

## **“Ascetic Ideals & Guru-bhakti in the Bhaṭṭāraka lineages of Digambara Jainism”**

Tillo Detige, Ghent University

In both scholarly and popular accounts of the history of Digambara Jaina asceticism, the larger chunk of the previous millennium looms large and dark. Naked, fully-initiated *munis* no longer roamed, and in their stead the institution of the clothed, sedentary *bhaṭṭāraka* arose. Typically depicting these as ‘clerics’ rather than ascetics, this historiographical representation singles out the ‘*bhaṭṭāraka* era’ as a distinct, and deficient, part of Digambara history, severed from both the earlier tradition and the revival of the naked *munis* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this paper, I propose to look at a range of largely unstudied, minor and often anonymous compositions of devotion and veneration of *bhaṭṭārakas*, drawn together from various manuscript collections from today’s Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, and mostly found in *guṭakas*. A corpus of 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century, vernacular *Bhaṭṭāraka gītas*, which include important biographical and historic information, apparently served to welcome visiting *bhaṭṭārakas* or celebrate their consecration. Approximately contemporaneous, Sanskrit *Bhaṭṭāraka aṣṭadravya pūjās* (eightfold veneration), found in most of the manuscript collections located at former *bhaṭṭārakas* seats, served for the ritual veneration of deceased *bhaṭṭārakas*.

Both genres establish the *bhaṭṭārakas* as venerable *satgurus* and as worthy (*supātra*) and charismatic ascetics, attributing to them all prescribed Digambara ascetic vows and virtues. The texts firstly speak of the continuation of *guru-bhakti* and *sādhu-vandana* as essential Jaina practices in the *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages. Overthrowing the current, scholarly interpretation of the *bhaṭṭārakas* as mere clerics, these compositions moreover helped to preserve Digambara Jainism’s ascetic ideals, at a time when there were few really ideal (naked) ascetics. This facilitated the veneration of the naked *munis* when these reappeared in the contemporary period. Attention to these texts, then, erodes the conception of a disconnected ‘*bhaṭṭāraka* era’ by showing deep continuities in devotional and ritual practices as well as ascetic ideals.