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SPEAK UP

RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN THE JAIN DIASPORA

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The development in modern times of a substantial Jain diaspora has opened an exciting new chapter in the history of Jainism, as Jains across the world are exposed to new influences and react to those influences while staying true to their traditional roots. I pursued my interest in religious developments among diasporic Jains in a recent paper presented at the latest Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

An important contribution to the scholarly literature on diasporic Jainism is the 1991 chapter 'Orthodoxy and Dissent: Varieties of Religious Belief Among Immigrant Gujarati Jains in Britain', by Marcus Banks. On the basis of fieldwork conducted in the English city of Leicester, primarily in 1982-83, Banks identifies three tendencies within Jain faith: orthodoxy, heterodoxy and neo-orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is the traditional form of Jain belief considered to prevail in India, although no individual in Leicester adopted this position for most of their time. Heterodoxy deviates from orthodoxy in that the heterodox worldview includes a supreme deity, while neo-orthodoxy views itself as a science.

I discussed distinctively neo-orthodox characteristics of K.V. Mardia's 1990 book *The Scientific Foundations of Jainism*. The author, born in Rajasthan in 1935, was Professor of Statistics at the University of Leeds, in the English county of Yorkshire, at the time of the book's publication. As a professional scientist, he is well placed to present Jain doctrine in terms of scientific concepts

and terminology, which he does through both text and figures in the book. Over the course of the book, he associates Jain teachings with multiple areas of science, such as particle physics. The process whereby karma binds the soul, keeping it trapped in the cycle of rebirth, is labelled ‘karmic fusion’ and explained as the absorption of karmons, a kind of subatomic particle, by the soul.

Mardia’s construction of Jainism as scientific is supported by his use of a range of analogies drawn from science and technology. The soul, contaminated by karma, is likened to gold ore in which pure gold is mingled with dross and to a magnet attracting karmic iron filings. When he discusses the volitional aspect of violence, the examples Mardia chooses are drawn from the world of modern applied science. A neurosurgeon whose patient dies under the knife incurs less karma than a murderer. An arable farmer must bear the karmic cost of deliberately destroying life through the use of pesticides and herbicides. While the underlying principles are in accordance with Jain tradition, these specific scenarios were not familiar to the authors of premodern Jain texts. Their inclusion adds to the general scientific ambiance that Mardia aims to create.

The use of visuals throughout the book is a major component of Mardia’s overall strategy. A particularly elegant example is his figure illustrating the ‘[f]our directions of the mental state in living beings,’ reproduced below. Readers of this newsletter will instantly recognise the traditional use of the swastika to symbolise the four *gatis* or main destinies to which souls may be reborn, here rebranded as a scientific diagram.

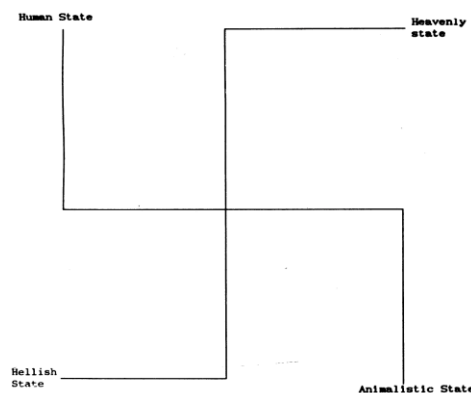


Fig. 3.3 Four directions of the mental state in living beings.



I stumbled across Mardia's book when my mother gave me a second-hand copy as a present. One of the great charms of second-hand books is, of course, the traces such books often bear of the lives of their former owners. Tucked into the pages of this particular volume, I found two items that open a small window onto late twentieth-century British Jain life. One is a pamphlet, *Live and Help to Live: Questions & Answers on Jainism*, published by the Leicester-based Jain Samāj and written by Paul Marett, an English lawyer, academic and writer on Jainism, now deceased, who was personally acquainted with Mardia and wrote the foreword to *The Scientific Foundations of Jainism*. The pamphlet contains statements that suggest a neo-orthodox bent. For example, the final question is '[H]ow does Jainism fit into the modern world?' In his answer, Marett states that '[t]o many thinkers Jainism stands up better than many religions to the discoveries of modern science.'

The other insert in Mardia's book is perhaps slightly more surprising. It is a beautiful devotional image of the Hindu goddess Kanyakumari. The presence of such an object in a Jain context suggests Banks' heterodoxy. Banks notes the inclusive nature of this tendency, which allows Jains to visit Hindu temples without seeing any contradiction between this and their Jain faith. Heterodoxy's inclusivity also enables it to incorporate features of orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy. By contrast, some of Banks' informants were almost exclusive adherents of neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodox Leicester Jains were critical of both orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Kanyakumari's insertion within Mardia's book illustrates the ability of heterodoxy to incorporate features of neo-orthodoxy. The fact that the former owner possessed Mardia's book in the first place, together with the inclusion of Marett's pamphlet, suggests that they were a Jain and, moreover, deeply interested in their religion. At the same time, their spirituality was inclusive enough for them to revere Kanyakumari and to see no contradiction in placing her image within the book, perhaps as a bookmark.

Although the most neo-orthodox Jains would disapprove of Jain reverence for Kanyakumari, I see a paradox here. Neo-orthodoxy is itself founded on a radical form of inclusiveness. In accordance



with the Jain doctrine of *anekāntavāda* ‘many-sidedness’, neo-orthodoxy acknowledges the value of Western science and embraces scientific discourse as a vehicle for the eternal truths of Jainism. I see this as a modern manifestation, facilitated by globalisation, of an openness and a flexibility that have long characterised Jainism. We can consider, for example, Haribhadra Yākinīputra’s engagement with non-Jain frameworks such as Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* in his eighth-century *Yoga-dṛṣṭi-samuccaya*. *The Scientific Foundations of Jainism* reflects a similar mixture of faithfulness to tradition and appreciative incorporation of tools developed outside that tradition.

