

BOOK REVIEW

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAINISM: VOLUME 1

Editor: Dhruti Ghiya Rathi

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This volume brings together 29 chapters on Jain contributions in a wide range of areas, authored by a mixture of scholars/research students at institutions in India and abroad, Jain community members outside academia, and community members who are also scholars/students. Edited by a board (headed by Dhruti Ghiya Rathi) whose members all fall into the third of these categories, the volume gives an interesting insight into how (some academically inclined) Jains wish to present their faith's contributions to the world in the third decade of the twenty-first century. As Peter Flügel observes in one of several forewords by scholars and community members, the cover design is informative about the editors' priorities (x). The front cover lists eight topics (not all of which correspond to sections in the book): "Cryptography," "Environment," "Mathematics," "Philosophy," "Science," "Sculpture," "Society," and "Women Upliftment." The back cover additionally mentions "Art," "Writing," "Languages," and "Literature." Flügel notes that "many of the articles [are united by] 'Jain modernism,' the attempt to bring ancient Jaina philosophy, linguistics, etc. into a creative dialogue with modern science" (x). This concern is arguably reflected in the ordering of the book's sections, which start with mathematics (a field closely linked to the sciences), science, and cryptography. The cryptography section consists of two chapters (Anil Kumar Jain's "The Siri Bhūvalaya: A Unique Multilingual Epic Scripted Only in Numerals" and Aruhant Mehta's "Automated, Error-Tolerant Decoding of the Siri Bhūvalaya") on Kumudendu's *Siri Bhūvalaya*, an unusual encrypted work written entirely in numbers; since both present technical details and Mehta's introduces an automated decoding system developed by the author, the section reads like a continuation of the two before it.

Jain attempts to connect with modern science have an extensive history that has not gone unremarked in scholarly literature. On the basis of fieldwork on British Jains carried out in the 1980s, Banks identified the neo-orthodox tendency, which "claims for itself the status of a science" (252). In an article on Jainism, Aukland introduced the term *scientization* for "processes by which proponents of a religion appeal to modern science" (192). Both authors' insights are applicable to the three chapters in the second section of the volume under review. In "Concept of Time, Space, and Matter in Jain Philosophy," Acharya Shri Vijay Nandighoshsuriji claims that Jainism has the solutions to "some problems and misconceptions

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of modern physics” (37). Narendra Bhandari’s “Modern Physics and Jain Philosophy” asserts that “basic laws of physics... and the concepts enunciated in ancient Jain scriptures have much in common” (58), while Aarti Gulgulia argues in “Prenatal Development in Jainology and Modern Biology: A Comparative Analysis” that “ancient Jain knowledge can enhance contemporary understanding of modern biology” (68).

The fourth section is devoted to the environment, a topic of vital importance in today’s era of ecological devastation. C. Devakumar’s “Jain Way of Life: Symphony in Ecology and Environment” and Vidit K. Shah’s “Jainism and Environmental Protection: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Challenges” both belong to a growing body of discourse that argues for the relevance of Jain teachings in this catastrophic situation. The attempt to cease or ameliorate environmental degradation through the application of Jain principles falls under the wider umbrella of engaged Jainism, which has recently received scholarly attention from researchers working at Arihanta Institute and elsewhere (cf., e.g., the chapters collected in Miller and Bohanec). While the aims of authors like Devakumar and Shah could not be more laudable, it must be noted that such modern ecological applications of Jain principles involve a significant degree of reorientation. *Ahimsā*, *aparigraha*, *anekāntavāda*, and *samyaktva* were not originally intended to be, in Devakumar’s words, “ethical and practical responses to modern challenges” (105). Traditional Jainism is primarily concerned with escaping the world, not restoring it. This tension is reflected in the collection *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life* (Chapple), which brings chapters by environmentally engaged Jains together with the critical voices of Cort, who characterizes “[s]tatements that Jainism is an inherently environmental religious tradition or that Jainism has always ‘enthroned the philosophy of ecological harmony’” as “largely untrue as statements about history” (65), and Dundas, who sees “[c]ontemporary environmentalism” as an “issue into which Indian religious traditions are co-opted somewhat uneasily if their own often highly ambivalent presuppositions about nature and the world are not fully taken into account” (111).

The remaining seven sections of the book under review are dedicated to philosophy and religion, art and architecture, history, culture, and society, writing and language, Jainism around the world, trade and finance, and Jain luminaries. The placement of the section on Jain luminaries, surely intentional, means that the book ends with Jeffery D. Long’s “Vīrchand Gandhi: Bringing Jain Teaching to the World” and Shugan C. Jain’s “Bhavarlal Jain ‘Bade Bhau’ of Jalgaon: Exemplary & Successful Applications of Business Ethics by a Jain in his Multinational Enterprise – A Case Study.” Both chapters profile exemplary Jains, both laymen, whose pursuit of a Jain life had significant impacts. Gandhi (1864-1901) is best known for his participation in the World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, although he also spoke publicly in other contexts and wrote on Jainism; Long observes that “Jain outreach to the rest of humanity, particularly in the modern period, begins with Vīrchand Gandhi and his intrepid journey to the Western world” (334). Shugan C. Jain discusses ways in which the business practices of Bhavarlal Jain (1937-2016), the founder of Jain Irrigation Systems, reflected Jain principles and praises his creation of schools and the Gandhi Research Foundation. The implicit final message of the volume is that following Jainism can

substantially affect the world around one for the better. The focus here is not on Jainism as a religion of renunciation, but on Jains as engaged inhabitants of the world.

The editors' concern with women's upliftment also reflects an engaged perspective. Although no specific section is dedicated to this topic, no fewer than three chapters on women are scattered throughout the book: Kumarpal Desai's "Role of Women in Jain Religion," Kamala Hampana's "Status of Women in Jainism in Karnataka," and "Jaina Women: Warriors and International Traders" by Hampa Nagarajaiah (who uses the *nom de plume* Hampana).

Desai "presents Jainism as a religion that has consistently respected, empowered, and uplifted women" (202). This enterprise involves a certain level of anachronism and the wearing of rose-tinted spectacles. While from a modern perspective it may seem to obviously follow from the Jain belief that "there is no difference or distinction between the souls of a man and a woman" (203) that it "would be illogical, irreligious, and ignorant for a man to treat women as inferior," I think the assumption that premodern Jains drew the same conclusion is unfounded. Medieval sources such as those used by Jyväsjärvi, who found that "Jain monastic authorities... operate on the assumption that women are not in control of their sexuality" (281) and must be controlled by men (282), strongly suggest that they did not. Desai's statement that men and women "are equally entitled to liberation" (203) is true only of the Śvetāmbara sect: he conveniently overlooks the well-known fact that Digambara doctrine states that a male body is an essential prerequisite for liberation. While Desai is right to point out the remarkable fact that Jain nuns have always outnumbered monks (205), the statements that "[a] woman is... equally at liberty as is man for religious worship and advancement" (203) and that Candanā, the head of the order of nuns in the divine assembly Mahāvīra, "was given rights equal to those of a senior *ācārya*" (206) are objectively false. Even among Śvetāmbara ascetics, a gendered hierarchy is reflected by the requirement for any nun to salute any monk upon meeting, not vice versa, regardless of the relative seniority of the two (Laidlaw 56), while Digambara nuns may not take the final step of adjuring clothing and consequently always remain inferior to naked *munis*. No Jain nun attained the rank of *ācārya* (which is formally superior to that of *pravartinī*, the rank held by Candanā (Wiley 64)) until 1987 (Vallely 10).

The chapters by Kamala and Hampana both concern Jain women in Karnataka. On the basis of inscriptions, Kamala discusses five notable women who lived between the ninth and sixteenth centuries, including one (Sāviyabbe) who fell in battle in the late tenth century and a sixteenth-century ruling queen, Cennabhairādevī of Hāḍuvallī. The latter is also one of the personalities celebrated in Hampana's chapter, surely the most enjoyable in the volume. Alongside Cennabhairādevī, it profiles two other queens who ruled in the same century and also enjoyed military success against the Portuguese, the two Abbakkas (mother and daughter) of Ullal. Hampana is a litterateur as well as a retired professor, and the chapter is a work of literary biography, rich in color, rather than scientific history.

While variation in tone and approach is unavoidable, given the diversity of contributors, I find the editorial choice to eschew even typographical consistency regrettable. A "Note on Transliterations," whose authorship is unclear, states that the decision to keep varying spellings used by different authors was taken "in favor of readability" and "will benefit new readers"

(xxxiii). It is hard to see how this can be so: if a novice reader is familiar with the spelling *Rishabha*, used by Maruti Nandan Pd. Tiwari in “Contributions of Jains to Ancient Indian Art and Architecture” (e.g. 159), they may find Tiwari’s chapter readable, but this will not help them with the different transliteration in Shrinetra Pandey’s “Rṣabhadeva: The Founder of Modern Human Civilization.” The lack of an index is also unfortunate.

From valiant queens to the useful account of Western Indian schools of painting presented in Patrick Felix Krüger’s “The Position of Jain Manuscript Illuminations in the History of Indian Painting,” from Jain mathematics to Erika Caranti’s “The Path of Jainism in Italy from Roots to New Horizons: Contributions and Perspectives on Jain Studies,” this volume surely has something for almost everyone with Indological interests. Jasvant Modi is right to state in his foreword that “the... impact of the Jain community... often goes unrecognized and underexplored” (xviii). The editors’ attempt to rectify this injustice is laudable.

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