

# **Ecology of Love and Avoidance Negotiating the Boundaries Between World-Affirmation and World-Renunciation**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the intersection between religion and environmental ethics in South Asian traditions, namely that of Jainism. Religious traditions, as they confront the challenges of modernity, are redefining their traditional mores and narratives in ways that are contemporary and relevant. One of the most striking ways Jains are accomplishing this is by interpreting the self as inherently “ecological”, and applying “Western” animal rights discourse to traditional Jain doctrine. This study will explore how such new understandings are being established by members of these “living” communities, and argue for the re-evaluation of such reified concepts as “ecology” and “religion.”

## **Introduction**

Contemporary India is constantly negotiating the boundaries between the “old” and the “new”. Streets are flanked on each side by temples that once stood on the highest ground, but are now overtaken by immense shopping malls – symbols of consumer society. In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell asserts that the largest building within a society is analogous to what is accorded utmost importance within a given culture.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in contemporary India, with the exception of the Taj Mahal, which has, in any case, become the site of an increasing tourist industry, the largest buildings are the shopping malls. The polluted air and crowded streets have therefore created a longing among many contemporary Indians for – what is now perceived

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<sup>1</sup> *The Power of Myth*. Perf. Joseph Campbell, Bill Moyers, PBS, 1988.

as – the utopian past. The religious traditions of South Asia find themselves at the centre of these negotiations.

From 1996 through 1998, conferences on the subject of religion and ecology were held at the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions.<sup>2</sup> These conferences led to the publication of massive volumes such as *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water* and *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*. These volumes endeavoured to resolve the tensions between scholars arguing against the inherent eco-friendliness of South Asian religious traditions and academics arguing for the possibility of an ecological hermeneutic within Jain and Hindu doctrines. Indeed, religious traditions, as they confront the challenges of modernity, are redefining their traditional mores and narratives in ways that appear – and are, for several members of these communities, contemporary and relevant.

For Jains, the ecological crisis has given rise a re-evaluation of its traditional *mokṣa-marga*, an ideology which entails complete renunciation of the world of matter and, therefore, of nature. This paper, much in the same way as the above-mentioned sources, seeks to explore the ways in which this is accomplished, and how these new understandings are being established and understood by Jains and by scholars of religion. It also endeavours to demonstrate the fluidity of Jain religious doctrines through a discussion of Orthodox and diaspora Jain experiences of nature both in India and North America. In essence, I argue that the diasporic emphasis on world or “nature-affirmation” and the Orthodox emphasis on world-renunciation, or the avoidance of nature, are both “Jain.” It will be important to remember that, in keeping with Robert Orsi’s manifesto against typologies and reifying boundaries, I will be examining the lived tradition of Jains, both in India and abroad, in order to avoid any separation between authentic or

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life* (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass Publishers, 2006), v.

“ideal” and inauthentic or “real” Jainism.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, those who describe themselves as “Jain” engage in their ideal and real Jainism, and so I will be approaching the material with this standpoint in mind.

Nevertheless, it is important to discuss what is commonly labelled “Orthodox” and “Popular” Jainism in order to understand the ways in which certain scholars, arguing against the possibility of a Jain environmental ethic, draw their boundaries between “Jainism” and “Ecology.” In other words, I discuss the reified notions of “Jainism” and “Ecology” as they are commonly understood by these aforementioned scholars. Moreover, a discussion of the ideals of Jainism requires an examination of Jainism as a dynamic and context-sensitive religion. Hence, I examine how Jains in India and North America negotiate their boundaries between old world Jainism and the contemporary issues surrounding the environment.

During my stay in India in the summer of 2007, as a student at the International Summer School for Jaina Studies, I had the opportunity to examine and engage with Jainism as it is traditionally lived and Jainism as it is “packaged”. While Jain scholars and religious representatives from Jaipur, Delhi, and the United States presented students with the “public,” and thus Orthodox, face of Jainism during formal presentations, “other” Jains, both lay and ascetic, from India and abroad, offered descriptions of Jainism that would have been an anathema to a scholar who held dogmatically to an “authentic” and Orthodox Jainism.

### **The Ascetic Ideal: Renouncing a Violent World**

According to the ideals of Jainism, we are all souls (*jīvs*). All that is alive has a soul, including animals, insects, plants, water, fire, bacteria, and so on. Moreover, Jains argue that, though we are individual souls, we all have the same kind of soul. However, some are more tarnished than others and, therefore, incarnate

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<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 156.

differently (e.g., animal body, insect body, man's body, woman's body, etc). This idea corresponds to the Jain belief in cyclical time, whereby the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth leads to various incarnations and embodiments that depend on the accumulation or the shedding of karmic particles. These karmic particles are believed to be a physical substance – a kind of “sticky” material known as *ghatiya karma* – that adheres to the soul and modifies it.<sup>4</sup>

The above-mentioned cycle of death and rebirth, also known as *samsara*, is not uncommonly referred to by renouncers as the “vomit” from which all souls must escape.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the use of this word denotes a negative interpretation of the world of matter. Furthermore, traditional Jain doctrine asserts that it is only possible to escape this world from a human body. In fact, the liberated ones, also known as *Tīrthankaras* (ford-makers) and *Jinas* (conquerors), are said to be “a human being, born of human parents.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, only human beings are considered capable of achieving liberation within institutionalized Jainism. Among the Digambar sect of Jainism, it is only human males who are considered capable of achieving the ideal in Jainism (e.g., *mokṣa*), since it is believed that only men are capable of undergoing the most excruciating forms of austerities (*tapas*) for taming the body and burning off karma. Women and animals, on the other hand, are said to be incapable of achieving liberation within this sect, because they are more susceptible to the passions (*kashayas*) than men.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Digambara spiritual leaders (*acharyas*), such as Kundakunda, have argued that women are incapable of achieving spiritual liberation because of their close association with the world of matter due to their bodies. The same is true, of course, for animals. Nevertheless, though important Jain

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<sup>4</sup> Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass Publishers, 2001), 107-133.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Vallely, *Personal Conversation*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, April 11, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Jaini, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jaini, 39.

scriptures dictate that men are superior to women in their spiritual endeavours, Jain women, both lay and ascetic, have also demonstrated that they are not “passive victims” of this patriarchal system. In fact, Jain women renegotiate the boundaries as imposed on them between their bodies and liberation by the patriarchal doctrines of Jainism. While Digambara doctrine, for instance, denies women the possibility of reaching spiritual liberation, contemporary Jain nuns do not perceive themselves as inferior to their male counterparts. Actually, many Digambara sadhvis perceive the sexualisation of the female body as a non-issue since they understand the body to be simply a tool that aids one on the path to *mokṣa*.<sup>8</sup> Hence, there is no “perceived inferiority” because the body is, for the sadhvis, transient.

As this example regarding the agency of Jain women shows, when discussing ideological concepts within any religious tradition, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that doctrine does not always coincide with practical life. In fact, as I shall demonstrate shortly, Jain doctrine has been reinterpreted by several Western scholars and members of the Jain community as a way of modernizing the Jain tradition so as to make it relevant to contemporary issues such as the environmental crisis and the animal rights movement. However, before delving any deeper into these issues, I will discuss certain key ideals as set forth by Jain religious doctrine.

### **A Religion of Prohibitions: “Quarantining Life”**

Since Jainism is a *śramanic* or renouncer tradition, it is not surprising that the code of conduct for lay and ascetic Jains has emphasized avoidance, rather than affirmation, of worldly life. In fact, the five major vows of ascetics (*mahavratas*) and laypersons (*anuvratas*), namely *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-possession), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), and *brahmacarya* (celibacy), have been defined

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Vallely, “These Hands Are Not for Henna.” in *Women’s Renunciation in South Asia: Nuns, Yoginis, Saints, and Singers*, eds. Meena Khandelwal, Sondra L. Hausner, and Ann Grodzins Gold, 224 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

negatively, which further emphasizes the assertion that Jainism is, ultimately, a world-renouncing rather than world-affirming tradition. As Vallely asserts, “elaborate practices of non-violence are not so much about minimizing death or saving life [as it is in the case of Western animal rights movements and organizations concerned with the welfare of animals, such as PETA and the SPCA] as about keeping life “at bay” and essentially amount to an attempt at the avoidance of life.”<sup>9</sup> Though Vallely does acknowledge the multifariousness of Jain practice in her article, she asserts that Jainism is traditionally perceived as a world-renouncing tradition. Yet, she does not accept the argument that a world-affirming Jainism is any less authentic than a world-renouncing Jainism – and rightly so.

Of course, traditional Jain doctrine does consider the fact that those who live “in the world”, namely the Jain laity, must engage with the world and, therefore, commit “necessary” acts of violence for their own survival and for the survival of the Jain tradition. Without the laity’s willingness to remain in the world, which allows them to prepare food, the ascetic order could not exist since they depend on the laity for physical sustenance.\* Therefore, since renouncers have taken the great vows, which focus on *absolute* non-violence to all living beings, they depend on the laity to be less than ideal in practice.

Thus, nature, or the world of matter, is perceived as a obstacle to the soteriological goal since “the emphasis throughout Jainism has consistently been upon the danger that nature causes man through his interaction with it and his careless propensity, ultimately dependent upon *karma*, to cause violence.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly, the logic of a soteriological tradition, which has as its ultimate goal liberation from the world of matter, would necessarily emphasize the need to avoid and, thus,

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<sup>9</sup> Anne Vallely, “The Jain Plate: The Semiotics of the Diaspora Diet.” in *South Asians in the Diaspora: Histories and Religious Traditions*, eds. Knut A. Jacobsen and P. Pratap Kumar, 12 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Dundas, “The Limits of a Jain Environmental Ethic,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple, 97 (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 2006).

to not interfere with nature – a world that would surely implicate one into the violence it commits and into committing violence oneself through harming, either intentionally or unintentionally, a living being. Therefore, *ahimsa*, or non-violence, in this case, requires detachment (*aparigraha*) from the world of bondage.

### **The Ideal and the Real: Negotiating the Boundaries between Affirmation and Renunciation**

During my research in India, the tension between ideology and practice became evident on many occasions at the *ISSJS*. I will illustrate with an example, namely the discussion between Dr. Kamini Gogri, a Jain lecturer at the *ISSJS* who is also a coordinator in Jain studies at Mumbai University, and Dr. Kamal Chand Sogani, author of several books dealing with Jain Ethics and Philosophy, regarding the possibility for non-human animals to achieve liberation. Dr. Gogri argued that the scriptures, especially Umasvāti's *Tattvartha Sūtra*, were not clear as to whether animals could gain karma. She did mention, however, that animals could never achieve liberation if they could accrue karma, since they have no possible way of burning off any residual karmas gained from their previous lives due to the nature of their bodies, and so, with this in mind, *jivs* or souls, according to Gogri, could not achieve liberation from a “beastly” body. On the other hand, Dr. Sogani argued that animals can gain karma because of their close association to *kashayas*, or passions, due to their instinctual bodies, and so he was *certain* that animals could not achieve liberation. In any case, despite their disagreements, Gogri and Sogani agreed with the idea that animals' bodies are obstructions to the entrapped souls' liberation.

This friction between Dr. Gogri and Dr. Sogani exemplifies the fact that Jainism is a lived tradition filled with the contradictions, the complexities, and the “messiness” that one would expect of a dynamic religion comprising of complex and “layered” human beings. This is precisely the problem that Orsi attempts to tackle in his examination of lived Catholicism. According to Orsi, the boundaries that are arbitrarily imposed by scholars of religion, and by religious officials, are reflections of the boundaries imposed by the use of the term “Religion,” which

has an extensive colonial history.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, he asserts that any belief or practice that stands outside, or on the margins of, the boundaries of normativity are labelled differently. The static and sterile notion of “religion,” which ignores, as Orsi puts it, “the elbowing in the pews,” has had the unfortunate effect of excluding certain “popular” practices from so-called “authentic Religion.” This critique regarding the construction of boundaries, which excludes the “dirt”<sup>12</sup> or the messiness of everyday practices is also applicable to the Jain case, whereby world-affirming practices are often labelled “not Jain” by so-called “Orthodox” Jains, while world-renouncing practices are labelled “not Jain” by those who wish to modernize their tradition (e.g., Surendra Bothara). In essence, the issue here is one of Jain identity or the question of “Who is a Jain?”

Since religion is fluid and dynamic, rather than calcified and static, I would argue that both world-affirming and world-renouncing Jains are “Jain.” Thus, the “increasingly conspicuous discourse within the diasporic community [of attempting] to position Jainism as an ecological/animal rights tradition [is both a modern and a valid interpretation of Jain doctrine].”<sup>13</sup> While I agree with Valley that contemporary Jains attempt to modernize their tradition through their syncretising of Jain doctrine and animal rights/ecological discourse, I would add that this dialogue between “old” and “new” is also occurring within the Indian context. In fact, there are three essays within Chapple’s volume on Jainism and ecology, written by Jain practitioners, which argue for the possibility of a development of a Jain environmental ethic, as well as for the inherent eco-friendliness of the Jain tradition.

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<sup>11</sup> Orsi, 157.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Valley, “The Jain Plate: The Semiotics of the Diaspora Diet,” 17.

## World-Affirming in India and Abroad: Jainism *is or can be* an Ecological Tradition – Taking Jainism into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”: Developing a “Green” Jainism

It would appear that religion has hardly anything to do with such *physical* and technical things as the environment and ecology. This is because the artificial dividing lines originally drawn between different disciplines for convenience of management have now become *barriers*.”<sup>14</sup>

The above-mentioned quote is, indeed, indicative of the tensions that exist between world-affirmation and world-renunciation within the Jain tradition. In fact, Surendra Bothara, author of *Ahimsā: The Science of Peace*, is one of many Jain scholars arguing for a modernizing of the Jain tradition. In his opinion, Jain concepts, such as *ahimsā* (nonviolence) and *aparigraha* (non-possession/non-consumption), are suggestive of the fact that Jainism was the first tradition to approach the environment and all its macro- and micro-organisms from a *scientific* and environmentalist perspective.<sup>15</sup> However, over time and place, says Bothara, these concepts, especially the notion of *ahimsā*, have lost their “original” meaning to, in turn, become institutionalized in the form of mistaken ritualism.<sup>16</sup> Hence, the current *mokṣa-marga* or renunciant ideal of Jainism, which has been propounded as authentic for centuries, is, according to Bothara, the result of centuries of “false” interpretations.

In Bothara’s view, “hard-core traditionalist[s]”<sup>17</sup> interpretations are not just erroneous because of their emphasis on a negative definition of *ahimsā* (e.g., *avoidance* of life),<sup>18</sup> they are also misguided in terms of their calcification of a dynamic concept. In fact, I would argue that, though Bothara

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<sup>14</sup> Surendra Bothara, *Ahimsā: The Science of Peace* (Jaipur: Prakrit Bharati Academy, 2004), 1.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, xxxii.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, xxii.

also places his own boundary between “old” and “new” in his attempt at modernizing and universalizing the Jain tradition, some scholars of religion studying Jainism would fit into his category of “hard-core traditionalist” because of their reification of Jain belief and practice as well as their delimitation of ecology as a Western concept. For instance, Dundas’ assertion that Jainism is not inherently ecological, because it is a *śramanic* or renouncer tradition, is part and parcel of setting boundaries between authentic and inauthentic ecology. He argues that the “soteriological path” of Jainism does not “fit the requirements of a modern, [and] ultimately secular, Western-driven agenda.”<sup>19</sup> But surely, one can ask whether ecology is solely a “Western” concept. Does it belong to “us” and not to “them”?

Other scholars, such as John Cort, argue that it is possible to *develop* a Jain environmental ethic, but that it would be “dishonest” to acquiesce to the inherent eco-friendliness of an ascetic tradition. Though Cort is open to the fact that Jainism is fluid, dynamic, complex, and “messy,” he does not do the same in regards to the concept of “Ecology.” Nonetheless, before discussing this “othering” through the reification and calcification of Jainism and Ecology, it is important to discuss the ways in which Jains in India and North America are “developing” a Jain ecology. It should become apparent, throughout this discussion, that the idea of *developing* a Jain environmental ethic stems mostly from diaspora Jains, while the idea of the *inherent* eco-friendliness is found mostly, though not exclusively, among Jains in India.

### **Young Jains of America: Ecology of Love**

Certainly, scholars specializing in the Jain tradition, especially those with a tendency to associate this tradition solely with ascetic ideals, would be surprised to come across a link to the PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) website on the Young Jains of America homepage. Indeed, a statement such as, “Khloe Kardashian's Sexy New Naked Anti-Fur Ad and Giveaway!” is definitely “out of bounds” with regards to

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<sup>19</sup> Dundas, xix.

traditional or Orthodox Jainism.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the socio-centric ideal of PETA, which puts forth an ethos of engagement with, rather than withdrawal from, “nature,” does coincide with the ethics of diaspora Jains in North America. As Valleyly asserts, “Rather than through the idiom of self-realization or the purification of the soul, ethics are being expressed through a discourse of environmentalism and animal rights [in North America].”<sup>21</sup>

Yet, she also argues that this socio-centric attitude towards nature is a recent diaspora development, which moves away from the traditional mores of Jainism as it has developed in India.<sup>22</sup> Of course, it is not unprecedented that a community espousing certain ideals prior to immigration will modify them in order to “fit in” to their new surroundings, and so one of the ways in which Jains modify their tradition is through the reinterpretation of the Jain principles of *ahimsā* (nonviolence) and *aparigraha* (non-possession) and, in turn, applying them to Western animal rights and environmental ethics discourse. This reinterpretation of Jainism as an “ecology of love,” while valid for North American Jains, especially Jain youths, is often labelled “inauthentic” by Jains espousing traditional practices and beliefs. In fact, “a number of [Toronto’s] first-generation immigrant [Jains] believe that Jainism as practised in Canada is less “authentic” than that practised in India, and readily attribute the perceived “degeneration” of Jainism outside of India to the absence of ascetics.”<sup>23</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Jain ascetics are completely restricted from committing any violence, even to the minutest life-forms, called *nigodas*, and so any form of travel, which

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<sup>20</sup> PETA: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. “Khloe Kardashian’s Sexy New Naked Anti-Fur Ad and Giveaway,” <http://www.peta.org> (accessed December 15, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Anne Valleyly, “From Liberation to Ecology: Ethical Discourses among Orthodox and Diaspora Jains,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple, 193 (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, 193.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 195.

would necessarily implicate these renunciants in involuntary violence, is strictly prohibited for those who are furthest on the path to liberation. Hence, fully initiated monks and nuns are non-existent in the diaspora, which, according to Valley, has been one factor in Jainism's development of a socio-centric over a liberation-centric ethos. Although Jainism has traditionally been concerned with *harm done to the self* through violence done to others, "for most Jain youths [in North America], violence refers principally to harm done to *others*, and *ahimsā* is primarily about alleviating the suffering of *other* living beings. Self-realization [here] is subordinate to this overarching goal."<sup>24</sup> In essence, socio-centric Jainism concerns itself with the well-being of "others," and not with the fear of accruing karma by intentionally or unintentionally harming or killing nonhuman life-forms. This certainly does explain how North American Jains were able to develop a Jain ecology that greatly resembles Western environmental ethics and the discourse of the animal rights movement.

### **Protecting Life by Avoiding Life: Jainism as *Inherently Ecological***

Since the purpose of this essay is to attempt to deconstruct any preconceived and reified notions and/or definitions of concepts such as "ecology," and to demonstrate the fluidity of the beliefs and practices of religious traditions, such as Jainism, I would argue that it is necessary to discuss the ways in which Orthodox Jains renegotiate the boundaries of ecology, as it is traditionally understood by Western scholars, in order to put forth a uniquely Jain environmental ethic. Questions, such as 'Who is an Ecologist? What does an ecologist look like? What are the ideals of ecology, and are these ideals purely Western,' which have also been applied to Western Feminism, are, indeed, relevant to this discussion. In fact, as Feminism is now understood as "feminisms," environmentalism is yet another "-ism" that must be understood as multifarious in nature. Thus, a discussion of the necessity to be open to a uniquely Jain ecology will be necessary in order to instigate a constructive "global" dialogue on the environmental crisis.

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 205.

Though Vallely asserts that there exists a significant difference between the ecology of diaspora Jains, who, especially those of the younger generation, adhere, for the most part, to Western ecological values, she also confirms my point regarding the possibility of perceiving world-renouncing Jainism as inherently ecological. She states:

In spite of their divergent views... Jainism and environmentalism do share much in common, and... Jainism has an important role to play in fostering a new social ethic. Indeed, Jain ethics (both in the diaspora and traditionally) are deeply concerned about relationships with the nonhuman environment, reflecting an ontology whereby moral value is constituted, above all else, through interactions [either by avoidance or by interference] with “nature.” Its ethical commitment to the avoidance of harm to all life-forms, however this is reasoned, offers an important restorative to views which treat nature as a mere backdrop for human activity, as are common within the Judaeo-Christian tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Though the *word* “ecology” is certainly context-sensitive, the presence of this context-sensitive *concept* in Jain doctrine is, to many Jains, obvious.

At the outset of this paper, I mentioned that many Jains argue for the inherent eco-friendliness of the Jain tradition, three of whom have written articles for Chapple’s volume on Jainism and ecology. While a discussion of all three perspectives would certainly be stimulating, I will narrow this discussion to focus solely on Sadhvi Shilapi. Indeed, as a Jain nun, she represents the ideals of Jainism, which fervently argue against any kind of interaction or interference with the natural world. Yet, as a human being, she represents the paradoxical, complex, and layered nature of us all. In her discussion of the narrative of the six *leshyas* (e.g., states of mind; see Appendix), Sadhvi Shilapi demonstrates a concern for the environment rather than for personal salvation. Traditionally, this narrative is meant to demonstrate that “through passion, desire, and hatred, the *jīva*

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, 194.

attracts karma,” and, thus, prevents one from achieving liberation.<sup>26</sup> However, Shilapi, in her version of the narrative, reveals a concern for the depletion of natural resources and the potential of traditional Jain principles, such as *ahimsa* (non-violence) and especially *aparigraha* (non-possession), to remedy this situation (see Appendix). In essence, this narrative, which was originally meant to promote non-interference in nature, has been redefined in a way that appears, and is, for several members of various Jain communities, contemporary and relevant. Indeed, by syncretising “old” world values with cutting edge issues, such as the environmental crisis, Shilapi demonstrates, what she believes to be, the *inherent* ecological nature of Jainism.

## Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have argued that several scholars specializing in Jainism, as well as Jains themselves, assert the need to develop a “Jain ecology.” Nonetheless, while some scholars argue that Jainism is inherently ecological, others do not. Those who argue that Jainism is ecological often refer to Jain concepts such as *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and to the famous Jain saying “*parasparopagraho jivanam*,” which essentially asserts the interdependence of all living beings on this planet. Though these concepts and sayings may appear to confirm the argument that this tradition is inherently ecological, other scholars, approaching the Jain tradition with a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” argue that since Jainism is ideologically concerned with individual salvation and “withdrawal from” rather than “action in”, the world, it is not inherently ecological. They argue that a soteriological tradition discouraging any attachment to physical matter, and, thus, to nature, cannot possibly put forth an ecological ethic. Nevertheless, as I have tried to demonstrate, these scholars only take into consideration the ideal of the Jain tradition – they do not consider the fact that most Jains *live in the world* and, thus, *engage* with the world. Moreover, the “live and let live” ethos of

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<sup>26</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 14.

the ideal of world renunciation could, in itself, be perceived as ecological, which therefore questions which definition of “ecology” these scholars have in mind. As Cort asserts, an open mind on the part of Jains, scholars, and environmentalists could “potentially [lead to] fruitful interchange with the principles, practices, and worldview assumptions of environmentalists [Jains, and scholars of religion].”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, just as certain contemporary Jains negotiate boundaries in an attempt to modernize their tradition, scholars specializing in the Jain tradition, as well as any scholar of religion, should keep an open mind when considering concepts such as “ecology” and “Jainism” in order to avoid any reification and, therefore, misrepresentation of the complex and lived realities of members within various religious traditions. Furthermore, though certain practices may not seem “ecological,” it is important to remember that, though the word is context-sensitive, academics in the field of religious studies should avoid drawing overly narrow boundaries that would prevent further constructive dialogue on the issue of the contemporary ecological crisis.

### *Endnote*

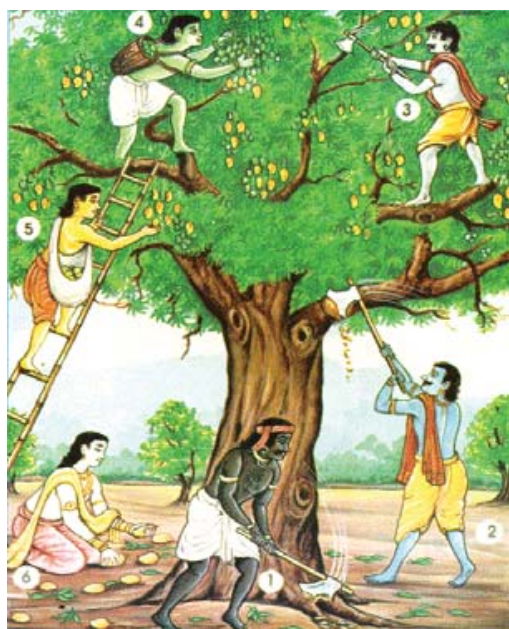
\*It is important to note, here, that laypersons and ascetics would generally not admit to the idea that the food is prepared for them (e.g., the ascetics), since it would indirectly implicate these renunciants in the violence committed in the cooking and killing of innumerable life-forms, which would, in turn, result in the ascetic accruing bad karma (*punya*).

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<sup>27</sup> John Cort, “Green Jainism? Notes and Queries toward a Possible Jain Environmental Ethic.” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple, 69 (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 2006).

### *Appendix: The Six Leshyas*

The Jain way of using resources is beautifully illustrated in the following story, which may be familiar to some readers. Once upon a time, six friends went out together. After a while, they were hungry and thirsty. They searched for food for some time and finally found a fruit tree. As they ran to the tree, the first (1) man said, “Let’s cut the tree down and get the fruit.” The second (2) one said, “Don’t cut the whole tree down, cut off a whole branch instead.” The third (3) friend said, “Why do we need a big branch?” The fourth (4) friend said, “We do not need to cut the branches, let us just climb up and get the bunches of fruit.” The fifth (5) friend said, “Why pick that much fruit and waste it? Just pick the fruit that we need to eat.” The sixth (6) friend, quietly, “There is plenty of good fruit on the ground, so let’s just eat that first.” This shows how destructive one can be if one fails to think through the consequences of one’s actions and consider possible alternatives.<sup>1</sup>



(photo from Jain World website, Jain World. “Leçons pour les juniors: Leshyas,” *JainWorld.com*  
[http://www.jainworld.com/JWFrench/jainworld/education/juniors/junles16\\_enfr.htm](http://www.jainworld.com/JWFrench/jainworld/education/juniors/junles16_enfr.htm))

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<sup>1</sup> Sadhvi Shilapi, “The Environmental and Ecological Teachings of Tirthankara Mahavira.” In *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple, 164 (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 2006).

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