep commitment to ethical and mental discipline, consistent with the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* (ethical codes) of Yoga.

Mīmāṃsā, founded by Jaimini, emphasizes dharma and ritual action as the path to spiritual fulfillment. In the play, dharma is central to Jayakumāra's decisions. His actions both in battle and in personal choices are governed by a strong sense of duty, not personal desire. The respect for social roles, justice, and righteous warfare echoes Mīmāṃsā's vision of moral responsibility rooted in Vedic tradition.

Vedānta, based on the Upaniṣads and developed by philosophers like Vyāsa and Śaṅkara, teaches the non-dual unity of *Ātman* (self) and *Brahman* (universal soul). In the union of Jayakumāra and Sulochanā, Vedāntic ideals are evoked not as mere romantic fulfillment, but as the merging of souls on a higher, spiritual plane. Jayakumāra's spiritual calmness and eventual reconciliation with Arkkakīrti suggest a realization of oneness beyond ego, mirroring Vedānta's principle of self-realization and liberation (*mokṣa*).

Jain Philosophical Principles in the Play

Vikrāntakaurava, composed by the Jain poet Hastimalla, is deeply rooted in Jain philosophical thought. While the play integrates broader Indian epistemological and ethical frameworks, its moral core is distinctly Jain. Three principal doctrines ahimsā (non-violence), anekāntavāda (doctrine of manifold viewpoints), and karmavāda (theory of action and its consequences) form the ethical and philosophical foundation of the narrative, particularly as embodied in the protagonist, Jayakumāra.

The principle of ahimsā, or non-violence, is central to Jainism and pervades the character and conduct of Jayakumāra. Unlike traditional heroic figures in Indian epics who often rely on aggressive valor, Jayakumāra exercises great restraint even in the face of provocation. His actions are measured, avoiding unnecessary conflict and destruction. Although he participates in battle, it is only as a last resort and strictly for the protection of justice and dharma, never for personal glory or vengeance. This reflects the Jain reinterpretation of heroism not as brute force but as moral strength and self-control. Jayakumāra's refusal to misuse power, his diplomatic conduct, and his adherence to ethical warfare exemplify the Jain ideal of a true victor: one who conquers not others but himself.

Anekāntavāda, the Jain doctrine of manifold perspectives, is subtly embedded in the narrative through the complexity of characters and situations. The play does not portray the rival princes, especially Arkkakīrti, as one-dimensional villains. Instead, Arkkakīrti undergoes a transformation after his defeat and eventually marries Ratnamālā in a reconciliatory gesture. This nuanced portrayal aligns with anekāntavāda, which acknowledges the multiplicity of truths and the possibility of moral change in individuals. The acceptance of differing viewpoints, the non-absolutist tone of judgment, and the emphasis on dialogue over domination underscore the Jain epistemological approach that values tolerance, perspective, and contextual understanding.

The law of karma, or karmavāda, is another core aspect of Jain philosophy that plays a crucial role in the narrative. Actions in the play have moral consequences both immediate and long-term. Jayakumāra's ethical decisions lead to peace, marriage, and stability, while Arkkakīrti's jealousy and aggression initially bring defeat and humiliation. However, through repentance and transformation, Arkkakīrti's later actions lead to harmony, illustrating the Jain belief that karma is not fatalistic but dynamic and redeemable. The play communicates that liberation and spiritual progress are possible through self-effort, right action, and moral introspection.

In contrast to other philosophical schools such as Mīmāṃsā, which emphasizes ritual duty, or Vedānta, which focuses on metaphysical unity, Jainism in this play prioritizes ethical realism, personal responsibility, and compassion. Jayakumāra does not rely on divine intervention or rigid ritualism but on his moral compass and rational discernment. This sets him apart as a true embodiment of Jain virtues.

Conclusion:

Vikrāntakaurava by Hastimalla represents a remarkable synthesis of literary aesthetics and philosophical depth, reflecting the essential tenets of Indian epistemology. The play seamlessly

integrates the six traditional means of valid knowledge perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), analogy (upamāna), authoritative testimony (śabda), postulation (arthāpatti), and absence-based cognition (anupalabdhi) making it not merely a poetic drama, but a sophisticated philosophical work. Through its characters, dialogues, and plot progression, the play makes these complex epistemological concepts accessible, embedding them within the emotional and narrative flow of the drama. Jayakumāra is portrayed not only as a heroic prince but also as a moral exemplar and a living embodiment of Jain ethical principles and broader Indian philosophical values. His life, as depicted in the play, exemplifies a path of reason, self-restraint, and righteousness, rooted in the doctrines of non-violence (ahiṃsā), pluralism (anekāntavāda), and karmic responsibility. The interplay of themes such as love, valor, duty, and justice allows Vikrāntakaurava to convey profound philosophical insights while remaining emotionally resonant and theatrically compelling.

Hastimalla, with his poetic genius and philosophical orientation, has created a literary masterpiece that transcends its temporal context. This study has highlighted the play's rich epistemological and ethical dimensions, offering an interdisciplinary lens that brings together classical Sanskrit literature and Indian philosophical thought. It opens new avenues for academic inquiry into Jain narrative traditions, inter-school philosophical dramaturgy, and the enduring relevance of classical ethical paradigms in contemporary discourse.

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