BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Conflicting Descriptions of Jaina Monks in Indo-Persian Sources: Between Nonviolence, Magic and Snake-Charming

From the late 16th century to the early 19th century, Jaina monks were a recurring subject in various Indo-Persian historiographical and ethnographical writings. Persophone writers noted the importance of nonviolence for Jaina monks and described their concern with protecting all forms of life and the various practices this imperative entailed. But they were often also disparaged as repellent atheists and were sometimes associated with dark magical practices and in one particular case with serpent charming. In this paper I wish to present a comparative survey of these accounts and an analysis of the contradictory perception of Jaina monks in Indo-Persian sources.

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From the Telling of Stories to the Teaching of Jain Doctrine: Religious Discourses in Long Medieval Narratives

To preserve and transmit their tradition, the Jainas have developed an abundant literature between the beginnings of our era and the turn of the 1st millennium. To begin with, they have the canon and its exegesis with various layers of commentaries in verse or in prose, in Sanskrit or in Prakrit. They have also at their disposal treasuries of short stories illustrating such or such point of the Jaina doctrine in keeping with the canonical tradition of examples and parables). But also, less obviously, they can draw on long narrative works written in a variety of languages and styles. Indeed, the latter category of works is better known for its literary refinements (complex structures, metric virtuosity, lexical richness) that monks display thanks to their intensive training in the art of writing. However, these works also contain long religious discourses teaching the virtues of Jainism (non-violence, non-theft, sincerity, and other Jain principles) that are integrated into the narrative but which, though integrated into the narration, have often be overlooked in adaptations as well as in literary studies insofar they were felt as an interruption in the narrative plot. However, these religious discourses seem to be one of the causes of the success of these texts, as is shown by the parallel effort to have them copied at gold prices at the same time as the canonical texts. One can explore, therefore, what role these works played in the transmission of the Jaina tradition and what reasons motivated their religious importance.

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Rhetoric of Violence, Violent Rhetoric: The Sultanate and Mughal Era Flourishing of Digambara Jainism

Today, the Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) and Mughal (1526-1857 CE) era is often thought of as a period when the Digambara tradition singularly faced decline and hostility. As assumedly parallel processes, the arising of the bhaṭṭāraka lineages which formed the backbone of Digambara Jainism throughout this period on the one hand, and the disappearance of naked muni on the other, are conceived of as direct consequences of Islamic rule. Muslim rulers are depicted as fanatical zealots, pursuing a theologically motivated policy of temple destruction, and harassing and persecuting naked Digambara muni. As prevalent in popular understanding as un-nuanced, such tropes and the related historiographical periodization often spill over into scholarship, notably in the conception of the late medieval and early modern period as a distinct, and defective, ‘bhaṭṭāraka era’, unfavorably contrasted to both the contemporary ‘muni revival’ and an imagined golden, ancient and early medieval past.

Evidence of actual persecution of ascetic and lay communities and of violence other than localized and probably mostly politically motivated temple destructions is however very scant. Ample counter-evidence instead shows that rather than withering away, the Digambara tradition flourished in the Sultanates and Mughal Empire. Recent research brings to light the continuity of the so-called 'bhaṭṭāraka era' with both the earlier and the later Digambara tradition. A prime element here is the perception of early modern bhaṭṭārakas as ideal, venerable Digambara renouncers in the eyes of their contemporary devotees. Well into the Mughal era, the bhaṭṭāraka saṅghas furthermore also featured renouncers of the ācārya and muni ranks, generally thought to have disappeared in the Sultanate period. Instead of constituting a mid-way position between ascetic and layperson, the bhaṭṭāraka rank was added at the very top of the ascetic hierarchy.

Another argument for a revision of Digambara historiography is found in the distribution of the bhaṭṭāraka lineages proliferating throughout late medieval and early modern Western and Central India. Instead of fleeing from them, the frequently shifting bhaṭṭāraka seats were often attracted to Sultanate and Mughal capitals and centers. Praśasti and other sources also commonly hold attestations of Muslim rulers’ benign relations with Digambara renouncers and laymen, indicating the former’s typically pragmatic rather than theologically driven policies. Renouncers were received and honored at court; laymen were active as successful businessmen in the ‘Muslim polities’ or worked in state administration. Manuscript culture was thriving, and temple construction boomed, icons consecrated during the early modern period still populating most Digambara temples of sufficient antiquity.

The current rhetoric about the Digambara tradition’s late medieval and early modern era, then, does perhaps more violence to the past than that this past was actually violent.

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The Hunter, the Bow, and the Arrow: Intentional Harm in the Early Jain Canon

The Bhagavatī-sūtra offers an early concept of mental intention as it relates to harm. The text not only describes ārambhiyā-kiriyā, that is, actions (kiriyā) that are premeditated, deliberate, or purposive, but also distinguishes actions as physical, instrumental, hostile, tormenting, and murderous, indicative of distinct mental intentions or dispositions. Distinguishing these various kinds of harmful actions represents a multiplication of the meaning of ārambha, or violence arising from any physical action, as described in the early strata of the Ācārāṇga-sūtra. Among the many examples in the Bhagavatī-sūtra, the text offers an instructive lesson regarding a hunter, his bow, and his arrow, each committing distinct forms of violence when aimed at an animal. In this paper, I will examine the multiplication of diverse actions involved in violence described in the Bhagavatī-sūtra, paying special attention to those related to mental intention, and explore possible reasons for this conceptual development.

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The Non-Violence of Non-Violence

“He who knows the violence done for the sake of special objects, knows what is free from violence; he who knows what is free from violence, knows the violence done for special objects” (Āyāraṅga 1.3.1.4). The apparent paradox, recognised in this and other canonical passages, that cognition of violence is a condition and hence integral part of a religious system aiming at the maximisation of non-violence, can be explained, with the help of the theory of autopoietic systems of N. Luhmann, as a consequence of the fact that all social systems constitute themselves through selective self-referential mechanisms, based on binary codes, programmes and routines, which constitute the elements of a system that function as its parts. The paper presents a theoretical interpretation of the Jaina tradition, arguing that, as a social system, the Jaina tradition reproduces itself with reference to a combination of an ontological code, jīva/ajīva, and a moral code, ahimsā/hiṃsā, implemented through programmes, that is, criteria, for the allocation of objects and processes to one or to the other side of the constitutive distinctions directrices. Jaina philosophy itself highlights the significance of binary categorisations. Only with the development of the ahimsā-reductionism, predicated on the mushrooming of synonymous (a-) hiṃsā-words, described by K. Bruhn and C. Caillat, and the crystallisation of a central binary code in medieval times, the Jaina tradition could develop into a stable autopoietic social system, because all social systems are predicated on reductions of complexity. The paper argues that the self-differentiation of ahimsā through processes of semantic duplication and self-reference was the condition for the development of religious codes and programmes for their implementation, which still stabilise the Jaina system over time. As a social system, the Jaina religion is a relative late development.

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Violence and Humour in Hemacandra

Violence can be humorous and humour can be violent. We know this from our own reaction as spectators of violent acts depicted in films and cartoons. We also know how humorous badinage can develop into bullying and physical violence. Humour is often a surrogate for violence. Hemacandra in his vast epic, the Trīṣaṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra, and its appendix, the Sthaviravālīcaritra, describes many acts of violence, of which some are surely intended to evoke a humorous response in his audience. Other acts of violence described by Hemacandra, however, are intended to evoke feelings of horror, disgust and also sympathy for those suffering the violence. My paper will discuss the different registers of violence in Hemacandra in the light of some recent philosophical and anthropological discussions of humour and violence. The paper will also survey Hemacandra’s depictions of violence and humour within their setting of the Jain universe in an attempt to see if Hemacandra’s nuanced approach to hiṃsā is mirrored by a similarly nuanced approach to ahiṃsā.

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(Non)Violence in Stone and Clay: A Consideration of Jain Lithic Inscriptions, Relief Images, and Ceramic Vessels

The granitic hills around the ancient capital city of Madurai were once home to communities of Jain monks. The names of some of these monks and their patrons are engraved on the exterior and interior surfaces of the caves and beneath stone relief images of tīrthaṅkaras that adorn the granite escarpments. Archaeological survey of these hills in 2016 also revealed remnants of various ceramic vessels dated stylistically to the Early Historic to Medieval periods, i.e. contemporary with Jain occupation of the hills. This paper explores the histories of particular lithic inscriptions, relief images, and ceramic vessels in the lives of Jain monks and the contrast between the violence inherent in their creation and the vows of non-violence taken by Jain monastics and laity.

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The Visualizing of Torture and Pain: Depictions of Violence in Jaina Art

Although non-violence is one of the essential principles of Jainism, violence is a recurring topic in Jaina art. The numerous depictions of the hells included in manuscripts of cosmological texts since the 17th/18th century in particular show violence, torture and pain. Most of these illustrations rely on an established visual language; this paper, however, will present a hitherto unpublished manuscript that contains illustrations deviating from the familiar visual language in multiple ways. It furthermore raises the question how the representation of violence – apart from the mere deterrence – may have served to reinforce the doctrine of non-violence in Jainism.

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Teachings on Violence in Jain Prabandhas: The Tragic Death of King Ajayapāla

According to the Jain chroniclers who authored the corpus of Prabandha texts, the famous Jain king Kumārapāla (r. 1143-1173) was succeeded by his nephew Ajayapāla (r. 1173-1176), under whose reign the Jain faith dramatically fell out of favour. Indeed Ajayapāla is said to have persecuted Jain monks and demolished Jain temples. Whatever traumatic this period of disgrace could have been for the Jain community, it was at least shortened by the premature death of the king, who was murdered by members of the royal household after three years of rule. What seems interesting in this episode is that it reveals the dual purpose of the Jain Prabandhas recording historical events on one hand and imparting moral lessons on the other hand. As a matter of fact, there are in the accounts of the murder enough details that attest its historicity, but I will analyse in a second time how that violent demise came to be interpreted as a perfect illustration of the way violent actions eventually find their retribution.

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Ahiṁsā Praśikṣaṇa: A Socio-Religious Initiative

The generic term “praśikṣaṇa” refers to educating someone in a particular subject, or training or equipping someone with a certain skill. It is a common term that applies to all sorts of learning. When praśikṣaṇa is associated with a religious, ethical or social agenda such as ahiṁsā (non-injury or non-harm), it adapts to this specific purpose. Ācārya Mahāprajña (1920-2010) - a prominent Jain leader - initiated the ahiṁsā praśikṣaṇa in 1991 to promote nonviolence and interfaith harmony. The ahiṁsā praśikṣaṇa was a socio-religious initiative that employed a four-fold strategy: 1. studying the theory and history of nonviolence (ahiṁsā: paddhatti-aura itihāsa), 2. transformation of the heart (hṛdaya-parivartana), 3. attitudinal change (dṛṣṭikoṇa-parivartana), 4. change in lifestyle (jīvanaśailī-parivartana). It is argued that ahiṁsā-praśikṣaṇa is a modernised outlook of the cardinal Jaina principle of ahiṁsā. This paper explores the innovative ways in which the guru can transform the ideology and conduct
of the masses without religious conversion or a change in religious and cultural identity through the use of intermediate goals related to social and moral well-being. I term this sort of mass engagement of the guru ‘engaged spirituality’.

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Pilgrimage and Storytelling: Jain Adaptation to Muslim Rule during the Delhi Sultanate.

This paper examines how the 14th century Jain author Kakkasūri of the Upakeśagaccha in his Nābhīnandanaṇajinoddhāraprabandha views violence and non-violence as a natural part of a predetermined cosmic scheme involving religion, warfare, and the human condition.

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84 Lakh Yonis: The Jaina Doctrine of 8.4 Million Embodiments

The doctrine addresses the totality of possible objects for (a)himsā, i.e., all life forms recognized in the Jaina cosmos. The Śāt Lākh Śūtra enumerates such places of birth/origin (yoni) as follows:

“There are seven lakh (places of origin for) earth bodies, seven lakh water bodies, seven lakh fire bodies, seven lakh air bodies. Plants with a single body have ten lakh (places of origin), plants with common bodies fourteen lakh. Beings with two senses have two lakh, with three senses two lakh, with four senses two lakh. Heavenly beings have four lakh, hellish beings four lakh, animals with five senses four lakh, humans fourteen lakh. In this way there are 84 lakh (places of origin)” (Pañca Pratikramaṇa, ed. S. Sanghavi, Āgrā 1921, p. 80).

The doctrine thus conceives a quintessentially animated phenomenal world, about which we have to be very careful, if we want our own embodiments ever to end.

The paper focuses on the aspect of the doctrine, which fixes the number of life forms to 8.4 million. The first part gives an overview of attestations in literatures of the Digambaras, the Śvetāmbaras and other South Asian ascetic traditions. The second part discusses alternatives for the age of the doctrine and hypotheses on the history of its development.

It is argued that the doctrine evolved from independent investigations in the nature of yoni on the one hand and in the nature of living beings on the other, and that results from these two divergent hermeneutic contexts were merged in the intellectual tradition, which is represented by Devanandin’s Sarvārthasiddhi.

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What To Do About All This Killing? Locating Jain Tantra in Medieval Indian Political and Social Life

The study of Jain “tantric” works produced between the 10th and 14th centuries has emerged as a new area of scholarly interest in recent years. However, the study of tantra in the Jain tradition remains fraught partly because modern scholarship has portrayed “tantra” as redolent of violent and antinomian practices that provide “shortcuts” to liberation (mokṣa), which are antithetical to the popular understanding of Jainism as essentially about practicing ahimsā by cultivating ascetic self-control. Additionally, contemporary scholarly models have hampered the study of tantra’s place in the social and political worlds of pre-modern South Asia. While the influential work of Alexis Sanderson has created valuable tools for understanding the corpus of tantric literature, it has yet to account for why ostensibly Śaiva tantric texts served as compelling models for such widespread “copying” by Buddhists and Jains.

This paper proposes a new approach to tantric studies that attends to the religious, social and political contexts in which tantric texts and practices operated. Using the works on rituals and mantras by the fourteenth-century Kharatara Gaccha ācārya Jinaprabhasūri (ca. 1261-1333) as a case study, it proposes viewing Jain tantric works through emic definitions of the genre and as part of a strategy of “self-fashioning” monks as leaders of mendicant orders and as leading intellectuals in the broader Śvetāmbara tradition. The paper points out the limitations of previous approaches to understanding tantra and proposes a new approach to the study of tantric texts and practices that views them as “technologies of power” contested among such figures in their capacities as religious, social, and political elites. Thus, we may write a social history of tantra in medieval India that contextualizes practices, such as the cultivation of mantras capable of killing, that have left many contemporary Jains uncomfortable and scholars puzzled about the inclusion of such works in the corpus of medieval Jain literature.

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Justifying Violence & Redistributing Blame: The Implications of Devaprabhasūri’s Narrative Choices in the Pāṇḍavacarita

This paper will explore how the Jain author Devaprabhasūri in his Pāṇḍavacarita (1213 CE) balances the occasional extraordinary faithfulness to the Mahābhārata attributed to Vyāsa with his own original narrative choices that justify and redistribute blame for violence. Since the 8th century AD, Jains have adapted the narrative of the Mahābhārata, incorporating the story of the Pāṇḍavas within works of Jain universal history. With his Pāṇḍavacarita, the Śvetāmbara author Devaprabhasūri was among the first Jain authors to compose Jain Mahābhāratas in which the story of the Pāṇḍavas is the main narrative as opposed to being merely an episode within Jain universal history. In his Jain reimagining of the Pāṇḍavas’ exile at the court of Virāṭa and the slaying of Kīcaka, Devaprabhasūri cites lines found in the Critical Edition verbatim and includes small details with such a frequency as to evince his intimate awareness of Mahābhārata manuscript traditions. Yet Devaprabhasūri’s fidelity to MBh verses
stands in stark contrast to several of his own narrative inventions. The Jain author’s narrative changes temper the violence of the 'original' and provide further justification for violence, distributing blame among gender lines.

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