



Tine Vekemans

Digital & Diaspora

Intertwined Frontiers
of Contemporary Jainism

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Preface

Over the past decade, I have asked dozens of Jain men and women a great number of questions. In turn, they gracefully and with seemingly infinite patience attempted to explain their social, cultural, and religious practices to someone from a very different background (i.e. not Jain, not migrant, not ethnically South Asian). It is perhaps not surprising that the one question I was asked most often was: “Why? Why do you find this interesting?” My cheeky answer is: “Because it is”. And I stand by that.

This book brings together two different but interrelated strands of research conducted between 2013 and 2021: one looking into Jainism as it developed and is lived in Jain diaspora communities, and another looking at the different ways in which Jainism appears online. It identifies the diaspora and the digital as frontier spaces, the study of which, I argue, is particularly fruitful for gaining insight into contemporary Jainism. While focusing on the relatively small religious tradition of Jainism, this book also touches upon broader themes such as migration, access to information, globalization, etc., and thus seeks to operationalize the case of Jainism to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of migration, religion, and media.

The diversity within the Jain diaspora, together with the rapid development of digital media, means that this book could not claim exhaustivity, even if it wanted to. I am hopeful, however, that it succeeds in conveying the intricacy of the Jain diaspora, its unique features and trajectories, and its relation to digital media. For anyone conducting research on contemporary Jainism, I hope this book drives home the necessity of at least contemplating the inclusion of these two frontiers, i.e. the diaspora and the digital.

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues at Ghent University: Prof. Dr. Eva De Clercq who facilitated and supervised the doctoral research this book is based on, but also the team of lecturers and researchers that continue to support me in a myriad of ways. However, perhaps the most important debt of gratitude is to my respondents and informants in India, Belgium, North America, the UK, and elsewhere, without whose kindness, hospitality, and openness this book could not have been written.

If in my attempt to synthesize, summarize, and analyze I have misrepresented or offended anyone, I offer my heartfelt apologies, or as the Jains say, *Micchāmi dukkaḍaṃ*.

List of Abbreviations

AIA	Antwerp Indian Association
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
CMR	Computer Mediated Ritual
FIU	Florida International University
IAAMJV	International Alumni Association of Shri Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya
IDJO	International Digamber Jain Organization
IMJM	International Mahavir Jain Mission
IoJ	Institute of Jainology
JAANA	Jain Adhyatma Academy of North America
JAINA	Federation for Jain Associations in North America
JCCA	Jain Cultural Centre Antwerp
JCNC	Jain Center of Northern California
JCOCO	Jain Center of Central Ohio
JCSC	Jain Center of Southern California
JCSF	Jain Center of South Florida
JITO	Jain International Trade Organization
JSGA	Jain Society of Greater Atlanta
JSGD	Jain Society of Greater Detroit
JSMS	Jain Svadhyay Mandir Songadh
JVB	Jain Vishva Bharati
JVB-L	Jain Vishva Bharati London
JVBI	Jain Vishva Bharati Institute
MONA	Mumukshus of North America
OAUk	Oshwal Association UK
SCVP	Shree Chandana Vidyapeeth
SJDA	Shree Digambar Jain Association
SOAS	School for Oriental and African Studies
SRCMD	Srimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur
SRCMD-A	Srimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur Antwerp
SRCMD-L	Srimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur London
SRD	Srimad Rajchandra Divine Touch
YJA	Young Jains of America
YJP	Young Jain Professionals
YJUK	Young Jains UK

