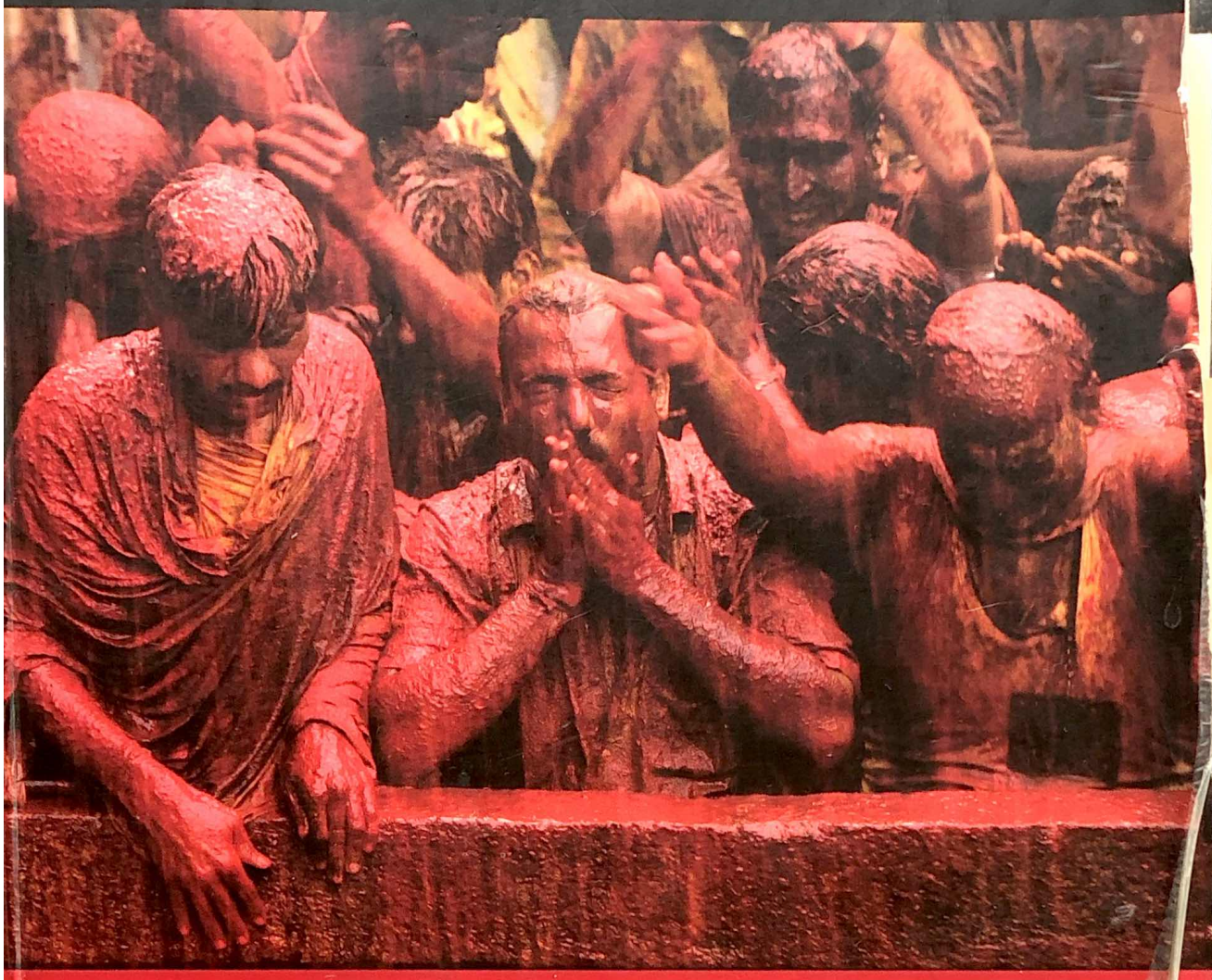
An Introduction



Jainism

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I.B. TAURIS

Published in 2009 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

Distributed in the United States and Canada Exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion

ISBN: 978 1 84511 625 5 (HB)
ISBN: 978 1 84511 626 2 (PB)

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Designed and Typeset by 4word Ltd, Bristol, UK
Printed and bound in India by Thomson Press India Ltd

Note on Diacritical Marks and Pronunciation of Indic Terms

In this book I have used the standard international system for transliterating Indic words into the Roman alphabet, with the exception of modern names with a common Roman spelling (e.g. Ramakrishna instead of Rāmakṛṣṇa, Mahatma Gandhi instead of Mahātma Gāṃdhī, etc.).

Regarding the correct pronunciation of Indic sounds:

a This is pronounced 'uh', as in 'bud'.
ā This is pronounced 'ah', as in 'father'.
i This is pronounced like the 'i' in 'bit'.
ī This is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'beet'.
u This is pronounced like the 'oo' in 'book'.
ū This is pronounced like the 'oo' in 'pool'.
ṛ This is pronounced like the 'ri' in 'rig' with a slight roll of the tongue, though not as hard a roll as in the Spanish r.
e This is pronounced like 'ay' in 'say'.
ai This is pronounced like 'aye' or 'eye'. However, in the case of the important word 'Jain', it is not uncommon in contemporary India to hear this pronounced like the English names 'Jane' or 'Jan', depending upon the region from which the speaker hails. These pronunciations are of course similarly extended to the words 'Jains' and 'Jainism'.
o This is pronounced 'oh', as in 'Ohio'.
au This is pronounced like 'ow' in 'how'.

Consonants are pronounced as in English, but consonants with a dot under them (e.g. ṭ) are pronounced with the tongue touching the roof of the mouth.

Consonants immediately followed by an 'h' (e.g. th, dh) include an exhalation – that is, the 'h' is pronounced, producing somewhat of a softening of the consonant.

The sounds ṣ and ś are almost indistinguishable, even for many Indians (ṣ being pronounced with the tongue at the roof of the mouth, while ś is not). They sound like the 'sh' in 'she'. So the name of the Hindu deity Śiva is pronounced 'Shiva', and not 'Siva'.

The only Indic sound that is not pronounced phonetically (i.e. exactly as it is spelled, according to the above system), is 'jña', which is pronounced either as 'gya' or, less frequently, as 'nya'. It is *not* pronounced 'ja-na'.

When Sanskrit names and terms are rendered in Hindi or Gujarati (two languages commonly spoken by Jains), the inherent short 'a' following the final consonant in many words is dropped. Mahāvīra, for example, becomes Mahāvīr; *nirvāṇa* becomes *nirvāṇ*, and so on. Even though most Jains will probably be more familiar with these names and terms in their modern forms, without the final 'a', for the sake of consistency I have used the more archaic Sanskrit (or Prakrit) forms throughout my text. One notable exception to this is the word *Jain* itself, which I have employed instead of the Sanskrit *Jaina*. I have also followed the convention of using the word *Brahmin* when referring to a member of the Hindu priestly caste. This is for the sake of clarity, to distinguish Brahmins from the ultimate reality (*Brahman*), the creator-deity (*Brahmā*), and a set of Vedic texts called the *Brāhmaṇas*.

Also, whenever I have cited another text, I have followed the standard convention of retaining the usage found in that text. If an author I am quoting makes a reference to 'Mahāvīr', for example, or 'Mahavira' (without diacritical marks), I trust the reader will understand that this is not a misspelling, but rather an alternative spelling of 'Mahāvīra'.

Chapter I

What is Jainism?

Introduction

Jainism is an ancient tradition of nonviolence and, according to many of its contemporary adherents, deep ecological wisdom.[15] Originating in India and having many affinities with Hinduism and Buddhism, it is a tradition that is relatively unknown in the West.

Like Hindus and Buddhists, Jains affirm the reality of a universal moral principle of cause and effect called *karma*. Derived from a Sanskrit word meaning 'act', karma governs all action.[16] It can be likened to Newton's Third Law of Motion: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. But traditional Indic worldviews do not make the sharp distinction, so typical of modern Western thought, between the realms of fact and value. Karma thus manifests not only in the form of physical laws, such as gravity, but also as a moral law governing action. If one engages in actions that are violent, or motivated by hatred, selfishness, or egotism, the universe will respond in kind, producing suffering in the one who has caused suffering to others. Similarly, if one engages in actions that are benevolent, pure, and kind, the universe will respond benevolently, and one will have pleasant experiences. There are Western expressions that convey a similar sensibility to that of the idea of karma: You reap what you sow. What goes around comes around.

Like Hindus and Buddhists, Jains deduce from the principle of karma the idea of rebirth, or reincarnation.[17] All religions must address the issue of why bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. Why, if there is universal justice – which is essentially what karma amounts to – does the world in which we live appear to be as unjust as it does? Indic religions explain this phenomenon in terms of past and future lives. Today's joy or suffering may be the fruit of karma from a previous life. And the actions one takes today will inevitably bear fruit, if not in this life, then in a future one.

Like Hindus and Buddhists, Jains see the ultimate good as escape from the cycle of rebirth – *mokṣa*, or liberation from karmic bondage, or *nirvāṇa*, as it is also called in all of these traditions, a state of absorption in unending bliss. But, as for most Hindus and Buddhists, this final goal is widely conceived as remote and difficult to attain, the more immediate goal of religious activity being merit-making: the acquisition of 'good karma'.

Like Buddhists, and unlike most Hindus, Jains do not affirm the idea of a God, at least as this idea is understood in the Abrahamic religions – a creator and moral arbiter of the universe.[18] Karmic 'reward' and 'punishment' is a wholly impersonal process, and we are each responsible for our own joy and suffering. There is no divine judge. It is up to us to follow the path that leads to ultimate freedom, or not.

Unlike Hinduism, but like Buddhism and other world religions, Jainism does have a founding figure. But this figure is a 'founder' in only a limited sense; for, according to Jainism, he is not so much the 'founder' of a tradition as a re-discoverer and re-initiator of eternal truths and an eternal path that have been re-discovered and re-initiated again and again throughout beginningless time. Mahāvīra, the 'Great Hero', lived at about the same time and in the same region as the Buddha: approximately 2500 years ago in the northeastern region of India that recent scholarship has designated 'Greater Magadha'.[19] One could call Mahāvīra the founder of the Jain community as it exists today. But Jain tradition tells us that he is the 24th in a series of *Tīrthaṅkaras*, or 'fordmakers': beings who discover the way across the river of rebirth to the further shore of liberation and build a *tīrtha*, or ford, that others may use to make their way across as well. This *tīrtha* is the Jain community.

This metaphorical usage of *tīrtha* to refer to the Jain community has become so prominent over time that it has gradually eclipsed the original meaning of the word – a ford or crossing over a river – to the point that today it simply means 'religious community'. Among Jains today, Mahāvīra is said to have established four *tīrthas*: Jain monks, Jain nuns, Jain laymen, and Jain laywomen.[20] These make up the fourfold Jain community, often symbolized by the four limbs of the *svāstika*.[21]

For those Westerners who have heard of Jainism, it may bring to mind images of ascetics – of monks and nuns – wearing what appear to be surgical face-masks in order to protect insects and microorganisms

from being inhaled, and sweeping the ground in front of them with a broom or whisk to protect tiny creatures from being stepped on – a practice of nonviolence so radical as to defy easy comprehension.

But though this picture is not an inaccurate one, it is one-sided. The commitment of the Jains to a radically ascetic practice of nonviolence should not be minimized; but it should also not be exaggerated. A tiny percentage of Jains are actually monks or nuns who practice the kind of nonviolent asceticism most Western representations of Jainism bring to mind – a life of constant mindfulness of what one could call one's environmental impact. Though such asceticism evokes great admiration and reverence from the typical, lay practitioner of Jainism, it is not uncommon to hear lay Jains admit, quite frankly, that such asceticism is beyond their own, current ability to practice. One also hears the hope expressed that the layperson may someday, perhaps later in life or in a future rebirth, feel the call of renunciation and take up the life of the Jain ascetic. The point is that although, as Jains, laypersons understand and admire what Jain ascetics do, they regard such ascetic practice much as many non-Jains do: as extraordinary and extremely difficult.

In addition to its valorization of asceticism, Jainism is also a vibrant and colorful religion of devotion – no less so than either Hinduism or Buddhism – a point that I hope the cover of this book makes clear, with its dramatic depiction of Jain laypersons celebrating the *abhiṣekha*, or anointing, of the massive image of Bāhubali at Śravaṇa Belgoḷa, an important Jain pilgrimage site in Karnataka, in southern India. Bāhubali was a son of the first Tīrthaṅkara of our cosmic era and, some say, the first human being to attain mokṣa.[22]

One can see from the cover photo that, far from practicing a grim religion of unrelenting austerity, as the mixture of water, milk, and brightly colored powders rains down upon them, these celebrating Jains are clearly in a state of spiritual ecstasy – of profound and reverent joy. Many of them are also, undoubtedly, having a great deal of fun.

And why should they not be? The religions of the world are full of festivals that are not only serious spiritual occasions, but are also occasions for joyful celebration. The surprise this image might evoke in some is perhaps due to a preconception that Jainism is purely a religion of austerity. That it might also have an ecstatically festive dimension is thus a bit unexpected. Clearly, an exclusive focus upon Jainism as a relentlessly ascetic tradition is one-sided.

A Jain Event in Central Pennsylvania

Jainism is, in its origins, a South Asian religious tradition, part of the larger milieu that is also home to Hinduism, Sikhism, and, originally, Buddhism – though Buddhism died out in India around the year 1300 CE, and was only reintroduced less than a century ago.

For most of their history, Jain communities have remained largely confined to the Indian subcontinent, which is where most Jains continue to reside today. Though there are no restrictions on the movement of Jain laypersons analogous to those imposed on the Brahmins in some of the law books, or *Dharma Śāstras*, of Hinduism, Jain ascetics have traditionally observed very strict rules that have kept the community from traveling very far.[23] These restrictions, as we shall see, are connected with the strict observance of nonviolence to which Jain ascetics are required to adhere.

However, along with many other Indian religious communities, Jains have, in the modern period, spread far and wide across the globe. Small, but nonetheless thriving, Jain communities exist in such countries as the UK, the USA, and Canada. Because Jains are no longer confined to India, Westerners may increasingly find them among their neighbors, their co-workers, their teachers, or their fellow students.

Indeed, one can find Jains in the most unlikely places. On the evening of 11 April 2006, my wife and I drove to the Hindu temple in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, just outside the state capital of Harrisburg. We have been members of this particular temple, the Hindu American Religious Institute, since moving to Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania in the year 2000, from Chicago.[24]

To say the transition from the urban jungle of Chicago to the rolling, rural hills of central Pennsylvania was a cultural shock would be, to say the least, an understatement. But through the Hindu American Religious Institute, my wife and I met many of our friends and became connected to a surprisingly large Indian community, hailing not only from Harrisburg but also from other nearby towns, with names like New Cumberland, Camp Hill, York, Lancaster, Mechanicsburg, and, of course, Elizabethtown.

It was my career that brought us to Elizabethtown. Having finished my doctoral degree at the University of Chicago, I went on the job market and had the good fortune to be quickly hired by

Elizabethtown College, where I continue to teach in the Department of Religious Studies, and where my wife teaches Japanese.[25]

What brought us to the Hindu temple on that particular evening in April was my ongoing interest in Jainism, a tradition I had been studying since my time as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. I had written my doctoral dissertation on *anekāntavāda*, the Jain doctrine of the complexity of reality, and its implications for arguments for religious pluralism.[26] More recently, I had just finished writing my first book, in which I argued that *anekāntavāda* is a very useful tool for arguing for the view – taught in my own religious tradition of Ramakrishna Vedānta – that there is truth in all religions, and that we should view different religions and philosophies not as contradictory and competing, but as expressing complementary views of different aspects of an infinitely complex reality. This view of the Vedānta tradition is difficult to defend logically. It involves claiming that traditions making a variety of mutually incompatible claims can all be, in some way, true – a counterintuitive notion, to say the least. My goal was to give it a logical defense.

My initial interest in Jainism was largely intellectual – a function of having found, in *anekāntavāda*, a useful and compelling logical tool for expressing my own worldview, which had already been shaped by Ramakrishna Vedānta. But as I studied this idea in its original Jain context, I grew more and more interested in Jainism itself, as a whole. What in the Jain worldview led Jains to develop a concept so similar to Vedāntic pluralism?

I began studying Jainism in graduate school as a convinced practitioner of modern Vedānta, which I remain. But I also discovered that *anekāntavāda* cannot be completely abstracted from the total Jain vision that gave rise to it, and that Jainism, not only as a philosophy, but also as a way of life, has much insight to offer all human beings.

But why search for Jainism at a Hindu temple in rural Pennsylvania? The answer is one that sheds a light on the relationship between Jainism and Hinduism; for, at least in the Indian community in the United States, there does not seem to be anything like a hard and fast division between Jains and Hindus.

As a dramatic illustration of the closeness of these two communities, I noticed, the first time I went into the Hindu American Religious Institute, that in a niche in the wall, in a place of honor no less than that bestowed on the mainstream Hindu deities – such as Śiva, Sri

Krishna, and Mā Durgā – there sat a *mūrti*, or image, of Mahāvīra. This was in the year 2000, just a couple of months after our arrival in the area. It was not something I had expected, to see a Jain Tīrthaṅkara in a Hindu temple!

The particular event that we were attending on that April evening in 2006 was the first in a week long series of lectures held at the Hindu American Religious Institute in celebration of Mahāvīra Jayantī, one of the holiest days in the Jain calendar – the day that commemorates Mahāvīra's birth.

Jains follow the same lunar calendar traditionally followed by Hindus. Months are divided into a 'bright half' (*śukla pakṣa*) and a 'dark half' (*kṛṣṇa pakṣa*). The bright half is the period when the moon is waxing – moving from its new to its full phase – and the dark half is the period when the moon is waning – moving from full to new. The bright half is generally regarded as more auspicious than the dark half, a better time in which to undertake new or important activities. Mahāvīra Jayantī is held on the 13th day of the bright half of a month called *Caitra*, which overlaps with the second half of March and the first half of April on the dominant Gregorian calendar.

Two short rituals preceded the lecture, which was the evening's main event. First, at 7 p.m., the *āratī* was held. At the Hindu American Religious Institute, the *āratī* is conducted daily at noon and again at 7 p.m. *Āratī* is a ritual performed by both Hindus and Jains before the *mūrti*, or image, of a representation of divinity. At the HARI Temple, the central deity is Lord Rām, or Rāma, flanked on his left by his wife, Sītā – an incarnation of the Goddess Lakṣmī – and on his right by his brother, Lakṣmaṇa – literally, Rāma's 'right hand man', as I am fond of explaining to my students whenever I bring them to the temple for field trips.

The *āratī* involves rotating a plate of five candles, or *dīyā*, in front of the image of the deity and singing a song, the most popular variant being *Om Jaya Jagadīśa Hare*, or 'Om, Victory to Hari (Viṣṇu), Lord of the Universe!' (Rāma is an *avatār*, or incarnation, of Viṣṇu, the Preserver of Dharma, the cosmic order, so the singing of a hymn to Viṣṇu in front of Rāma's *mūrti* makes sense.) Some devotees rotate the *dīyā* clockwise an odd number of times (usually three times, but sometimes five, and sometimes more) while others trace the Sanskrit character *Om* in the air (ॐ), before passing the *dīyā* to the next person so they can offer their devotions. After this 'offering' of the candle

flames to the deity, people approach the *dīyā* and bless themselves with the flame, holding their hands over the flame and then touching their forehead, their eyes, or their heart, or rubbing their hands through their hair – or some combination of these actions – usually three times.

The symbolism of the *āratī* is rich with meaning, with a variety of interpretations being given to each aspect of the ceremony. The flame of the candles is evocative of the most ancient of Hindu rituals – the kindling of the sacred fire in Vedic ceremonies, a fire personified by Agni, the deity of fire. Flame symbolizes purification, as well as the light of knowledge and the power of creativity, personified as the goddess Śaktī, wife of Śiva. When the flame is offered before the deity, accompanied by singing and the ringing of a bell, this symbolizes offering one's devotion. In return, the deity bestows blessings. The worshipers receive these by waving their hands over the flame and touching their heads.[27]

At least in the West, many Hindus take great pains to explain that, despite the appearance of polytheism, the deities – Rāma, Agni, Śaktī, Śiva, etc. – are all forms of one supreme God. We shall see, too, that a heterodox interpretation of Jainism has emerged which also conceives of the Tīrthaṅkaras as forms of this same supreme deity. This kind of thinking, though at odds with a more traditional Jain self-understanding, has facilitated the kind of easy interaction between Jains and Hindus and the sharing of worship spaces observed in North American temples such as HARI.

I noted that the Jains who had gathered for the event all participated in the *āratī* – singing and clapping their hands and offering the flame of the *dīyā* with as much evident fervor as the Hindus who were present. There appeared to be no conflict between being a devout Jain and celebrating Mahāvīra Jayantī while also offering the *āratī* to Lord Rām, a Hindu deity.

Similarly, I recognized that a substantial number of those who had come were Hindus (because I knew them personally), who clearly had no problem with coming to celebrate a Jain holy day and listening to a spiritual lecture by a Jain monk. This was an attitude that I had come to expect in the Hindu community, in which I had frequently heard the view expressed that all religions are paths to the same goal, roads going up the same mountain, rivers flowing into one ocean, and so on – a view often expressed by such influential figures in the modern Hindu tradition as Ramakrishna and Mahatma Gandhi.

I was able to distinguish the Hindus from the Jains at this event only because I knew them personally. There were no distinctive sectarian marks or modes of dress that set the two communities apart from one another. Though such sectarian marks do exist, none were in evidence that day. Most of the participants were Gujarati, hailing from the western coastal state of India from which Mahatma Gandhi hailed. Most of the women wore traditional Indian dress. Some of the men wore the traditional Indian long shirt, called a *kurta*, while others wore casual Western business attire: button-down shirts and slacks. The guest speaker – the Jain monk – was clearly distinguishable from the rest of the group by his white robes, as well as by the clear deference with which he was regarded when he entered the room and took his seat to begin his lecture.

I have heard HARI described as a 'universal temple', where all the major Hindu deities are honored and the members of all Hindu communities are welcome. Bengalis celebrate Durgā Pūjā there, for example, and everyone else is welcome to participate. At HARI, the typical pattern is that, on a given holy day, the sub-community for whom that day is particularly special sponsors the *pūjā* appropriate to the occasion, as well as the meal and some kind of cultural event or lecture. The rest of the community is welcome to participate, and many typically do, sometimes even to the point of becoming involved in food preparation, decorating of the temple, emceeing, and so on. The community is a kind of microcosm of the Hindu community as a whole, with each subgroup maintaining its distinct identity, while at the same time mixing quite easily with the rest.

At the Mahāvīra Jayantī celebrations, the Jains appeared to be one more group of Hindus at our temple. They had come to celebrate the holy day of their particular deity, Mahāvīra, just as the members of the Marathi community turn out in large numbers each year to celebrate Gaṇeśa Chaturthi and Mahāśivarātrī (Gaṇeśa and Śiva being popular deities in Maharashtra), and just as many GujaratiVaiṣṇavas come to celebrate Krishna Janmāṣṭami (the birthday of Krishna – Krishna being, like Rāma, an *avatār* of Viṣṇu), with the rest of the temple community being welcomed and encouraged to participate as well.

As the reader may surmise, the Hindu community is made up of a great variety of sub-communities, each predominant in a different region of India, and each having its own preferred deities, Durgā being popular in Bengal, Krishna in Gujarat, and so on.

After the usual *āratī* to Rām, the community moved from the center of the temple to the adjacent wall niche where the image of Mahāvīra resides. In front of the image, a small, stepped altar, draped with a red cloth, had been set up. On it had been placed a set of 14 silver items, which I recognized as representations of the 14 auspicious objects seen by Mahāvīra's mother, Triśalā, in a series of dreams that she had prior to his birth.[28] In front of these, rice patterns had been traced, on which had been set a coconut, a photograph of a departed loved one, and some money.

In other words, this small, impromptu altar had been set up for *pūjā*, or worship. I had previously seen similar altars, set up in similar ways before the various Hindu deities at HARI on their appropriate holy days. At this altar, another *āratī* was performed, this one being dedicated to the Jina – or spiritual conqueror – Mahāvīra.

The symbolic meaning of the *āratī* for Jains overlaps, but is not identical to, its meaning for Hindus. As we shall see, this is the case with many shared Jain and Hindu customs and traditions.

First of all, the *āratī* is not, for Jains, evocative of Agni, the Vedic fire deity, nor of the kindling of the fire for the Vedic offering. As a non-Vedic community, Jains reject the idea of sacrifice found in the *Vedas*. Jains typically perform *āratī* at the end of a temple ceremony in the belief that the *āratī* removes any negative karma that might have been incurred during worship.[29] This idea of fire as purifying is found in many religions, and is shared by both Jains and Hindus in their respective understandings of *āratī*.

After the *āratī* to Lord Mahāvīra, I noted that the Jains greeted one another with the expression *Jai Jinendra* – 'Victory to the Lord of the Jinas!' I had been introduced to this greeting a couple of years earlier, while participating in the 111th anniversary of the first Parliament of the World's Religions, in Barcelona.[30] I spent a good deal of my time at the Parliament with the various Jain representatives and enjoyed the familiarity of hearing this greeting again, which is distinctive to the Jain community. The Hindus that evening did not employ it.

To the right of the altar with the 14 auspicious objects and the main *mūrti* of Mahāvīra set in the wall I noticed what appeared to be a multi-tiered brass mountain with a temple on top, the entire assemblage being about my height (between five and six feet tall).[31] I had seen this object before. It is normally kept near the back of our

temple. But it had been brought out and placed between the wall *mūrtis* of Mahāvīra on one side and Śiva and Śaktī on the other.

Enthroned in the temple at the top of the mountain was a much smaller *mūrti* of Mahāvīra. I noticed that this *mūrti* was speckled with dried yellow sandalwood powder. Clearly, the brass mountain had been brought out and placed in a central location for the purpose of performing the *abhiṣekha*, or anointing, of the *mūrti*, which would take place on the actual day of Mahāvīra Jāyantī, which was scheduled for later in the week. For the sake of cleanliness, the community does not perform an anointing of the large wall *mūrti*, so this smaller *mūrti*, which is portable and more easily cleaned, serves this purpose.[32] A similar practice is observed in some Jain temples in India.

The symbolism of the *abhiṣeka* is a royal symbolism. In ancient times, kings in India were formally made kings not, as in medieval Europe, through coronation, but with a ceremony of anointing.[33] The anointing of the image of Mahāvīra expresses, through a ritual performance, Mahāvīra's *spiritual* supremacy by using the symbolism of ancient Indian *political* supremacy. This anointing, consecration, or ritual bath – all of which are possible translations of the word *abhiṣeka* – is performed daily in some Jain temples in India. At other temples it is performed only on special occasions, like Mahāvīra Jayantī. The basic *abhiṣeka* involves pouring water, then milk, then water again, and then yellow sandalwood water, and then water again, over the image.[34]

More elaborate versions of this ceremony involve the 'five nectars' (*pañcāmṛta*), which can consist of either (1) coconut juice, (2) sugarcane juice, (3) milk, (4) yellow sandalwood water, and (5) red sandalwood water, or, alternatively, (1) milk, (2) yogurt, (3) water, (4) yellow sandalwood water, and (5) red sandalwood water. More elaborate still are nine-pot or 108-pot *abhiṣekas*. The most elaborate *abhiṣeka* of all is the 1008-pot *abhiṣeka* of the image of Bāhubali at Śravaṇa Belgoḷa, partially depicted on the cover of this book.[35]

The reader may note that the more elaborate *abhiṣekas* are all performed either with nine pots or with numbers of pots whose decimals add up to nine: 108 and 1008. In Jainism, as in Hinduism, these are regarded as sacred numbers. The chief significance of the number nine for Jains is that it is three times three. The number three is sacred due to there being three components of the spiritual path: right faith, knowledge, and conduct.[36]

Performing *abhiṣeka* on the *mūrti* of Mahāvīra is especially appropriate on Mahāvīra Jayantī because, according to Jain tradition, the infant Mahāvīra was given a special bath by the gods shortly after his birth. Indeed, this *abhiṣeka* was performed by Indra himself, the lord of the *devas* or Vedic deities, on the sacred Mount Meru, the axis of the world according to traditional Indic cosmology – a cosmology which is shared, albeit with variations, by Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists.

With the 14 auspicious dream-objects seen by his mother, Triśalā, prior to his birth being put on display in the days leading up to Mahāvīra Jayantī, and with his image being anointed – just as he was – on Mahāvīra Jayantī itself, one can see the entire week-long celebration as a ritual re-enactment of the events leading up to and including Mahāvīra's birth and anointing.

This re-enacting of sacred events is also universal to the world's religions. The celebration of Mahāvīra Jayantī can be seen as analogous to Advent and Christmas in the Christian tradition, Passover in the Jewish tradition, or Ramadan in Islam. All of these celebrations re-create a sacred time, regarded by the community as foundational both to its self-understanding and its existence. Mahāvīra's birth is a sacred event. By coming into this world, re-discovering the path to liberation, and establishing his community to perpetuate that path, Mahāvīra makes the possibility of liberation available to all of his followers. In commemorating this event, the members of the community not only remind themselves of the values of their tradition, re-dedicating themselves to the path Mahāvīra has set forth. The community also, in a sense, ritually reconstitutes itself by re-enacting the events without which it would never have come into existence.

At the event I attended, after the Jain *āratī* had been performed, the community gathered before a small stage where the guest speaker, a Jain monk, Saman Śrūtaprajñā, sat and delivered his lecture in Hindi (ably translated for me by my wife). His lecture consisted mainly of highly practical advice on how to avoid unnecessary stress. At one point, he led the assembled listeners in a chant of *Om* and a short meditation, preceded by yoga exercises. He emphasized not only the spiritual dimensions of yoga and the ability of yoga and meditation to calm the mind and control negative impulses such as fear and anger, but also the very practical, physical benefits of a life free from stress. Referring jokingly to the various cardiovascular benefits of yoga and

meditation, he exclaimed, in English, 'Bypass the bypass!'. (He was referring, of course, to avoiding cardiac bypass surgery through living a healthy lifestyle, with minimal stress.)

Indeed, throughout his talk, Saman Śrūtaprajñā made very frequent use of humor. Belying the image a Westerner might have of a Jain monk as a serious ascetic – and therefore someone likely to be very stern and probably deeply judgmental of those whose lifestyles are not as strict as his own – his manner was easygoing and highly approachable. He took questions from the audience on both practical and profound matters and did not, at least to all appearances, discriminate between Hindus and Jains. In fact, I was struck by the fact that he quoted more than once from the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, texts very sacred to Hindus, as well as from the Jain scriptures and stories from the lives of various Jain saints. The sense, though, when he quoted scripture was not that he was citing an authoritative source of knowledge to which all must give assent, so much as illustrating his points with stories everyone could understand and relate to. My sense when he was quoting from the *Gītā* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in other words, was that he was drawing upon shared cultural resources to which his audience could relate. The *Mahābhārata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* is a part, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are widely known stories in India, even beyond those in the Hindu community who regard them as sacred. It is therefore not at all uncommon to find them cited as folk wisdom, even by members of other traditions.

How was Saman Śrutaprajñā able to come to Pennsylvania to give us his lecture? As mentioned earlier, the movements of Jain ascetics have traditionally been limited by a very strict set of rules. In the name of avoiding even accidental injury to small life forms, the only acceptable mode of transportation for Jain monks and nuns has been walking. If a monk or nun were to ride in a vehicle of any kind – an oxcart, a chariot, or an automobile or airplane – he or she would bear part of the guilt for the destruction of tiny life forms that such modes of transportation inevitably entail. Being constrained by the distances they are capable of walking, Jain monks and nuns have therefore never traditionally traveled very far. This is one of the reasons Jainism has remained confined largely to the Indian subcontinent, in contrast with Buddhism, which spread, in premodern times, from India to Southeast Asia, China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan.

The movement of lay Jains is not restricted in the way the movement of ascetics is. Long a merchant community, Jain businessmen were known, even in ancient times, to travel far and wide for trading purposes. In the modern period, many more Jains began to travel and settle abroad, along with other Indian communities, for economic reasons. In 1980, aware of the growing need to serve the spiritual needs of a lay Jain community that had become global in extent, Ācārya Tulsī, a leading monk in the Śvetāmbara Terāpanthī Jain community, established a special order of Jain ascetics, to which Saman Śrūtaprajñā belongs. This group of ascetics has been given special permission to use modern modes of transportation, as well as flexibility with regard to other traditional monastic rules that would make it difficult for these ascetics to function and travel in the Western world. One could say that these male and female ascetics – *samans* and *samaṇīs*, respectively – are an intermediate group, occupying a space 'between' the traditional roles of laypersons and ascetics.[37] Their function is to serve the spiritual needs of the increasingly global community of Jain laypersons. But they also promote Jain ideals to the broader outside world. This seemed to be the central mission of two *samaṇīs* who attended the Barcelona Parliament of World's Religions, who were among the prominent Jains that I met there.

Who are the Jains?

Based on my observations at the HARI temple during the Mahāvīra Jāyantī celebrations of 2006, one can deduce several things about Jain identity, at least in North America.

First, Jains are overwhelmingly Indian, in terms of ethnicity and national origin. I personally know of no current Western or other non-Indian converts to Jainism – though in the first half of the twentieth century, an Englishman named Herbert Warren did convert to Jainism, under the guidance of a Jain teacher named Virchand Gandhi, writing a book on the subject entitled *Jainism in Western Garb as a Solution to Life's Great Problems*.[38] No Jain-based popular movements have emerged in the West comparable to Hindu- or Buddhist-inspired movements such as Transcendental Meditation or Zen.

Today, there are approximately 4.2 million Jains in the world.[39] Although there are Jain communities in the UK, North America, and

elsewhere – such as the community in central Pennsylvania – the vast majority of Jains continue to live in India, where they have existed for over two and a half millennia as a small but highly influential minority.

Secondly, one notices – again, at least in North America – a very easy relationship between Jains and Hindus, even to the point of utilizing the same worship facilities and participating in one another's rituals – although the Jain and Hindu rituals remain distinct. There are currently 17 'Hindu-Jain' temples operating in the United States. One of the oldest and most prominent of these, the Hindu-Jain Temple of Pittsburgh, was built in 1981, initially as a Hindu temple, and dubbed a 'Hindu-Jain' temple in 1986.[40]

One should not deduce from this, however, that all Jains or Hindus are necessarily happy about such arrangements. And one generally does not find such arrangements in India. Scholars have identified three orientations toward Jain belief and practice that are operative in the modern period. These are *orthodoxy*, *heterodoxy*, and *neo-orthodoxy*. As Paul Dundas describes these, orthodoxy

> ... is the type of Jainism which would be recognizable to traditional followers of the religion in India, involving ritual, recitation of prayers and mantras, full acceptance of the authority of Mahāvīra and his teachings, and a concern with correct practice and sectarian exclusivity, all typically associated with women and old people.[41]

Heterodoxy, on the other hand,

> ... involves an interpretation of Jainism as theistic and free from the metaphysical complexities which many feel to be a feature of the religion, with the fordmakers [enlightened teachers, such as Mahāvīra] being viewed as in some way the manifestations of a supreme deity and endowed with the capacity to intervene directly in human affairs and offer assistance. Here, God-focused devotion plays an important part and the Jains who have espoused this heterodoxy see no incongruity in, for example, worshiping in Hindu or Sikh temples.[42]

Finally, neo-orthodoxy

> ... presents itself as modern and progressive, with an emphasis on those aspects of Jainism which can be interpreted as scientific and rational and can therefore be accommodated to and encompass western modes of thought.[43]

Depending on the degree of their attachment to orthodoxy, some Jains object to holding Jain ceremonies in the same facilities which house Hindu deities, where Hindu rituals are also performed. Again, one does not typically find such arrangements in India. Nor does there seem to be much of a precedent for them in the premodern era, unless one counts the ancient Jain tradition of worshiping goddesses such as Saraswatī and Lakṣmī, who are also prominent objects of Hindu worship.

Based on my own observations, it seems that the three orientations – orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and neo-orthodoxy – reflect more general trends, rather than being absolutely fixed identifications. In other words, I have met many Jains who have been, in varying ways and to varying degrees, both heterodox and neo-orthodox – though orthodoxy in the strict sense remains, as Dundas points out, confined largely to India, being dependent on relations with traditional monks and nuns that are not possible for Jains who are living in the West. But to the degree that a Jain practitioner wishes to maintain orthodoxy, sharing worship facilities with Hindus could be seen to be problematic. As we shall see, the ideas underlying Jain worship are quite distinct from those involved in most Hindu worship.

Though clearly, given the presence of 17 Hindu-Jain temples in the United States, close Hindu-Jain co-existence is religiously possible for at least some members of both communities. But it is possible that such cooperation has been at least as much a matter of necessity as of choice. Given the relatively small size of both communities in North America and their various commonalities, cooperation of this kind makes sense. But it is also the case that, when Jains have been able, they have built their own, separate temple facilities. Similarly, Hindu subgroups have also been known to split off from the more 'universal' temple communities when their resources have enabled them to do so.[44] The 'universal' Hindu temple, incorporating all forms of Hinduism, as well as Jainism, is largely a product of Hindu modernity combined with the immigrant experience of Hindus and Jains living in the West. In India, such temples are much less common, though their numbers are increasing.[45]

Diverse Jain Identities

A common stereotype of the Jains, in both India and the West, is that they constitute a highly affluent merchant community. In fact,

although many Jains do practice business professions – and many have been quite successful in these pursuits – there are also Jains who practice other professions, such as farming, and whose level of material wealth is relatively modest.

And then there are of course the Jain *sādhus* and *sādhvīs*, or monks and nuns, who have practically no material possessions to speak of, and who live a life of deliberate simplicity and nonviolence. Indeed, the strict commitment to *ahiṃsā*, or nonviolence, which the Jain monks and nuns embody, is the source of another stereotype of the Jains as a whole: that all Jains wear a face-mask to avoid accidentally ingesting insects, or that they carefully sweep the ground free of insects to avoid treading upon them as they walk. Only monks and nuns practice nonviolence to such a strict degree.

Indeed, not even all Jain monks and nuns observe precisely the same practices. The *muhpattī*, or face-mask, for example, is generally worn only at certain times. Only two monastic sects – the Sthānakavāsīs and the Śvetāmbara Terāpanthīs – are required to wear it at all times, and many monks do not wear it at all. Even within the same sect, differences exist in the realm of practice between monastic lineages, or *gacchas*. Many of these lineages have arisen by splitting off from other lineages over disagreements in regard to practice, which has been at least as divisive for Jains as matters of belief have been, historically, for Christians.

Jain identity, like all identities, is criss-crossed with a variety of affiliations, such as class and profession – as just mentioned above – caste (distinct from class), gender, and sectarian affiliation. Though Jainism, like Buddhism, arose partly in reaction to the caste system of Hinduism, Jains, like many other minority communities in India, are organized into castes – hereditary communities that tend to practice a particular occupation and that determine whom one may marry. And there are of course male and female Jains.

Finally, the Jains are also divided into sub-sects. The two most ancient ones, the Digambaras and the Śvetāmbaras, differ mainly with regard to issues relating to monastic practice: specifically, with regard to whether a monk should wear clothing and whether a woman can practice monasticism to the extent available to a man. Indeed, the names of these two groups are indicative of the issues on which they differ. The word *Śvetāmbara* means 'white-clad', and Śvetāmbara monks and nuns wear very simple white robes. In addition to wearing

these white robes, a Śvetāmbara monk or nun will also typically carry a begging bowl, from which he or she will eat food provided by the Jain lay community, and a small broom for the purpose of gently brushing aside small insects that may be in their pathway. The modest dress of Śvetāmbara ascetics is a symbol of their detachment and their status as ascetics in the Jain community. Śvetāmbaras make up, by far, the majority of Jains.[46] Most live in the western and northern states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. They are also the community that maintains the scriptural tradition in which are found the earliest references to and teachings of the Jina Mahāvīra, though the Digambaras contest the authenticity of this collection of texts.

Digambara means 'sky-clad'. Digambara monks, figuratively speaking, 'wear' the sky: they wear no clothing at all. They do not carry a begging bowl, but eat only that much food as they can hold in their hands. Some carry the small broom that is also used by the Śvetāmbaras for the purpose of protecting small creatures from accidentally being stepped or sat upon; but this is not personal, but community property. In any event, the broom exists to protect other beings – unlike clothing, which protects one's own body.

From a Digambara perspective, the wearing of clothing suggests that one is overly attached to the body – that one wishes to protect it. It also suggests that one has a sense of shame that implies a lack of spiritual maturity, of awareness that it is the soul and not the body that is of ultimate significance. A critic could of course ask, if the body is not what is important, why it matters whether one wears clothing or not. But for the Digambaras, practice is a necessary measure of spiritual attainment.

What of Digambara nuns? Digambara nuns do wear clothing, but are regarded, for that very reason, as incapable of practicing non-attachment to the degree of which a man is capable. Digambara Jains therefore traditionally believe that only men can attain *mokṣa*. A woman must await rebirth as a man in order to aspire to this goal. From a Digambara point of view, Digambara nuns and Śvetāmbara ascetics of both genders are nothing more or less than pious laypersons. Śvetāmbara monks are not true monks, from a Digambara perspective, due to their attachment to the wearing of clothing.

Women are barred from the practice of monastic nudity due to the fear that a nude female ascetic would be vulnerable to sexual assault.

Rebirth as a woman is therefore an unfortunate state, since it prevents one from engaging in monastic practice to the degree necessary for attaining liberation – from the practice of monastic nudity. Though there are Digambara nuns, who practice celibacy and other ascetic observances, they are not held within the Digambara tradition to be on the same level as the monks.

The immediate salvific aspiration of these women, like that of any Jain layperson, is therefore a better rebirth – meaning, in their case, rebirth as a man. Liberation is a more distant goal, requiring the practice of monastic nudity – a practice available only to males.

From a Śvetāmbara point of view, it is the attitude of detachment, rather than the actual practice of nudity, that is of ultimate importance in one's pursuit of liberation from the rebirth cycle. Women are as capable as men of attaining *mokṣa*. Indeed, Mallinātha, the 19th Tīrthaṅkara, is believed by the Śvetāmbaras to have been a woman (though this is regarded as having been the result of bad karma, due to her having deceived her fellow monks, in her prior lifetime, by secretly practicing more asceticism than they had all agreed together to practice, so it is not exactly an endorsement of feminism).

The debates between the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras over the necessity of actual monastic nudity versus an attitude of detachment, as well as debates regarding the related issue of the possibility of spiritual liberation for women, have been extensive. An entire literature has been produced as a result.

This literature displays a gradual development of an increasingly more sharply defined sense of sectarian identity on the part of both groups. Over time, one finds a hardening of attitudes between the two communities. The Digambara texts begin to state that it is not only the non-availability of monastic nudity to women that bars them from liberation, but certain aspects of the female anatomy. Some texts claim, for example, that more microscopic organisms inhabit the female body than the male body, making the biological processes involved in a female incarnation more violent than those involved in rebirth as a male, thus making birth as a woman unfortunate.[47] Menstruation in particular is seen as involving the destruction of microorganisms on a massive scale.

The Digambara rejection of the Śvetāmbara scriptural tradition is primarily due to the fact that the Ardha-Māgadhī Prakrit texts depict a variety of episodes incompatible with a Digambara understanding

of Jainism. Mahāvīra himself is depicted as practicing monastic nudity, though this is presented as more of an accident than a deliberate choice. (Mahāvīra was so detached from his body that his simple white loincloth simply slipped off one day without his noticing it.) Women – Mallinātha and Mahāvīra's mother, Triśalā – are depicted as achieving *mokṣa*. And, as discussed earlier, Mahāvīra is represented as engaging in speech and other normal activities after his *nirvāṇa*.

Although the names *Śvetāmbara* and *Digambara* refer to the clothing worn (or, in the case of the Digambaras, not worn) by their respective ascetics, the laypersons making up the vast majority of Jains of both sects also refer to themselves using this terminology. The average Śvetāmbara or Digambara Jain is a layperson, and not an ascetic: white-clad or otherwise.

It is not clear precisely when or how these two groups separated, but the schism occurred some time before the second century of the Common Era, and may have been a gradual process. Until the fifteenth century, there was also an 'intermediate' group called the Yāpanīyas, who practiced monastic nudity much as the Digambaras do, but they wore a simple white cloth when in public.[48]

According to one Digambara tradition, the division between the two communities occurred less than two centuries after the life of Mahāvīra. At this point, the community of Jains was centered in the northeastern region of India, where Mahāvīra had lived and taught. Due to a famine in this area, the community split, with one group migrating to the northwest and the other to the south. The northwestern group eventually became the Śvetāmbaras, with the southern group becoming the Digambaras. After many years of mutual isolation, when these two groups again encountered one another, they found that differences had emerged between their practices, with the ascetics of the northwestern group wearing simple white robes and the male ascetics of the southern group practicing nudity. Because this is a Digambara account, 'The northern monks are portrayed as … out of weakness taking to the heretical practice of wearing clothes.'[49]

Digambaras have traditionally lived in southern India, predominantly in what is now the state of Karnataka and southern Maharashtra. However, there is also a northern Digambara community centered in the northwestern states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. These

northwestern states are also the traditional location of the Śvetāmbaras. Of the two groups, the larger group by far is the Śvetāmbaras. Roughly 80 per cent of all Jains are Śvetāmbaras.[50]

The Śvetāmbaras are further subdivided into three main groups. More than half are Mūrtipūjakas, who, as their name suggests, engage in *pūjā*, or worship, using images, or *mūrtis*. The other two, more recently formed Śvetāmbara groups, are the Sthānakavāsīs and Terāpanthīs. They differ from both Digambara Jains and Mūrtipūjaka Śvetāmbaras regarding the propriety of *mūrtipūjā*, which they do not engage in.

The Sthānakavāsīs and Terāpanthīs were inspired, but not technically *established*, by Loṅka Śāh, a fifteenth-century Jain reformer who held that the monastic practices of his time did not live up to the vision of the Jain scriptures, particularly in regard to the observance of *ahiṃsā*. Loṅka regarded *mūrtipūjā* as a violation of *ahiṃsā*, because of the destruction of small organisms involved in temple building and in the ritual of *pūjā* itself.

As mentioned previously, like Hindus, Śvetāmbara and Digambara Jains practice *pūjā* – the act of giving worship to a deity through offerings of flowers, fruits, water, milk, a sacred flame, and various other sacred substances to the form (or *mūrti*) of that deity, usually through the medium of a statue.[51] Unlike the Hindus, whose worship is typically devoted to forms of divinity like Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Śaktī (the Mother Goddess), Jain *pūjā* is devoted to liberated beings, such as Mahāvīra and the other Tīrthaṅkaras, as well as to other respected ascetics of the Jain tradition. Some of the most beautiful and ornately constructed temples in India are Jain temples, devoted to the worship of the Tīrthaṅkaras.

The building of temples and monasteries, however, has not been uncontroversial in the Jain tradition. In favor of such construction, it has been argued that the spiritual benefits, particularly to laypersons, of visiting temples and worshiping the Tīrthaṅkaras far outweigh the destruction of life necessarily involved in construction activities such as digging, carving, and so forth.

The Sthānakavāsīs and the Terāpanthīs, however, argue that such reasoning is flawed, revealing an attachment to physical acts that is spiritually counterproductive. If one also takes into account the possibilities for destruction of microscopic life inherent in physical acts of worship, they claim, it is clear that a far more productive form of

worship is to visualize and worship the enlightened Jinas mentally and internally rather than using physical means.

The Sthānakavāsīs and Terāpanthīs maintain a high level of strictness in their ascetic practices, which include the constant wearing of the *muhpattī*. The older of the two groups, the Sthānakavāsīs' name refers to their ascetics' practice of dwelling in special halls (*sthānakas*) set apart from temples. This signals their protest against the practice of monks dwelling in temples. The phenomenon of monks dwelling in temples was quite old in Jainism at the time of the formation of the Sthānakavāsī movement. But the Sthānakavāsīs see this practice as inadequate to the strictures of the Jain monastic code.

Because of their rejection of *mūrtipūjā* and the temples in which it occurs, they see it as inappropriate for Jain monks to countenance such activity by residing in such an establishment. Their objection, and that of the Terāpanthīs, to *mūrtipūjā* and temple building is due to the violence to small creatures that these activities inevitably involve – the same objection that motivated Loṅka in his attempts to reform the Jain practice of his time. The motivating principle of aniconic movements in Jainism is nonviolence and not, as some have argued, the influence of Islam – though Islamic influence was prominent in South Asia during Loṅka's time.[52] The Sthānakavāsīs and Terāpanthīs emphasize mental worship (*bhāvapūjā*) over physical acts of worship using images, or *mūrtis*.

The Śvetāmbara Terāpanthī community was established in 1760 by a monk of the Sthānakavāsī tradition named Ācārya Bhikṣu. The name *Terāpanthī* 'is interpreted in two ways: (1) Path of Thirteen (teraḥ), signifying the thirteen monks who were the first followers of Ācārya Bhikṣu, or (2) Your (terā) Path, which is the thirteen-fold path of Mahāvīra,' which includes five ascetic vows, five comportments, and three restraints.[53] It is not uncommon for Jain literature to be addressed to Mahāvīra in the second person, referring to 'your path' or 'your teaching'. A number of classic Jain texts by luminaries of the tradition such as Samantabhadra and Hemacandra are composed in this way.[54]

Terāpanthī monks and nuns are noted for their exceptionally strong commitment to the Jain ascetic vision, as symbolized, again, by their constant wearing of the *muhpattī*. Interestingly, though, the Terāpanthī commitment to asceticism does not preclude some degree of engagement with the world. Terāpanthī monastic leaders such as

Ācārya Tulsī and Ācārya Mahāprajñā have been in the forefront of promoting Jain values beyond the boundaries of the Jain community – as in Ācārya Tulsī's *anuvrata* movement – and ongoing reform of Jain practice – as in Ācārya Mahāprajñā's promotion of *prekṣādhyāna*, or insight meditation, among both ascetic and lay Jains, both of which shall be discussed in greater detail later.[55] The 'intermediate' *saman* order of Jain ascetics mentioned earlier, designed to increase the visibility of Jain values in the modern world, is a Terāpanthī innovation.

Though fewer in number than the Śvetāmbaras, the Digambaras of northern India are also divided into several sub-groups, the two main ones being the Bīsapanthīs and the Terāpanthīs (who are a different group from the Śvetāmbara Terāpanthīs just mentioned).

The split between the Bīsapanthīs and the Digambara Terāpanthīs was mainly over the authority of *bhaṭṭārakas*. *Bhaṭṭārakas* are Digambara monks charged with the administration of monastic institutions. Again, as a central expression of their practice of non-attachment, Digambara monks traditionally do not wear clothing. But *bhaṭṭārakas* do wear clothing to facilitate their administrative functions, which can involve extensive interactions with laypersons. Terāpanthīs therefore do not regard them as true monks. The word *Bīsapanthī* means either 'twenty-fold' path or 'universal' (*viśva*) path.[56]

Some recent northern Digambara movements include the Tāraṇ Svāmī Panth, the Kavi Panth, and the Kānjī Svāmī Panth. Tāraṇ Svāmī (1448–1515), a Digambara monk who rejected *mūrtipūjā* and was critical of the institution of *bhaṭṭārakas*, established the Tāraṇ Svāmī Panth. The Kavi Panth is the relatively loosely organized following of the teachings of Raychandbhai Mahetā, also known as Śrīmad Rājacandra (1867–1901), who influenced Mahatma Gandhi. Finally, Kānjī Svāmī (1889–1980), a Sthānakavāsī monk who converted to Digambara Jainism, established the Kānjī Svāmī Panth.[57]

The southern Digambaras, in contrast with the northern Digambaras, are relatively unified. They do utilize the services of *bhaṭṭārakas* and engage in *mūrtipūjā*.

The divisions within the Jain community can be represented schematically in the following way:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Jains</td></tr>
<tr><td>Śvetāmbaras</td><td colspan="2">Digambaras</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Mūrtipūjakas
Sthānakavāsīs
Terāpanthīs
(Śvetāmbara)</td><td rowspan="3">Southern Digambaras</td><td>Northern Digambaras</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bīsapanthīs
Terāpanthīs
(Digambara)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Recent movements:
Tāraṇ Svāmī Panth
Kavi Panth
Kānjī Svāmī Panth</td></tr>
</table>

Are Jains Hindus?

An issue less central to Jain identity, but perhaps of interest to students of Jainism, is the relationship of Jain identity to Hindu identity, and of Jainism as a religious practice and worldview to the vast family of practices and worldviews that is designated by the term *Hinduism*. As we shall see, this is a complex and controversial issue.

Are Jains Hindus? Or are they sufficiently different from Hindus to be regarded, as they typically are in textbooks like this one, as a separate community? The question is a divisive one for Jains, some of whom insist passionately that they are *not* Hindus, and some of whom are quite happy to be identified as Hindus, even to the point – particularly outside of India – of sharing the same religious facilities with Hindus, as we have seen in the case of the Hindu American Religious Institute and the other Hindu-Jain facilities in North America.

At one end of the spectrum of views on this issue are those Jains who, in a spirit of heterodoxy, see their practice as a form of theistic Hindu devotion. But at the other end there is a group of northern Indian Digambaras who went to court in 2006 in order to have Jainism formally declared a minority religion. This was in direct response to a bill, introduced to discourage conversion from Hinduism, which declared Jains to be Hindus.[58]

This issue is divisive and politically charged due in part to the character of Indian secularism. In the United States, *secularism*, at its most basic, is the separation of church and state enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution and in subsequent court

decisions which have upheld this wall of separation. The idea of a court being involved in deciding whether a particular tradition is a minority religion or part of another religion is quite foreign to an American understanding of secularism. Are Mormons Christians? Or are they members of a separate, distinct tradition that happens to share a good deal of Christian symbolism and terminology? In a secular society, as this is understood in the United States, this is a private issue, to be settled, if ever, by the Mormons themselves, and not by the government.

Coming from such a cultural context, one might well ask why Jains should care whether others regard them as Hindu or not. Isn't each person free to define his or her own religious identity?

The intensity of this issue is fueled by the character of Indian secularism, which is quite different from American secularism. The trajectory of American secularism has been very much in the direction of the relegation of religion to the private sphere. This is in keeping with a social ethos that is more individualist than communal in nature.

In contrast with the American Constitution, which seeks to separate the realms of religion and government, the Constitution of India is set up to protect *group* rights – in particular, the rights of religious minorities. This, of course, involves defining who is a religious minority. The majority religion of India has been defined as Hinduism. If a particular religious group is not Hindu, it is therefore, by definition, a minority, and is thus eligible for state protection and a variety of government benefits.

At the same time, there is a widespread cultural and political movement of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India, which identifies India as a Hindu nation and so sees minority identities as not fully Indian – much as the Christian right defines the USA as a Christian nation and perceives non-Christians as un-American.

There are therefore very intense social pressures on certain religious communities in India to see themselves either as Hindu or as minority traditions. If one defines oneself as Hindu, one avoids marginalization and is able to identify with the culturally dominant tradition. But if one defines oneself as a minority tradition, one can receive government benefits and protections. Clearly, there are advantages and disadvantages either way.

This situation can lead to what can appear to an outsider (and often to insiders as well) to be very odd scenarios. Christianity and Islam, as non-indigenous traditions, are seen as very clearly distinct from Hinduism. So as minority groups, evangelical Christian organizations, often based in the United States, can receive government support in India not available to Hindu organizations.

And because Hinduism is so internally diverse, Hindu groups can argue, based on their distinctive features, that *they* are also minority traditions, and not Hindu, in order to receive similar benefits. My own Ramakrishna tradition tried, without success, to obtain recognition as a minority religion in the 1980s, in order to be protected from having its schools taken over by the government.[59]

Passions can run very high when questions of religious identity are at issue. The wisest and most ethical strategy, it seems to me, is to leave the question of whether or not Jains are Hindus for Jains to decide, noting only that there are significant overlaps and interconnections, as well as important differences and discontinuities, between the beliefs and practices of Jains and those of other Indic religious communities, including those that are generally regarded as constituting Hinduism.

The most common response to this issue that I have received from Jains is that they view 'Hinduism' as the common culture in which all Indians participate, but that the Jain tradition is *religiously* distinct from the other *culturally* Hindu traditions. When they give specific examples, they seem to be pointing, with this distinction between religion and culture, to a distinction between practices aimed at transcendence – distinctively Jain practices – and shared practices of a more this-worldly and, to use Babb's terminology, *transactional* character. The Jain who engages in such practices 'is certainly on the road to liberation, but ... is headed down a detour of worldly felicity along the way', engaging in worship as a kind of transaction, either with deities (sometimes Hindu deities) or with powerful ascetics 'who can and do intervene in his or her worldly affairs'.[60]

Their basic sense, in other words, seems to be that there is a considerable range of beliefs and practices that Jains share with non-Jains, but that the practices in particular tend to be oriented around goals that are of a generally this-worldly character: ceremonies related to birth, marriage, death, moving into a new home, starting a new business, and so on. But with regard to what is most integral to Jainism – its path of transcendence and release from the cycle of rebirth – the Jain tradition is distinct.[61]

Jains, for example, celebrate the holiday Dīvālī along with Hindus – for many of whom it is the biggest single holiday of the year. Jains even participate in the worship of Lakṣmī, the primary deity honored during this holiday, who is associated with bestowing prosperity and this-worldly success upon her devotees.

But Jains also celebrate Dīvālī as Mahāvīra Nirvāṇa Divas, commemorating the physical death and final *nirvāṇa* of Mahāvīra, a practice that is unique to the Jains. Jains can thus be seen as, in one sense, Hindu and, in another sense, as distinctively Jain – and beyond that, distinctively Digambara, Terāpanthī, and so on.

From a Western religious perspective, such a seeming 'dual identity' must appear quite odd, given that Western religious loyalties are generally mutually exclusive. From a Western perspective, it would seem quite odd for a devout Methodist, for example, to regularly attend synagogue and Catholic mass, participating in the rituals as fully as the regular members of these communities. But in Asian settings, particularly in India, such crossing of religious boundaries is not at all uncommon. As Paul Dundas explains:

> Religious identity in India has not invariably had a fixed 'all or nothing' exclusivity attached to it and there can be identified consistently throughout South Asian history a commonality of religious culture which has operated across what are ostensibly sectarian divides. So, for a Jain lay-person to worship occasionally or regularly a markedly Hindu deity such as Hanumān or Bhairuṇjī does not betoken abandonment of Jainism and consequent adherence to Hinduism, but rather an easy participation within and desire to confirm linkage to a South Asian religious world richly populated with figures redolent of power, prosperity and transcendence who are accessible to all.[62]

Whether or not to call this shared 'South Asian religious world' *Hindu* is, again, a highly politically fraught issue. Many Jains with whom I have spoken have no quarrel with such a deployment of terminology. Though ardently devout Jains, they are happy to identify themselves as 'culturally Hindu', due to their participation in the shared South Asian religious world with which the term *Hindu* is not infrequently identified. Some even express this cultural identification politically, supporting Hindu nationalist parties and policies.

Other Jains, however, disagree quite strongly with such a stance, perceiving the various differences between Hinduism, defined as the

Vedic tradition, and Jainism to be of sufficient consequence to merit seeing Jainism as a completely separate and distinct tradition from Hinduism. Politically, this can involve seeking status as a minority group, with the various benefits this can involve to the community under the Indian version of secularism.

Both views of Jains – as either a Hindu or non-Hindu religious community – have some merit, and both ultimately hinge upon the still much disputed question of how to define Hinduism – a question with, as we have seen, both religious and hotly contested political implications.

The easy crossing of religious boundaries that one often observes in India – or at the HARI temple, for that matter – can be explained in a number of ways. One often hears it said that Hindus cross religious boundaries in this easy way because of the widespread belief that all religions are one, or that they all lead to the same ultimate goal. While it is no doubt true that this view is widespread in contemporary Hinduism – I have heard many Hindus express it in answer to questions about this crossing of boundaries – it is more of a rationalization than an explanation. I have heard Jains make similar claims about their tradition: that Jainism, too, sees all religions as one, thus allowing the kind of sharing of facilities and participation in one another's ceremonies observed in US temples.

My own suspicion is that this puzzle of the crossing of boundaries is a function of a peculiarly Western way of conceiving of religious boundaries. Because the West erects boundaries in a particular way, and behaves accordingly, Westerners naturally expect that others will behave in the same way. This is the problem of extending Western categories such as 'religion' to non-Western societies. I would suggest that Hindus and Jains might be crossing lines that only Westerners can see. For Hindus and Jains, there may be no lines – or at least different lines from the ones a Westerner would draw – with the idea of distinct religious traditions participating in a broader, shared religious culture.

Conclusion

So, who are the Jains? They make up a distinctive religious community with a complex set of relations to the larger Hindu culture from which they can be distinguished, but in which they also, in various ways, participate. They are a small community – 4.2 million, in contrast

with Hinduism's approximately 900 million. Most Jains live in India, though a thriving Jain diaspora exists in the West – having reached even rural Pennsylvania. They are, on the whole, an affluent community, which has exerted a considerable influence on the larger culture of Hinduism, despite their small numbers. They are divided not only by sect, but by caste as well – despite, as we shall see, the ostensibly anti-caste character of Mahāvīra's teachings.

Finally, they are an ancient community, to whose long history we now turn.