

DANAM CONFERENCE 2008

SESSION JDP

Theme: **The Intersection of Religion & Culture in the Lived Tradition of Jainism**

Organizer: **Anne Valley**, University of Ottawa

Presiding: **Stephen Quinlan**, University of Ottawa

Panelists: **Kyle Green**, University of Ottawa, **Ellen Gough**, Yale University, **Smita Kothari**,
University of Toronto, **Tom Pokinko**, McGill University, **Andrea Jain**, Rice University,
Victoria Gibb, University of Ottawa

PANEL PROPOSAL

This panel addresses the interaction between religion and culture and seeks the exploration, analysis and interpretation of the interrelations between the Jaina religion and its popular, lived expressions.

The academic study of religion has until recently confined itself to textual exegesis, the analysis of hierarchical structures and the religious elites who populate them. But religion is a part of the human project for making sense of and shaping experience. The attempt to impart meaning¹ to life is ongoing, and is carried out in daily activities². For scholars intent on revealing these multiple sites of meaning making, "religion is best approached... by meeting men and women at this daily task, in all the spaces of their experience" (Orsi, 1997: 7).

The Lived Religion in America project claims that "while we know a great deal about the history of theology and (say) church and state, we know next-to-nothing about religion as practices and precious little about the everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women" (Hall, ed., 1997: vii). Scholars of religion must aim toward an understanding of the messy, multiple and contradictory meanings and experiences that constitute individual lives. Robert Orsi, a scholar working within the Lived Religion in America school, encapsulates the central idea in the following words:

Workplaces, homes, and streets - as well as churches, temples, shrines, class meetings, and other more immediately recognizable sites of religious activity - are the places where humans make something of the worlds they have found themselves thrown into, and, in turn, it is through these subtle, intimate, quotidian actions on the world that meanings are made, known, and verified. "Religion" is best approached ... by meeting men and women at this daily task, in all the spaces of their experience. AV [The concern is with] what people do with religious practice, what they make with it of themselves and their worlds. ... Religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life (1997: 7).

This panel seeks to take up this "Lived Traditions" challenge and examine the intersections as well as the contradictions between normative canonical Jainism and lived practices. It eschews the self-contained research silos wherein human practices are circumscribed into distinct secular and religious arenas. Instead, it addresses the convergence of the religio-political-socio-economic in contemporary Jaina communities, and queries how Jaina-s (in India as well as in North America) transmit cohesive world views that are flexible enough to accommodate deep-rooted contradictions among their religious and political, economic commitments. For example, we ask "How do Jains maintain a commitment to nonattachment and renunciation in a context of plenty? How do Jaina-s maintain their commitment to ahimsa in a context of unavoidable hinsa? In what way can Jain education being considered 'Jain'? In what ways are Jain gender relations

influenced by religious forces? In what ways are Jain business practices “Jain”? In what ways are they influenced by religious forces?

In sum, this panel explores the convergences and divergences between the normative and the lived traditions within Jainism, and queries whether or not religio-cultural forces propel Jains toward particular political, economic, gendered etc. behaviors.

ABSTRACTS

Kyle Green, MA Student, University of Ottawa

Mahavira's Unveiling: Inaccessibility and Schwartz' God's Phallus in Digambara Jain Iconography

Howard Schwartz argues in *God's Phallus* that Jewish men have a feminized position with God and that the entailing homoerotic dilemma engenders an aversion to the depiction of a naked supreme being. This aversion complicates the male relationship with God and problematizes the concept of masculinity in a patriarchal system. In Digambara Jainism, iconographic nudity of the Jina-s and clothing as a hindrance to liberation are fundamental ideological factors. However, the Jina-s as inaccessible is also central to Digambara ideology, whereas Jewish men can be directly impacted by and have a personal relationship with God. Through an investigation of the Digambara community in terms of lived tradition and the practical ramifications of their unique iconography in relation to Schwartz' analysis of Jewish devotion, my paper will revise the *God's Phallus* theory. I will argue that it is not the scripturally supported feminization of men in patriarchal monotheistic traditions that engenders an aversion to genital iconography, but the accessibility of the god.

Ellen Gough, PhD candidate, Yale University

Jain Understandings of the Power of the Word: Interpretations of the Rsi Mandala Yantra

In recent decades, western Indologists have produced a wealth of studies on the uses of sacred utterances (mantras) and their pictorial representations, yantras. This scholarship, however, has shed very little light on Jains' uses of mantras and yantras, with academics perhaps agreeing with A. Padoux's contention that "Jain Mantraśāstra does not differ in its essentials from the Hindu version and is not very developed." This paper will examine the history and philosophy of one Jain yantra in particular, the Rsi Mandala Yantra, to assess the validity of this statement. While recognizing how some aspects of Jain mantraśāstra do belie classical Jain philosophy, conforming more to brahmanical teachings, it will illustrate how Jain mantras and yantras still maintain their own long histories and unique components, in the lived tradition of Jainism.

Smita Kothari, PhD candidate, University of Toronto

Revival and Reform of Jaina Yoga – The Preksha Dhyana Movement

According to the Terapanthis, a Svetambara Jaina sect, Jaina yoga comes directly from Mahavira, the twenty-fourth *Tirthankara*, and was lost over time. The first major written work on Jaina yoga, according to some scholars, is Haribhadra's *Yogadīśamuccaya* (8th century C.E.). There is a lineage in Jaina yoga from Mahāvira, through the ages with Haribhadra, Hemacandra (12th century), and from the late twentieth century to the present day, Preksha Dhyana. Preksha Dhyana is a lived tradition, not only amongst the Terapanthis, but also amongst other Indians who are drawn to its physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits. The movement is also gathering momentum amongst Jains in the U.K. and pockets of the United States. This paper will explore

how Acarya Mahaprejna, the current leader of the Terapanthi sect has revived and reformed Mahavira's yoga and made it relevant in the twenty-first century. Preksha Dhyana claims to be transforming lives through its emphasis on education of the young, its approach towards a scientific way of living without stress, and its accent on *ahimsa* non-violence. This paper will explore the strategies through which Preksha Dhyana is being marketed as a modern spiritual therapy for the 21st century.

Tom Pokinko, PhD candidate, McGill University

Some Contemporary Views on Jaina Values and Conduct Among Indian Lay Jaina-s from Jaipur and Delhi

The findings in this paper are based on interviews conducted in the summer of 2007 with seven lay Jaina-s from Jaipur and Delhi (three men, four women; ages ranging from early twenties to late sixties). These interviews form part of a larger project that investigates contemporary lay Jaina views on the ethics of violence and non-violence, with a particular focus on the issue of self-defense (local and national levels). The present paper serves as a foundation for this discussion by examining more broadly the views of my interviewees on issues related to Jaina values and conduct. The questions I am interested in are: what is the main Jaina value or values according to my interviewees? Do Jaina values impact the social sphere in any way, and if so how? What is the best form of Jaina conduct given these values? What does this say about the way contemporary Indian lay Jainas imagine society? In analyzing the position of my interviewees, I note similarities and differences from both the medieval (predominantly monastic) Jaina textual position and the position of a group of contemporary Terapanthi nuns, whom I also interviewed at the same time.

Andrea Jain, PhD candidate, Rice University

Health, Well-Being, and the Ascetic Ideal: Terapanthi Jainism in the Context of Late Capitalism

As a study on globalization and transnationalism, this paper will address the transformations in religious ideas as they continually adapt to new socio-economic cultural contexts. In the Western culture of late capitalism, new forms of religiosity result from a process of adaptation, appropriation, and syncretism, all in response to new cultural desires and trends. This paper explores the interaction between Jain religion and the shifting socio-economic contexts in which it exists. I will investigate the interrelations between Jain Terapanthi religious practice and late-capitalist culture in North America. I will discuss changes in language about the human body and health, particularly with regard to yoga, food, and sexuality. Terapanthi Jainism, in the diasporic context of North America, moderates the traditional Jain ascetic ideal and challenges its radical dualism between body and soul. Resembling processes in New Age religiosity, the Terapanthi invokes yoga and dietary regulation as tools for better health and well being, which are made priorities of religious practice; however, this amounts to a cosmetic change insofar as it takes place on a practical level. The ultimate truth remains dualistic, and a body-negating asceticism maintains its central role in the construction of the path towards spiritual liberation.

Victoria Gibb, University of Ottawa

'The Coldest of all Religions': Late British Colonial Interpretations of Jaina Dharma

The formal British presence in India during the period of the Raj, from 1858 to 1947, necessitated interactions with the varied religious communities that composed the vibrant framework of the

country. In many regards, the traditions of India were substantively different from anything the British had ever encountered previously, and as a result, attempts were made by contemporaries to understand and contextualize what they saw. Diaries, letters, and editorials of Raj-era Britons, as well as journal articles and books by Indologists of the same period shed light on the complex dynamic that existed between Britons and Jains. The sources that I employ range from the personal letters of the wife of a viceroy of India, to a British scholar who wrote some of the earliest definitive sources on Jainism. Through careful examination of late colonial sources several pervading issues come to light. Using specific quotations that highlight broad interpretive problems on the part of the British, I intend to draw conclusions about the nature of British colonial analyses of the Jain religion. Issues of caste identity among the Jains, as well as the nature of the Jinas and gods are examples of complex matters within the Jain community that were interpreted in unique ways by Britons. The same can be said of the “gastro-politics” of the community and for Jain self-identification as Hindu. An examination of the development of Jain historiography illustrates the shift in thinking that occurred as a result of prolonged study of the Jain community. Final conclusions on the part of the British scholars also reveal the nature of their prejudices. In this essay I plan to argue the two following points: firstly, in a number of instances the Jain faith was explicated with a fairly accurate and emic perspective by the British scholars who encountered it, and secondly, that when misinterpretations did arise—as evidenced by personal accounts, newspaper articles, and earlier scholarship—it can be seen as the result of discrepancies between the normative and the lived traditions of the Jains in conjunction with the pre-existing Christian interpretive biases of the British