

BOOK REVIEW

THE JAINA PATH OF PURIFICATION

Author: Padmanabh S. Jaini

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Reviewer: Joanna Flynn¹

Originally known as *niganṭhas* (*nirgranthas* – unattached ones), the followers of Jinas (spiritual victors) formed a *śramaṇic* movement whose followers rejected both the authority of the Vedas and the ritual of Vedic sacrifice. Although the historicity of the Jain tradition is attested as far back as the ninth century BCE and Jainism is one of the most ancient religious traditions in the contemporary world, at the same time, the Jains are, and they have been for many centuries, one of the smallest communities on the Indian subcontinent. How they were perceived in the wider society can be observed in the literature of different periods. Although very often misunderstood due to ubiquitous stereotypes, or treated as a minor sect of Hinduism, the Jains established a thriving community that has survived until today in South Asia. This stands in contrast to the Buddhist tradition which disappeared from India in the middle centuries and only came back to its motherland less than a hundred years ago.

Despite the fact that Jainism is an ancient and important Indian tradition and is an inseparable part of the history and culture of South Asia, unfortunately at the university level, in the West at least, courses on the topic of Jainism are sadly lacking and difficult to come by.

Before we delve into *The Jaina Path of Purification*, let me introduce the author himself. Padmanabh S. Jaini (1923-2021) was a renowned Jain and Buddhist scholar of Indian origin born into a Digambara Jain family in Karnataka. During his academic career, he taught at several universities including the Banaras Hindu University, the SOAS, the University of Michigan, and the University of California. He is the author of several books – of which the best known is *The Jaina Path of Purification*. He has also authored several papers, some of them gathered together and published as the *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* and *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*.

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In *The Jaina Path of Purification*, P. S. Jaini introduces the reader to many topics related to Jainism, from stories related to Mahāvīra and his life, through philosophical doctrines and teachings, to historical and social threads of the Jain community.

The book consists of nine chapters and an exhaustive bibliography divided into primary source texts and modern works. The latter are in several languages including English, German, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. In the end, there is also a Glossary of Sanskrit and Prakrit words. The publisher has chosen not to include the General Index and Additions and Corrections to the publication in the current reprint. Additionally, thirty-three illustrations are found throughout the text, which can serve as a visual aid to understanding the text itself. A short foreword by Kristi L. Wiley gives insight into the background of the text.

Chapter one starts with a short story of Śāntisāgara, a Digambara mendicant who peacefully dies through *sallekhanā* (ritual death by fasting) in 1955 in a way prescribed by Mahāvīra some 2,500 years earlier. It is a pretty strong commencement of the book, perhaps Jaini tries to make a point on the fact that the Jain tradition in contemporary times is still well alive and firm among its followers. Through the vivid descriptions, efficient use of language, and natural flow, the author tells us briefly the story of Mahāvīra, the last of the twenty-four *tīrthamkaras* of the current time cycle while emphasizing that he is not the founder but rather the propagator of a path which has been taught in the similar manner by his predecessors. Further, Jaini ponders over certain controversies between the two major sects – Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras such as the nature of the omniscient, the role of nudity, the position of women, and begging and eating habits.

In the second chapter of the book, the reader learns about the chief disciples of Mahāvīra – Gaṇadharas; and is presented with a thorough overview of Jain literature – canonical *āgamas* with the *pūrvas* (extinct), *aṅgas* and *aṅgabāhyas* and their extensive Prakrit and Sanskrit commentaries; and post-canonical compositions of various Jain authors and philosophical writings of both Digambaras and Śvetāmbaras. The next two chapters delve deep into the philosophical foundations of Jainism and examine the main teachings and doctrines such as: *anekānta* (manifold aspects), *naya* (partial expression of truth), *sapta-bhaṅgī-naya* (the sevenfold application of *syātī*), three main categories of being (sentient, material and neither sentient nor material), *samsāra* (the cycle of transmigration) through the karmic bondage, four main types of embodiment (*deva*, *nārakī*, *manuṣya* and *tiryakṇca*), various types of karmic matter and mechanisms of its binding to the soul.

In chapter five, the author raises the issue of the conditions that make the person turn away from delusion towards the right perception (correct view, *samyak-darśana*), and among others he discusses the notion of *bhavyatva* (the capability of the soul to become free) as a catalyst which redirects the soul. This change is connected with the attainment of the state of true insight – the fourth *gūṇasthāna* (on the 14-rung ladder towards enlightenment).

After setting the foundations of Jain philosophy, Jaini describes the path of a layman with his *vratas* – prescribed vows among which *ahiṃsā* is the first and foremost; and *pratimās* – stages of

the spiritual progress of a layperson. Before he turns towards the issues related to the mendicant path and the attainment of liberation, he depicts daily Jain rituals and other ceremonies which also contribute to the formation of a Jain group identity. He discusses in detail a prescribed set of practices for laypeople such as *devapūjā* (worship of Jinās), *guru-upāsti* (venerating the teachers), *svādhyāya* (study of the scriptures), and others. He also mentions the importance of the pilgrimages to holy places and of the ritual of fasting, as the latter contributes directly to spiritual progress by detachment from the body. In the next chapter, we learn about the mendicant path of total renunciation, *dīkṣā* (initiation), austerities, meditational practices, and many others.

In the final part of the book, Padmanabh S. Jaini tries to understand the phenomenon of the survival of the Jains despite the fact that they always formed a tiny minority among other traditions and religions of India. He discusses different reasons including royal patronage, Jain rulers in Karnataka and Gujarat, and the integration with the surrounding Hindu population among others. He concludes with a short description of the Jain reform movements which started with Lonkā Śāha at the end of 15th century as a response to the slowly progressing spiritual decay of the Jain community at that time.

The author defines his work as ‘that [which] can introduce Jainism, not only as a religious tradition, but as a literary and sociohistorical one as well’ (p. xviii) and I couldn’t agree more. *The Jaina Path of Purification* is an excellent overview of not only the Jain religion but also the Jain philosophy, literature, and socio-historical background of the entire Jain community. Throughout the text, Jaini neatly intertwines the differences (sometimes very subtle) between the Digambara and Śvetāmbara sects, so the reader in the end has a good understanding of both sects without prejudice to either group.

Moreover, Jaini defines the target audience for his book as those who have ‘only a general knowledge of India and its major faiths’ (p. xviii). I would partially agree on this point as on one hand, the text is an introduction to Jainism, however on the other hand, the author doesn’t shy away from introducing Sanskrit and Prakrit technical terms, and at the end of the book he provides a thorough glossary with English explanations. So having that in mind and adding a few more characteristics of it such as excellent research work, extended original quotations – from canonical and commentarial material, and comprehensive references, this book can serve a broad audience from students of religions, ancient Indian languages and cultures to more advanced researchers of Jainism.

With the above in mind, this book can be read on two levels:

1. By the beginner who is looking for a good and comprehensive overview regarding Jain tradition and philosophy, and
2. By the more advanced reader – the book organizes previously acquired knowledge about Jainism and through many references and quotations from the original scriptures, it

encourages further exploration and expansion of specific topics – put simply the reader is not left alone with further questions but is given many in-depth references to turn to.

When I first came across Jaini's book, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, I found that the title completely misled me. My first impression was that I was dealing with some kind of new age guide on how to become a better person or how to live my life better. However, when I started reading, after the first few pages – I became completely immersed, and I knew very early on that this book is an absolute gem. The author's lightness of pen and his flowing style greatly contribute to the fact that this book reads like a good novel. The multitude of references and citations of original texts (some dated BCE) give a sense of the full picture of the topics that the author has touched upon. There is hardly a page that does not include thorough footnotes and references – the text is very well-researched and gives the reader many options to go further and dig deeper into any particular topic of interest to them. Jaini draws from original Jain textual sources throughout the entire book. Extensive original quotations come from the texts such as *Ācārāṅga-sūtra*, *Bhagavatī-sūtra*, *Sthānāṅga-sūtra*, *Kalpa-sūtra*, *Uttarādhyayana-sūtra*, *Tattvārtha-sūtra* – just to name a few.

Another great strength of this book is the lack of long lists of enumerations within the text. Instead, Jaini describes all important elements and weaves them skillfully into the text of the chapters. By doing this, the author ensures that no significant information is missing and that the entire picture of a particular topic is relevantly presented. In fact, the author has provided only four lists of enumerations, namely types of *karma*, the *pratimās*, the *vratas*, and the *guṇasthānas* at the end of their relevant chapters.

The current reprint has a larger font size due to which the number of pages has increased but the author has included an enormous amount of knowledge in the small book. In fact, the book is a gem of information and packed with detail that can satisfy the most demanding reader, yet, while reading it doesn't feel overwhelming in the least. This proves the skill and depth of understanding of the topic by the author himself. Despite the fact that *The Jaina Path of Purification* was written 45 years ago, it remains a significant book in the field of Jain studies containing a large amount of proven knowledge about Jainism. I would highly recommend this book to anybody who is open-minded and seeking a greater understanding of Jain tradition but also to those who already know the topic and want to further their knowledge on this subject.
