



Philosophical-Linguistic Study "From Sanskrit to Prākṛta: A Philosophical Reading of 'Ataḥ Prākṛtam' in Hemacandra's Grammar"

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Abstract: This paper explores the philosophical and linguistic implications of the phrase “Ataḥ Prākṛtam” found at the beginning of Hemacandra’s *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*, a seminal Jain grammatical treatise. Rather than viewing this phrase as a mere syntactic marker, this study interprets it as a metaphysical and epistemological declaration that signals the transition from the classical Sanskrit order to a vernacular Prākṛta worldview. Drawing on Jain philosophy, theories of linguistic hierarchy, and comparative grammatical traditions, this paper analyzes how Hemacandra’s model displaces Sanskrit as the linguistic ideal, instead affirming Prākṛta as philosophically and ethically grounded. The research further examines how this transition reflects deeper Jain commitments to accessibility, non-absolutism (*anekāntavāda*), and ethical restraint (*ahiṃsā*) in speech. The study concludes by offering a new interpretive model for understanding Jain grammars as philosophical texts that fuse ontology, ethics, and language.

Key Words: *prākṛta, hemacandra, ataḥ prākṛtam, jain grammar, linguistic philosophy.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The phrase “Ataḥ Prākṛtam” (अतः प्राकृतम्) in Hemacandra’s *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana* has traditionally been understood as a simple transition from Sanskrit grammar to Prākṛta grammar. However, this paper reinterprets the phrase as a powerful philosophical declaration that challenges linguistic and ontological hierarchies. Through a close reading of Hemacandra’s grammar and its Jain philosophical underpinnings, this research offers a layered understanding of how Prākṛta is positioned not merely as a derivative of Sanskrit but as a distinct linguistic-philosophical mode. This perspective foregrounds Prākṛta not as a degeneration but as a conscious ethical and epistemological choice.

Background, Purpose, and Significance

Background:

Hemacandra’s *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana* comprises Sanskrit and Prākṛta grammars in a unified framework. The phrase “Ataḥ Prākṛtam” marks the transition to Prākṛta after a detailed exposition of Sanskrit, usually considered linguistically prior.

Purpose:

To interrogate whether this syntactic transition also encodes a philosophical shift — from Brahmanical universalism to Jain pluralism; from scriptural orthodoxy to ethical inclusivity.

Significance:

This reading impacts how we interpret not only Prākṛta grammars but also the ideological structure of Jain philosophical-linguistic thought. It questions the supposed primacy of Sanskrit and offers a counter-hierarchy grounded in *anekānta* (plurality) and *ahiṃsā* (non-violence in speech).

Research Questions

1. What are the philosophical implications of “Ataḥ Prākṛtam” beyond its grammatical function?
2. How does Hemacandra’s transition from Sanskrit to Prākṛta embody Jain metaphysical and ethical doctrines?
3. What does this transition reveal about language hierarchy and accessibility in Jain linguistic theory?



2. LITERATURE REVIEW: Classical Interpretations: Most grammarians and commentators (e.g., P.L. Vaidya) have treated the transition as structural, not philosophical.

- **Jain Language Philosophy:** Scholars like Balbir, Jaini, and Dundas have hinted at the Jain emphasis on linguistic pluralism and ethical speech but have not explored grammar's internal structure as a medium of such expression.
- **Gaps:** Lack of a detailed philosophical-linguistic reading of the exact phrase “*Ataḥ Prākṛtam*” and its implications within Jain grammar.
- **Need:** A new framework is required that fuses Hemacandra's grammatical order with Jain metaphysical and ethical priorities.

3. OBJECTIVES: To interpret the phrase “*Ataḥ Prākṛtam*” in Hemacandra's grammar as a philosophical-linguistic marker that reflects Jain epistemology, ethics, and a deliberate linguistic de-centering of Sanskrit.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

- **Textual Analysis:** Close reading of Hemacandra's *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*, especially the beginning of the Prākṛta section.
- **Comparative Philosophy:** Analyze parallels with Jain doctrines of *anekāntavāda*, *naya*, and *syādvāda* to interpret linguistic decisions.
- **Historical-contextual Analysis:** Situating Hemacandra's grammar in the sociolinguistic context of 12th-century Gujarat and the Jain community's ethical-aesthetic norms.

5. FINDINGS:

- Hemacandra's grammar uses internal grammatical structure to embody Jain philosophical values.
- The phrase “*Ataḥ Prākṛtam*” is a deliberate philosophical signal, not just a pedagogical cue.
- Prākṛta emerges as an ethical and pluralistic linguistic choice aligned with Jain values of non-violence, relativism, and inclusivity.

6. DISCUSSION :

a. The Syntax of Declaration: “*Ataḥ Prākṛtam*” as Philosophical Marker

- Not a neutral grammatical cue but an ontological move — from Sanskrit *sat* to Prākṛta *bhāṣā*, reflecting Jain egalitarianism in language.

b. Reversal of Linguistic Hierarchy

- Prākṛta is not derived, but selected for ethical clarity.
- Hemacandra's ordering is deliberate: Sanskrit precedes, but Prākṛta is the culmination.

c. Jain Epistemology and Language

- The transition mirrors *anekānta* (non-absolutism) — rejecting one absolute language.
- *Nayas* (perspectives) as interpretive modes in Prākṛta grammar.
- *Ahiṃsā* in speech is better preserved in Prākṛta due to its gentler phonology.

Table 1: Structural Comparison – Sanskrit vs. Prākṛta in Hemacandra's Grammar

Feature	Sanskrit (Saṃskṛta)	Prākṛta	Philosophical Implication
Position in Text	Treated first	Introduced with “ <i>Ataḥ Prākṛtam</i> ”	Sanskrit precedes; Prākṛta culminates
Morphological Complexity	High (verbal roots, sandhi rules, etc.)	Simplified inflectional patterns	Ethical accessibility
Source/Status	Classical, elite	Vernacular, lived language	Shift from universalism to pluralism
Phonological Nature	Dense consonantal clusters	Softer, open syllables	Aligned with <i>ahiṃsā</i> (non-violence)
Intended Audience	Brahmins, scholars	Laypersons, monks, women, merchants	Democratization of knowledge



Table 2: Philosophical Themes Mapped onto Grammatical Structure

Grammatical Element	Jain Philosophical Concept	Interpretation
Transition “Ataḥ”	<i>Naya</i> (perspective)	A new <i>naya</i> initiates: from Sanskrit absolutism to Prakṛta relativism
Prākṛta Section	<i>Anekāntavāda</i>	Affirmation of multiple truths through language plurality
Reduced Verb Conjugations	<i>Aparigraha</i> (non-possessiveness)	Simplicity in linguistic forms reflects restraint
Gentler phonemes	<i>Ahiṃsā</i>	Linguistic form embodies ethical non-violence
Integration with Sanskrit	<i>Syādvāda</i>	No exclusion; Prakṛta complements, not denies, Sanskrit

Table 3: “Ataḥ Prakṛtam” as a Philosophical Sūtra

Component	Grammatical Role	Philosophical Reading
Ataḥ (“therefore”)	Conjunctive marker; transition	Marks a shift in ontological worldview
Prākṛtam	Indicates the start of Prakṛta grammar	Denotes a more ethical, pluralistic language form
Whole Phrase	Section header	Philosophical declaration of language choice
Implicit Message	Not just grammar, but ethics	Grammar as a vehicle of non-absolutism

Table 4: Ethical Comparison of Language Use

Ethical Category	Sanskrit	Prākṛta	Jain Ethical Position
Accessibility	Restricted to initiated scholars	Open to householders and monks	Knowledge must be accessible
Violence in Speech	Tendency to complexity	Simpler and clearer structures	Clarity supports <i>ahiṃsā</i>
Truth & Relativity	Tends toward absolutism	Accepts variability	<i>Anekānta</i> validated
Possessiveness	Rich morphological adornment	Reduced forms	<i>Aparigraha</i> reflected
Inclusivity	Sanskrit-centric, caste-limited	Multivocal, multiregional	Jain universalism

Table 5: Comparative Table – “Ataḥ” Usage in Other Texts vs. Hemacandra

Text/Tradition	Phrase Beginning with “Ataḥ”	Meaning/Function	Philosophical Significance in Hemacandra
Pāṇini’s Aṣṭādhyāyī	“Ataḥ” used in technical transitions	Formal rule structuring	Structural only, not ethical
Vedic Sūtras	“Ataḥ” marks ritual continuation	Temporal sequence	Procedural; not metaphysical
Hemacandra’s Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana	“Ataḥ Prakṛtam”	Philosophical and ethical turn	Marks Jain ethical-linguistic philosophy
Nyāya Sūtra	“Ataḥ pramāṇam”	Ontological transition	Similar in depth but different in domain
Jain Āgamas (e.g., Tattvārthasūtra)	“Ataḥ” used in doctrinal shifts	Marks important doctrinal divisions	Echoed in Hemacandra’s structuring

Table 6: Phonological Simplifications from Sanskrit to Prakṛta

Sanskrit Form	Prākṛta Form	Type of Phonological Change	Description & Philosophical Implication
kṛṣṇa	kaṇha kaha	Consonant simplification	Complex clusters (kṛṣ) replaced with simpler forms— <i>ahiṃsā</i> in articulation
rāmaḥ	rāma rāmaṃ	Final visarga deletion	<i>ḥ</i> dropped → phonetic softness
bhavati	hoti / hoi	Initial consonant weakening	Voiced aspirate → voiceless unaspirated



Sanskrit Form	Prākṛta Form	Type of Phonological Change	Description & Philosophical Implication
Asti	atthi / aṭṭhi	Insertion of retroflexion	Assimilation and retroflex for ease
putraḥ	putto / putta	Gemination of consonants	Double consonants in place of final sounds
Vidyā	vijjā	Metathesis and assimilation	Dy → jj (palatal assimilation)
Śrī	sī / sirī	Palatal to dental simplification	Reflects regional pronunciation ease
duḥkha	dukkha	Elision and assimilation	ḥk → kk, easier articulation
gacchati	gai / jai / janti	Stem change with tense simplification	Elimination of inflectional burdens
Sukhī	suhī / suhi	Simplification of aspirated forms	Sound gentleness— <i>ahiṃsā</i> -aligned speech

Philosophical Insights (Hemacandrian Interpretation):

- **Ahiṃsā in Sound:** Sound that is *less harsh, less breathy, and less forceful* is considered ethically preferable—non-violent in speech.
- **Anekāntic Voice:** Multiple phonetic forms are permitted; reflects pluralism in perception (*anekāntavāda*).
- **Upayoga:** Speech should be meaningful but efficient—Prākṛta eliminates unnecessary morphological and phonetic complexity.
- **Laukika Orientation:** Everyday speech becomes the site of *dharma*—speech accessible to monks, women, and laypeople is preferred.

Table 7: Prākṛta Verses Illustrating Jain Philosophical Traits

Prākṛta (Transliteration)	Verse	Source Text	Philosophical Trait	English Translation
“savvesiṃ bhūyaṇaṃ jīvāṇaṃ, na hiṃsā kārayāi appaṇā.”		<i>Āyāraṅga Sutta</i> 1.4	Ahiṃsā (non-violence)	“One should not cause harm to any living being by oneself.”
“nānā dhammāṇaṃ bhāsā, nāṇā bhāvāṇaṃ jīvaṇi.”		<i>Sūyagaḍaṅga</i>	Anekāntavāda (non-absolutism)	“Different doctrines have different languages; beings have different perspectives.”
“jo pamāṇeṇa bhoge bhujjāi, so bhikkhū nāpariggaho.”		<i>Daśavaikālika Sutta</i>	Aparigraha (non-possession)	“The monk who consumes within limits is truly without attachment.”
“maṇaṃ na karaī jo viṇā bhaṇai, so muni maunadhamme ṇiogaṃ.”		<i>Uttarajjhayaṇa</i> 24.8	Mauna (restraint in speech)	“He who speaks without mindfulness does not truly observe silence.”
“samaṃ jīvāṇaṃ piyaṃ, samaṃ bujjhaṃti paṇḍiyā.”		<i>Samaṇasuttaṃ</i> (Hemacandra)	Samatā (equanimity)	“The wise understand that equanimity is dear to all living beings.”
“jeṇa vi nikkasāi vihiṃsā, so savvadukkhāṇi samāvahai.”		<i>Uttarajjhayaṇa</i> 10.10	Ahiṃsā & Karma	“Whoever engages in violence accumulates all kinds of suffering.”
“nāṇaṃ davvaṃ pajjuvahaṃ, nāṇaṃ bhāvaṃ vi nimmalaṃ.”		<i>Niyamasāra</i> (Kundakunda)	Jñāna & Anekānta	“Knowledge is substance and mode; knowledge is also pure attitude.”

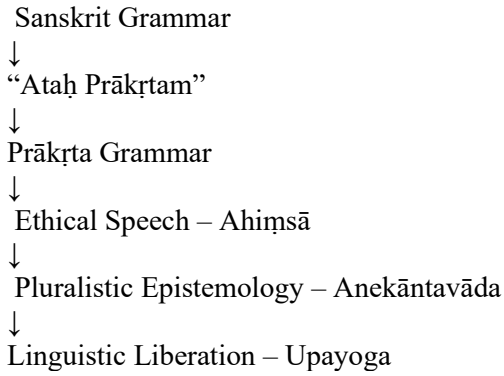


Prākṛta (Transliteration)	Verse	Source Text	Philosophical Trait	English Translation
“icchāmi appāṇaṃ vosirāmi savvajīvehi bhūyaṇa.”	samaṃ	<i>Sāmāyika verse</i>	Samatā & Ahimsā	“I forgive all living beings equally and wish them peace.”

8. CONCLUSION:

This paper reinterprets “*Ataḥ Prākṛtam*” as a symbolic and philosophical gesture that elevates Prākṛta to a central place in the Jain intellectual tradition. Hemacandra’s grammar, far from being a technical manual alone, is a layered philosophical text that challenges linguistic and ethical hierarchies. It affirms the Jain commitment to *anekānta*, *ahimsā*, and *upayoga* (conscious linguistic use), positioning Prākṛta as both a vernacular and a vehicle of philosophical liberation.

Diagram: Philosophical Structure of 'Ataḥ Prākṛtam' Transition



9. LIMITATIONS:

- Limited direct commentary from Hemacandra on his own grammatical ordering.
- Interpretive nature of philosophical reading — subject to scholarly debate.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Future research could explore parallel phrases in other Jain grammatical works (e.g., Vararuci, Śīlāṅka).
- Comparative studies with Buddhist and Brahmanical grammars for alternative metaphysical-linguistic models.

11. FUTURE SCOPE:

- Expanding this model to other transitions (e.g., Ardhamāgadhī).
- Application of this framework to pedagogical models of Prākṛta education.
- Cross-linguistic Jain contributions to language philosophy and ethics.

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