WOMEN AND THE ASCETIC
IDEAL IN JAINISM

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Anthropology
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Women and the Ascetic Ideal in Jainism
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Abstract

This is a study of Jain ethics based on 13 months of fieldwork in the town of Ladnun, Rajasthan, India. The research was conducted among a community of Terapanthi Svetambar Jains and explores the many facets of what constitutes a moral life within the Terapanthi ascetic community.

Jainism's core values are ascetic. Its ethical ideals revolve around non-violence, non-possession and non-attachment. These ideals are embodied in the ascetics who, by renouncing the world to dedicate their lives to spiritual pursuits, serve as the community's cultural heroes. The central distinctions -- common to all Jain communities -- between ascetic and household life, between the 'spiritual' and 'worldly' and between non-violence and violence, are more sharply delineated among the Terapanthi than among any other Jain community. Their notions of what constitutes a moral life are narrowly circumscribed to include only that of complete detachment and non-violence, in other words, a life of renunciation. The ontological separation between the spiritual and the worldly is at the centre of the Terapanthi worldview.

The research explores how Terapanthi religious ideals related to the lives of the ascetics who profess them. It focuses on the Terapanthi moral universe from the perspective of female renouncers. In Indian ascetic traditions, women are perceived as ambivalent symbols — both as symbols of detachment and attachment, of renunciation and worldliness. The research explores how Terapanthi Jain women create their own ascetic subjectivities and how they construct and understand themselves as symbols of renunciation.
Women & The Ascetic Ideal
In Jainism

SADHVIS & SAMANIS, SOURCE: A.VALLELY, 1996
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Preface

The impetus for my research was to explore the ways in which Jain ascetic ideals relate to the lives of the women who profess them. From December 1995 until January 1997, I lived among a group of Terapanthi Jain ascetics at their spiritual base at the Jain Vishva Bharati in Ladnun, Rajasthan.

Although I studied Hindi prior to leaving for India, and enlisted the help of a Hindi teacher in Ladnun, my ability to communicate in that language was seriously limited in the early stages of my fieldwork. Originally I had hoped to immerse myself in the local dialect, but that was somewhat naive. Upon my arrival, the leader of the ascetic order assigned me the role of English teacher. In addition, many of the ascetics and lay individuals with whom I worked were proficient in English. Therefore, my fieldwork was throughout a hybrid of English and Hindi. The verbatim dialogue presented herein is in English only.

Pseudonyms are used throughout. However, with the well-known personages, their actual names are used.
Like an ungainly acrobat on a tightrope, she fought to keep her balance before the curious onlookers. Determined not to use her hands, she struggled to pry off her right sneaker with her left foot, but the velcro straps were snug and secure, preventing an easy release. Back home this would be less of a big deal, since one’s hands play a less central role in bodily maintenance; more like aloof middlemen than active participants in the feeding and cleaning of the body. But here, bare hands sans instrument are the big players in daily nourishing and ablutions. The importance of their cleanliness must be unconditional! Ms. Veena, who had effortlessly stepped out of her chappals, stood calmly waiting for me to finish my ordeal.

Ms. Veena, a middle aged woman from the Punjab, dressed in a floral patterned sari, continued to watch my animated feet. I felt that she had by now become involved in the struggle and was aligning herself with the Reeboks. Perhaps she thought this was the standard way Westerners remove their shoes! And what shoes! What had I been thinking when I bought them? Simplicity was not in fashion in Montreal the day I purchased sneakers for my trip. My only criterion had been that they be non-leather since, for Jains, eating animals and wearing their skins are unnecessary forms of violence. Their motto “ahimsa paramo dharma” which translates as “non-violence is the highest form of religion” is applied to every aspect of life. I succumbed to the first pair of non-leather Reeboks the breezy clerk suggested. He assured me that the Big Sneaker look is not just American hype-aesthetics, but a global phenomenon. I can report that it hadn’t reached Ladnun by the time I had. Here, my Reeboks were categorically absurd.

The small but growing crowd of spectators paid little attention to my particular struggle, more interested as it were in the general package. Finally I surrendered and with an air of apology darted over to the cement steps in front of the nun’s residence to sit and remove the shoes the only way I knew: with both hands. As I had feared, my fingertips were soon gritty from the Rajasthani sand, which, like an endless beige blanket, is everywhere, and in everything, dulling and adding a matte finish to the harsh shadows of the desert. The shoes
finally off, I took them to the surprisingly orderly pile of chappals huddled together fraternally by the steps of the nuns’ residence. Most were of the simplest style, with just one tiny strap for the large toe. I placed mine on the left side in the shadow of the steps.

The jet lag and intensity of the past few hours were taking their toll on my sobriety. From the time it took me to travel from Montreal, Canada to Ladnun, India, I had been transformed from something of an outsider within my own culture to being its celebrated representative. I now stood as its living exemplary in a part of rural Rajasthan not familiar with foreigners. My views and actions were no longer my own, nor my dress, nor even the way I walked: all carried piercing insights into Western ways of being. But I was the reluctant emissary: I sought to dodge this fiction, to eclipse it somehow. I yearned to merge with the greys and browns of the Indian winter; to walk unself-consciously through the narrow village streets, past the itinerant cows and wretched dogs, and among the spirited crowds at the market place. I looked down at my stubborn sneakers: whom was I kidding? The velcro and the stripes stared back mockingly, and I realised how much they encapsulated my own awkwardness. A beacon brighter than the star of Bethlehem, they announced a foreign presence with all the subtlety of American jingoism. This image clung to me like a gargantuan shadow in the dusk of early evening. I had wanted to enter this culture with reserve, sensitivity and openness, but as I stepped hesitantly, it ridiculed me by racing ahead and announcing itself assuredly.

“Miss Anne, let us enter now.” Ms. Veena was waiting for me at the top of the steps. I followed directly behind her; the onlookers directly behind me. She was taking me to meet a young and junior nun in the order, Sadhvi Prasandji. We continued down a corridor, which opened on one side to face the barren courtyard. On the other side were a series of small dark windowless rooms. A hefty middle aged man in a dhoti was moving brusquely down the hall behind us, darting in and out of the small rooms as if he was in a big hurry to find something. Mumbling, he pushed ahead into the room nearest us, and flicked on the light. Then he disappeared.

Jain ascetics are not allowed to use electricity because they believe it to be alive. Animals, plants, water, soil, air and fire are all considered sentient beings with souls identical in every way to those of humans. For lay Jains, a distinction is made between necessary and unnecessary violence; the eating of plants for survival is a form of violence that leads to the accumulation of bad karma, but it is necessary. However, the ascetics attempt to exist in an environment of complete non-violence or ahimsa. They never prepare any food for themselves, and only ‘beg’ for what they need. In this way, they argue, they are not implicated in the violence. They will not accept offerings of foods that are ‘alive’: all vegetables, fruit and water
must have been boiled, and hence dead, before they can accept them. In addition, the food must never have been prepared expressly for them. Only if the ascetics are sure of this will they accept the offerings. In reality they depend on the lay community to commit some ‘necessary’ violence on their behalf, which the laity do with great enthusiasm. It is an honour to have monks or nuns come to one’s home for alms and, to boot, it leads to the accumulation of good karma. The turning of a light switch on and off, which involves the destruction of innumerable living souls, is unnecessary violence. The devoted lay community willingly does this “killing” for their revered ascetics, who would otherwise sit in the dark and be unable to provide them with religious instruction.

With the light on, I could see Sadhvi Prasadji. She looked to be in her late teens. She sat cross-legged on the cement floor, her bare feet weathered from the sun. The group following behind now rushed in ahead of us, stooped over in supplication. They lowered themselves to their knees, and bowed deeply before her. She raised her hand gently as a sign of acknowledgement. Light stubble peaked out from under the hood of her san. Her huge eyes appeared jovial, but with half her face hidden under the muhpati, I could only guess. The mouth covering or “muhpati” distinguishes her as a Jain ascetic in a country with no shortage of saints and holy men. It is at once practical and symbolic: worn to prevent the accidental swallowing of tiny living creatures, but also to avoid causing injury to the air itself. I was also told that it serves as a reminder to speak only when necessary and then, only in gentle words.

Ms. Veena and I moved forward, our hands joined in namaste. When Ms. Veena lowered herself to kneel, I bowed my head and sat down quietly in a cross-legged position. Immediately, I knew I had done something terribly wrong. Eyes that had been focused on the young sadhvi were now on me again. Ms. Veena lowered her head ceremoniously.

Then, from a deep bow, she raised herself with graceful control and turned her head toward me. Her face was sedate but severe. All she said was “This is how we show respect to our maharajas”. She bowed deeply again in the direction of the sadhvi, touching her forehead on the floor before her. This was my cue, though I was reluctant to take it up. Such self-effacing seemed altogether inappropriate before a pubescent teen, her pimples peering over her muhpati. Reckoning that a little ego-debasing was better than being perceived as a cultural dolt, I prostrated myself.

Ms. Veena said a few words in Hindi by way of introduction. She used a cotton handkerchief as a makeshift muhpati. The nun nodded, and then settled herself more securely in her lotus position, one hand grasping the big toe of her left foot and the other resting on her knee.
"You have come from far to learn about Jainism". Her words were flattened and muffled under her muhpatti, but her English was good. I then realised why I was taken to see so junior a nun. Most of the nuns of the Terapanthi Jains spoke Rajasthani and Hindi, but very few spoke English. For the most part, the girls came from conservative merchant families and received little education before entering the monastery. Here they learned to read the ancient Jain scriptures in their original Sanskrit and Prakrit, and to study the great traditions of Indian philosophy. Of Sadhvi Prasandji, I was later told that she "comes from south India" as a short hand way of explaining why her English was so fluent. Of the others who had come that evening for her darshan, mostly middle aged women in colourful saris and a few men, several knew a little English. The others didn't appear troubled at all; the main thing was to be in the presence of a "saint". All were eager to hear the young nun's words.

We all sat crossed legged on the second floor of a large whitewashed cement building built several hundred years ago by Jain merchants working the trade routes in and out of the Middle East. Some years ago, descendants of those merchants donated the building to the Jain monastic order. The rooms were austere. Except for a few miniature desks, that the nuns used for scripture study, and a cupboard for books, the rooms were empty. The nuns studied, ate and slept on the hard cement floors.

"I will tell you the story of Isu, we also know about Isu here," Sadhvi Prasandji said. Veena quickly leaned over to me saying, "You say Jesus, we say Isu".

"Jesus?" I whispered back at her in amazement. I was hoping for something more exotic: the Jain saint Lord Mahavir and his heroic fasts in the forest or an exhilarating Hindu tale of Kali or Vishnu... She continued,

"One day a blind man asked Isu to help him. He told Isu that he was unable to have a family of his own or to work since he was blind. Isu felt pity for the man and so he touched his eyes with both his hands. Then the man could see. He thanked Isu and went away very happy. Many months later, when Isu was walking through the bazaar, he was surprised to see the same man in a brothel. The man, seeing Isu, came out to pay his respects. Isu asked him, 'Why are you at this bad place? I helped you not long ago and this is how you thank me? The man then replied, 'Isu you gave me eyes so that I could see, but you did not show me the right path to follow'"

Some whispers of translation and everyone was soon nodding in acceptance of its profundity, aligning themselves with those "in the know". I, however, sat blank faced as I searched my mental repertoire of children's bible stories. Could it be that I simply never heard this one? There was Jesus and Lazarus, Jesus and the fish, the water into wine story... I distrusted my memory. The young sadhvi went on,
“In the West you make a big mistake. You confuse the body and the soul. The body is just body!” She exclaimed, emitting a huge breath of air from the sides of her muhpatti. She stared down at her folded legs wrapped in white cotton sari and mock-hit her knee with contempt, “One day - no more. It will die. To heal it is not religion. For religion, you must heal the soul”.

There was a moment’s silence. Then she asked:

“What is your country?”

“Canada”.

It was obvious that this meant nothing. She turned towards another sadhvi for help, but none was forthcoming. Ms.Veena looked as though she was about to come to the rescue when a man’s voice from the back of the room called out “America”. Instantly, order was restored.

“Well, north of America” I added, but no one heard the detail. The young sadhvi had heard all she needed to continue and, perhaps armed with this new ammunition, she asserted, “You are very lost”

“I’m sorry?” I said.

“You are lost,” she emphasised the word ‘lost’ assuming, I suppose, that I was having some difficulty understanding her accented English, “like the blind man.”

My amazement at her words goaded my brows upwards. I forced a smile hoping that the seriousness of moment was in my own mind, and that it might quickly evaporate, but the young sadhvi’s eyes were without humour. My smile dropped. What was this, I thought?

Where was all that ‘feel-good’ stuff associated with darshan? I had been to spiritual gatherings back home, even to ones with jet-set gurus flown in from India. This bore no resemblance to those outpourings of affection in which the banal was transformed into sublime epiphanies, simply through a smile or totter of the swami’s bearded head, and where everyone left feeling sanctified.

“You are here because you are lost spiritually.” She clarified, looking very matronly, then she turned to Ms.Veena and asked her in Hindi how long I would be staying.

“Several months” Ms.Veena answered. She rocked backed on her rump, one hand still grasping her bare foot.

“Oh…you will learn so much here. In the West you say, ‘Eat, drink, be merry’, yes? This is not good. You will learn that you too have a soul, not just a body and then you can teach this in your country”.

She appeared happy with her counsel. Her muhpatti strained across her cheeks evincing a broad smile beneath. She raised her palm to us, to signal the end of our darshan. The edifying lecture was over.
We all filed out of the room, the others went to pay their respects to other more senior sadhvis, but Ms. Veena and I left the residence. I looked at my watch: 8:10 p.m. I had only been in the town 5 hours and already I wanted to flee! My anxieties had not been unfounded: the sadhvi saw me not as an individual eager to learn about Jainism, but as a representative of a caricaturised culture known for its crassness, selfishness and un-spirituality. And without even seeing my shoes! I looked down at my feet as they took the Reeboks for a walk. Poor feet: smothered beneath something so showy and cumbersome, they longed, like the ascetics, for release.

Never having married, my wonderful companion Ms. Veena was something of an oddity herself. She chose to devote herself to her Guru, as she put it, but not to become a sadhvi. This was a risky and uncommon path for a woman in India, and she would tell me in later months that she considered her life to be far more difficult than those of the ascetics. She seemed totally unconcerned with her appearance, in distinct contrast to the typically wealthy lay Jain women on their annual pilgrimages to receive Guru Dev’s blessing. Ms. Veena’s laxity also made her distinct from the ascetics, whose ‘neglect’ of their body was cultivated and, in fact, a daily preoccupation. In the course of my stay I came to the conclusion that they renounce the world, society and their families to pursue the ascetic path of non-violence, but their bodies become the templates upon which they demonstrate and judge the success of their efforts.

We were on our way to visit Ganadhipati Guru Dev Tulsi1 himself, the gentle and charismatic leader of the Terapanthi Jains. His devotees loved to recount miracles associated with him, insisting that he had tremendous spiritual power. I was often told of how, when Guru Dev wanders from place to place under the scorching Rajasthani sun, the clouds are eager to shelter his path so that his journey is always in shade. I was more interested in his fifty years of relentless campaigns for non-violence, for which he is justly famous throughout India. Although he renounced the world when he took his monastic vows, he remained actively involved in efforts to make it a less violent place. I had been eager to meet him for years, but now I was feeling utterly exhausted and discouraged, and would have preferred to return to my room.

The galis (paths) that Ms. Veena shepherded me through seemed narrower and smellier than before, and the open sewers that lined them, more menacing. It was dark and only the bulbs dangling from the makeshift shop stalls lighted our way. Horses free of their tonga-carts stood meekly in the dwarfed grass awaiting sunrise and another day’s work. The shopkeepers
squatted comfortably on their haunches, resting their upper arms on their angular knees. Disenchanted, I resented their stares which I assumed to be mocking. We walked slowly, careful not to step into the mounds of horse droppings dotting our path. With each shuffle of Ms. Veena’s chappals, the parched sand would rise up in a big beige cloud, sometimes as high as our eyes. In a world of dulled and muted hues, the ascetics in their impossibly white saris were visions of purity and ‘otherness’. They too liked to describe themselves this way: ‘like beautiful white lotuses that float on top of the water, only barely touching it and never contaminated by it’.

With the monk’s residence in view, I rushed ahead to remove my sneakers, getting a head start on the confrontational velcro. All pretence at Indian protocol abandoned, my already filthy hands went to work. It was late and the monastery was nearly devoid of devotees, as Ms. Veena had hoped it would be. This would give us a greater chance to pay our respects, she said. We entered the spacious and barren room with our heads lowered and hands joined: I immediately recognised Guru Dev from the many photos I’d seen of him, though I hadn’t expected him to be quite so small or old. He sat in a lotus position on top of a low wooden table that elevated him slightly above those around him. Here was the man that led the Terapanthi Jains since he was just 25 years old, controlling one of the largest ascetic communities in all of India with nearly 800 monks and nuns. Several monks (munis) sat near or moved quietly behind him. Two looked very young - no older than eleven or twelve. All in white, and gliding across the marble floor with their rajoharan (whiskbrooms) clearing the way before them, they looked like dreamy little Chagall angels. All Jain ascetics carry rajoharan, which they use to gently sweep away any insects or critters that may be in harm’s way. Most of the lay devotees present were also wearing the muhpatti. They were there for darshan (to be in the presence of the holy one), not for discussion. But one stout man in his 50s with well-oiled dark hair was busy recounting a tale to Guru Dev when we walked in. He held his right hand an inch or so away from his mouth as a quickly improvised, but untrained muhpatti: his words were faster than his well-intentioned hand, which moved up and down like a piston out of control. His hand would flutter before a silent mouth, only to drop as a torrent of words gushed forward again. It was not a well-synchronised performance, but the intent was there.

Guru Dev noticed our entrance and before we could move to the back of the room, he gestured for us to come forward. We came within two feet of him and then bowed deeply three times, as is the custom. I had heard that he eschewed formality and was oblivious to status.

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1 When in March 1994, Tulsi renounced his position as acharya after 58 years, his successor Mahaprajna bestowed upon him the title of Ganadhipati, meaning “leader of the order”. Guru Dev means “godly.”
Without delay, he asked me in Hindi why I had come to study Jainism. There was no interrogation; his dark eyes were smiling above his muhpatti.

"I've known about Jainism since I was a child, and have always been interested in its teachings" I answered in a Hindi-English hybrid. He called one of the youngest monks to come forward. His name was Amit Muni and he too 'came from south India'. He would serve as our interpreter. Translating Guru Dev's words, Amit Muni asked in a surprisingly loud and clear voice beneath his muhpatti,

"Why did you come to Ladnun?"

"By chance" I answered, "I met a Jain family when I was in Canada who suggested I come here. I was planning on coming to India, but at that time I didn't know where in India to come." Guru Dev had closed his eyes and was nodding his head meditatively even before the translation came back. He asked another muffled question through Amit Muni,

"Are you vegetarian?"

Vegetarianism is so central a practice in Jainism, and widespread in Hinduism and Buddhism as well, that it is often simply taken for granted. But Jains know of Westerners as voracious meat eaters.

"Yes, for a long time." Guru Dev, smiling broadly, gestured around the room when he spoke in a Hindi tailored for me,

"Yahan...ahimsa" he said, allowing Amit Muni to then elaborate, "Everything here is done for non-violence". Through the young muni, Guru Dev continued,

"There is so much violence in the world today, people hurt people, people hurt animals. We spend so much money and so much time thinking about ways to destroy living beings, if only we could put this energy into peace. Imagine what we could do! We must change people's hearts so they know what a terrible thing violence is".

"It is my dream" I answered in English.

"Do you eat cake?" Amit Muni interjected with his own question.

"Cake?" I remember smiling, wondering if perhaps I misheard him.

"Yes, cake" he persisted, "Cake has eggs and eggs are non-veg".

In India there are two main categories of food: 'veg' and its negation, 'non-veg', leaving no doubt which commands the moral high ground. I enjoyed the idea of being part of a universe where the default was to vegetarianism, and where it was the meat eaters who were called upon to explain themselves. But now was I going to be grouped with the dreaded cake eaters?

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"teacher" and is used with affection. On June 23, 1997, at the age of 82, Guru Dev died.
Guru Dev started to laugh heartily at the over zealousness of the little monk. His laugh was contagious and soon everyone was smiling. He was nothing like the waif-like swamis with Mona Lisa smiles and oxygen-deprived voices that the West has caricatured as India’s spiritual teachers. He had a powerful presence that was at once intellectual and pragmatic. His eyes exuded such tremendous warmth that I felt relaxed for the first time since leaving Canada and I knew I was privileged to be exactly where I was at that moment. He began to speak directly to me again in Hindi,

“You are home, you have come home”.

Before I could react, he turned to Acharyasri Mahaprajna, the second in command, and said something I could not follow. Acharyasri nodded his bald head, his eyes becoming smaller as they scrunched up into smiling creases. I looked around at the laity to find them beaming back at me. There was a buzz of Hindi in the room until the man with the oily hair, forever impatient, blurted out loudly, and without his hand-muhpatti,

“His Holiness says that you were a Jain in a past life, and now you have come home”. I felt colour race across my face and I smiled widely as I looked back at Guru Dev. Ms.Veena leaned forward to me and whispered “It is a great honour for you. Guru Dev knows so many things”. I lowered my head in a deep bow of thanks and respect.

Outside the monk’s residence, Ms.Veena was smiling when she asked me if I remembered the way back to my room. I wasn’t certain, but told her I did. I was happy to be alone with my thoughts. A western reincarnation of a former Jain! (Later on in my stay, this status would be further elevated to that of a former Jain ascetic!) What sins must I have committed to deserve my present incarnation? I mused light-heartedly. No doubt it was another classification, another fiction, but one that I delighted in because it was a Jain fiction. I had been invited to join their drama, to dream using their idioms and to share in their reveries. For a fraction of a moment I floated like a white lotus on a pond.

The exposed lightbulbs jutting out of the low cement buildings transformed the shadows of the passers-by into enormous animated goblins: a sweeper-woman’s long broom of uneven twigs cast a deranged image as she hurried by, and a distorted shadow of a mangy dog told of its fear. The difficulties of the day were wiped away. I had crossed a line from outsider to friend, and was joyous even though I knew it would be a bridge I would have to cross daily. That was fine. I didn’t yearn to be a Jain, even if their teachings were the most virtuous I had heard. The crossing itself was exhilarating. I had feared that I would be prevented from taking the first step; that the bridge would be permanently closed, but within a few short moments Guru Dev paved the way for me. With his benison, I could walk less hesitantly. I watched my
shadow as it moved ahead of me: things were going to be all right. The sneakers, casting their enormous shadow, would definitely have to go. I would liberate them.

***
Background:

Jainism is an indigenous Indian tradition and is among the world’s oldest living religions. It emerged over 2500 years ago during a time when ancient Indian society was in ferment. Jainism, like Buddhism, rejected the authority of the Vedas, the ancient Hindu scriptures, and denied the caste system any legitimacy. In addition, it denied the authority and privilege of the Brahmans, and claimed, contrary to the conventional wisdom of the times, that it was possible for all humans to achieve liberation through their own efforts (Folkert, 1987).

Mahavir (c. 599-527 BCE)\(^2\) was an historical figure and contemporary of the Buddha. He usually represents the starting point in the historical study of Jainism but, to Jains, he represents the final great spiritual teacher or Jina\(^3\) (conqueror) of our present cycle of time. Jains, like Hindus, conceive of time in grand cosmic cycles of moral and physical ascent and decay, and claim that their tradition has no beginning or end. Like the universe, it is eternal and uncreated; it is simply a set of ‘truths’ that have always existed and will always be true (Dundas, 1992; Folkert, 1987). These truths, however, are dependent on favourable eras of the cycle for their dissemination. In the middle eras of each half cycle, twenty-four consecutive Jinas appear and propagate the eternal truths to receptive listeners. Mahavir was the 24\(^{th}\), and final, Jina of our cycle. No Jinas appear during the ‘Corrupt Age’ (the Kaliyuga) in which we are presently living, when religion, culture, knowledge, human nature etc., are in decline. The ensuing age will bring the complete demise of truth and Jain teachings will die out. But since it is a continuous cycle, another twenty-four Jinas will appear in future cycles to propagate the universal truths again (see Babb, 1996 for a detailed description of Jain cosmography and time).

Jainism bases its teachings on a fundamental division of all existing things into two classes: jiva (that which is sentient), and ajiva (a non-sentient, material component that is connected with the jiva). Its association with ajiva prevents jiva from realising its true and omniscient nature. Folkert’s discussion of Jain cosmology reveals its distinctiveness within its Hindu and Buddhist surroundings:

[A] key element in Jain teachings is the nature of ajiva and the working of karma. All insentient existents are included in the category of ajiva. Particularly space, time and matter, the latter conceived of as atoms. It is important to note that the actual existence of ajiva is not denied by Jains, and that matter is therefore real and eternal. Karma, then, as a subtle form of matter, is not an illusion or result of perceptual error. It is real, and must be dealt with in a physical way, as must be all components of worldly existence.

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\(^2\) This is the traditional Svetambar dating. The Digambar claimed he died in 510 BCE (Dundas, 1992:21).

\(^3\) Jina is used synonymously with Tirthankara and Fordmaker, to denote one who has made the ‘crossing’ (Folkert, 1987) or passage over the ocean of samsar to liberation.
Dissolution of the jiva’s association with karma thus requires the cultivation of actual and extreme detachment from all that is not-jiva. No purely ‘spiritual’ or ‘mental’ exercise will suffice. Thus Jain monastic life has always had, and has today, a quality of concreteness and actual physical rigour to it (1987:264).

By rendering karma a physical substance, it becomes subject to, and governed by, individual human agency: liberation becomes a battle between the individual (jiv) and karma (ajiv) on the battleground of samsar (Goonasekere, 1985:137). A consequence of this ‘concrete’ cosmology is that crucial differences between individuals are sought in behaviour, not inherited qualities. It is the great warriors of samsar (viz., the ascetics) who are Jainism’s cultural heroes (see Babb, 1996), not a priestly caste, and the commoners (householders) are distinguished from the elite (ascetics) by degree, not kind. Folkert contends that it is difficult to make a sharp distinction between monastic and lay religious practice amongst the Jains because a continuum exists between them. He writes,

[B]ifurcation fails because there is a body of lay Jain practice that is modelled on the monastic life, and because Jainism has regularly sought to link together monk and lay person, ascetic and lay life (1987:265).

The importance given to the laity was always an essential element of Jainism and is often assumed to partly explain the survival of the minority tradition in India (Folkert, 1993:180; Nevaskar, 1971:125).

Since the fourth century BCE, the Jain community has been divided into two major branches, the Svetambaras (“white clad”) and Digambaras (“sky clad”) (Dundas, 1992:43). One of the major disputes between the two sects centres on the attire of the ascetics, as their names suggest. Folkert writes,

The two groups disagreed largely over monastic practice. The Digambaras maintained that an ascetic who had truly renounced the world would also renounce clothing, and go naked, as Mahavira apparently had done. The Shvetambaras maintained, however, that Mahavira’s life and teachings did not make nudity an absolute requirement, and that the wearing of simple white garments would be a sufficient act of renunciation (1987:259).

There are many other areas of contention between the two sects, but the one that concerns us most here, and is related to the dispute over garments, is that of female spirituality. The debate centres on the question of whether or not moksa (liberation) can be attained following a life in a female body (Balbir, 1994; Jaini, 1991). Since nudity is not ‘feasible’ for women, the Digambar argue that liberation is not possible following a life in a female body – that a woman would have to be reborn as a man before liberation could occur. It follows that the Svetambar, who do not see garments as an obstacle to liberation, argue that women can
attain salvation (Balbir, 1994; Banks, 1986; Jaini, 1991; Shántá 1985). The practical consequence of this doctrinal debate is that fully-fledged female ascetic orders exist among the Svetambar sect that admits women to full monastic vows. Among the Digambar, however, women are not permitted to take full monastic vows and therefore can attain only the quasi-ascetic status of arṣīkā meaning “noble woman” (Babb, 1996; Jaini, 1991; Shántá, 1985:483-517). The Terapanthi Jains, with whom I conducted my fieldwork in 1996, are a branch of the Svetambar sect and have the largest order of female ascetics under a single acharya, with nearly 600 nuns. However, neither the strength of their numbers (over three times that of monks) nor the egalitarian soteriological doctrine, has meant equal status for women. The Svetambar assert the fundamental equality of all souls, but they do not dispute the inferiority and inherent impurity of the female body (op.cit. Balbir, Banks, Jaini).

In addition to the Svetambar/ Digambar division, which encompasses all Jain communities, there are numerous sects and sub-sects within each branch, making the Jains one of the most fragmented religious communities in India (Banks, 1986). This fragmentation is evidence of the tradition’s vigour, and challenges the once common view that Jain history is a monolithic and static body of doctrine (Cort, 1991,1995; Folkert, 1993). At Jainism’s core are its ascetic values (Babb, 1996; Folkert, 1987:256,1993:177), and the source of schisms has always been over the issue of what constitutes the ‘true’ ascetic path. From the earliest known historical records, the ascetic ideal has been differently interpreted and its imperatives differently applied (Cort, 1991:655). It was this issue of orthodoxy that in the C15th led to the emergence of the non-idolatrous Sthanakvasi order out of the Murtipujak Svetambars and, similarly, in the C18th inspired a group of ascetics to break away from the Sthanakvasis to form the Terapanthi. The Terapanthi Svetambar are an offshoot of the Sthanakvasi Svetambar Jains, which emerged as a distinct sect under the leadership of Acharya Bhikshu in 1760. The non-idolatrous tradition from which the Terapanthi and Sthanakvasi have their roots is that of the Lonka Gacch of the fifteenth century. Flügel provides the tradition its historical background:

This tradition emerged in 1451 as an anti-yati [property-owning ascetic] movement amongst the Mûrtipûjak-laity in Muslim-ruled Ahmedabad, led by the Rajasthani-Osvâl court-jeweller, and copyist of Jain manuscripts, Lonkâ Śâh (ca. 1415-1489). Lonkâ noticed a widening discrepancy between precept and practice among

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4 The Tapa Gacch, predominant in Gujarat, has the greatest number of ascetics of any single Jain order with 1,246 monks and 4,226 nuns (Babb, 1996:54). But this group is broken down into sixteen subgroups called samudāyās (see Cort, 1991b for a detailed account of Svetambar ascetic lineages). In the Tapa Gacch, the samudāya is the primary organisational unit and therefore the number of nuns in one unit is smaller than that of the Terapanthi.

5 It should be noted that it was the issue of what constitutes the true ascetic path that prompted a number of Terapanthi ascetics to leave the order to form the Naya Terapanthi in 1981.
contemporary ascetics because he did not find any references to idol-worship nor to sedentary monasticism in the oldest textual tradition. With the help of the Jain minister L.B. Bhansali from Patan he then started a revivalist ascetic tradition on his own in 1471 under circumvention of monastic rules of linear succession. Although Lonkā never initiated himself, it was he who drafted a set of organisational principles for the new Lonkā Gacch in form of 69 maxims (Lonkā Ṣāh kī Hundī). These rules played a paradigmatic role for all subsequent iconoclastic Śvetāmbar movements. They explicitly rejected idolatry and sedentary monasticism, and stressed the ultimate authority of 31 of the ca. 45 scriptures of the Śvetāmbar 'canon' (Āgama), and the importance of ascetic wandering (vihāra) for the maintenance of a propertyless (aparigraha) monastic order into which 'only baniṣṭ [merchants] should be initiated' (1995-6: 122).

And, . . . some years later, after Lonkā was murdered by the followers of a rival sect, the Lonkā Gacch split into factions and the cycle of reform and routinisation started again. In protest against the renewed lax behaviour (sthīlaśīra) of the ascetics and the re-emergence of temple-worship the muniś Lavjī and Dharmsinhjī split off the Gujarātī Lonkāgacch in 1644 in Surat and founded the Dhūndhiyā (seekers) sect, which then divided itself into 22 schools (bāñśtoḷa) and later became known as the Sthānakvāsi (hall dwellers) tradition. For similar reasons muni Bhiksu (1726-1803) and four sādhus broke away from the Sthānakvāsi Ācārya Rughaṇāth in 1760 in Baghī (Mārvār) and founded the Terāpanth gan four months later in Kelvā through a collective rite of self-initiation (bhūv dī kṣā) (ibid., 123).

Bhiksu was critical of what he considered to be the ‘worldliness’ of his contemporary ascetics. He considered the boundaries between the śravak (householder) and ascetic to be dangerously blurred and so he sought to sharply delineate between them. His most notable doctrinal innovations are the rigid distinction he made between the laukik (‘the worldly’) and the lokottar (‘the transcendent’) and his exclusively ‘soul-centric’ (as opposed to socio-centric) interpretation of ahimsa. To Bhiksu, ahimsa is strictly an ethic of non-interference and a method of disconnecting or separating oneself from worldly existence.

Today the Terāpanth community numbers approximately 500,000 and remains overwhelmingly associated with the Rajasthan Bisa Osval bania caste (1995-6: 144-5). Over generations, many have migrated out of Rajasthan to wealthier states but have remained connected through a strong religio-socio-economic network. The lay and ascetic community is tightly integrated under the spiritual leadership of a single leader (presently Acharya Mahaprajna) and his ascetic disciples.

6 See Flügel, “The Ritual Circle of the Terāpanth Śvetāmbara Jains” BEI 13-14 (1995-6) 117-176. He describes, for example, how the Terāpanth Mahasabha national council “provides a centralised organisational framework for the Terāpanth laity, parallel to the religious organisation of the ascetics” (ibid., 147).
Symbols of Renunciation: Women and the Ascetic Ideal

Renunciation brings to society a recognition of an irreparable rupture or breach between the laukik (worldly) and the lokottar (spiritual), and the ascetic is its dominant symbol. Jain renunciation does not act as a social feedback system whereby ascetic values infuse and legitimate worldly life, as is the case with Hindu asceticism according to Louis Dumont (1960; 1980). Instead, on the ideological level, it acts as a sustained critique of worldly life. Dumont's analysis of world renunciation parallels Victor Turner's notion of liminality in that Dumont treats renunciation as a method of 'release' for the caste structure. Renunciation becomes a mechanism to transcend caste society (Folkert, 1996:179), without challenging it; it exists as a "social state apart from society proper" (Dumont, 1980:273). Turner depicts the state of liminality as a suspension of social structures and the inversion of norms, eventually culminating in social harmony. Caroline W. Bynum describes Turner's concept of liminality as a "moment of suspension of normal rules, a crossing of boundaries and violating of norms, that enables us to understand those norms..." (1994:30). Similarly, Dumont sees the renunciant as a form of social guardianship and elucidation: by renouncing hierarchically organised caste society, the ascetic represents purity 'outside the world' but parallels and legitimates the Brahman priest who represents purity 'within the world'. The ascetic, in Dumont's words, becomes the "safety-value of the Brahmanic order"(1960:52). Jainism, however, denies the possibility of purity in the world and therefore its renunciation is never a form of social endorsement (Holmstrom,1988:9). It does not legitimate social norms or values, it renounces them outright. Rather than a temporary suspension of social and normative structures, Jain renunciation is a state of permanent 'outsiderhood' or fixed 'liminality'. Its referents are society's norms and values, but rather than a temporary inversion of them, renunciation seeks to unmask them as illusory once and for all. The ideological rupture to society's norms and values is permanent and it is the ascetic who is its symbol.

Folkert describes Jain studies as "bedeviled by the perceived split between the sadhus and the community"(1993:172), implying that, in reality, it is interaction and interdependence between the laity and sadhus that characterise the Jain community. However, the work at hand suggests that what is fundamental to an understanding of Jainism is why this split is 'perceived' to exist and why it is vehemently maintained and defended, in the face of its 'real' (i.e., day-to-day) transgression. From the perspective of Jains themselves, the split reflects the ontological separation of jīv and ajīv at the centre of their worldview. I explore how the split is used...
rhetorically\(^7\) in the construction of the Jain moral universe, and how the ascetic embodies this ‘split’. In particular, I look at how this embodied subjectivity is structured and experienced, from the perspective of women. Throughout, I attempt to consider the interaction between abstract ideals and empirical realities, without privileging the latter. Jain ascetics embody the cultural ideals of world renunciation and understand themselves as such. And it is on this ideological level that they find personal and social legitimacy. Therefore, this is necessarily a study of both ideology and practice, and the dynamic dialectic between them.

In the dissertation I set out to examine how women create ascetic subjectivities and how they construct and understand themselves as symbols of renunciation. Reynell’s (1985) rigorous study on lay Jain women in Jaipur explored the relationship between women and religion in Jainism. It prompted me to look at this relationship among the nuns who, as renunciants, epitomise the tradition’s highest ideal. I was interested in looking at the ways in which Jain social and religious ideals are embodied in the role of the female ascetic, and in examining how religion serves as both a creative and conservative force in women’s lives.

Reynell’s work outlines the close affinities that exist between Jain religious beliefs and economic practices where family prestige depends upon the sexual honour of its women, and where the control of female sexuality is central to the control of wealth. She demonstrated that religious activity is the primary means whereby women publicly demonstrate their sexual purity. In Jainsim, lay female spirituality is, therefore, an essential aspect of the pan-Indian female ideal of stridharma (woman’s duty) whereby a woman’s primary purpose is to dedicate herself to the service of others, first as a daughter, then as wife and mother. I set out to explore the lives of the female ascetics who renounce the world for their own spiritual advancement and who therefore, represent a challenge to the dominant female ideology. Clementin-Ojha writes that female asceticism in Hinduism is outside the orthodox feminine norm. She writes,

> From the orthodox point of view as it is outlined in the vast corpus of texts of dharma, known collectively as the Dharma Sastras, there is no possible existence for a woman outside of marriage. The practice of world renunciation is a masculine pattern of life... Marriage and married life are thus viewed as a road to salvation, they are sadhana, a method of spiritual achievement (1988:35).

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\(^7\) Throughout the dissertation, I use the word “rhetorical” to describe the way in which the ideological split between the worldly and the transcendent is used persuasively in the construction of Jain reality. It is only through persuasive or “rhetorical” means that the laukik and lokottar is constructed and maintained as separate, since daily life is characterised by their interdependence. As means of persuasion, rhetorical techniques are not meant to be challenged or validated. Instead the context in which the rhetorical techniques are used “supplies its own answer by suggestion, and admits of no other”. (Websters Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1988).
Since female asceticism has been an institutionalised feature of Jainism since the time of Mahavir, it may not be considered “outside the norm” as is female asceticism in Hinduism. I assumed, however, that the ideas and understandings of what constitute a meaningful life to be profoundly different for lay and ascetic women. Reynell describes the disjuncture between lay and ascetic female religiosity thus:

Whilst women’s fasts and religious activities are seen by the community as an extension of their duties within the domestic sphere, and whilst the women themselves engage in religious activities in the belief that they are furthering their family’s fortunes, they also see religion as something which they do for their own pleasure, as a vocation consuming their interest and creative energies. It brings with it far more self-esteem and prestige from their peers and the community than the women gain from their domestic work. Taken to its extreme, this culminates in nunhood. At this point we reach an aspect of Jainism which has vital repercussions for women (1985:242).

I was interested in exploring the lives of female ascetics and the relationship between lay and ascetic women who, I believed, embodied conflicting cultural ideals. The Terapanthi order offered an interesting opportunity through which to explore the relationship between religion and gender: it has the largest order of female ascetics of any Jain sect and, consistent with Jain orders in general, the female ascetics greatly outnumber the monks. In addition, the order’s maintenance of a rigid boundary between the laukik and lokottar, and its insistence on self-realisation as the sine qua non of ascetic life seemed to offer a direct challenge to pan-Indian cultural female ideal of stridharma.

The fieldwork, however, challenged some of my early assumptions. I learned that, in practice, the differences between lay and ascetic women are less stark than their different orientations (worldly/spiritual) might suggest. The powerful symbols and rhetorical tools of the lokottar – namely non-violence, non-possession, celibacy, independence, detachment etc., are less available to ascetic women than to their male counterparts. Even in the Terapanthi order, with its insistence on a rigid demarcation between the laukik and the lokottar, female ascetics continue to be seen (in part) as extenuations of the social sphere by lay society and male ascetics; they are considered less able to completely break with the laukik. Thus, in spite of renouncing the world by becoming renunciants, ascetic women, like lay women, are “perceived as intimately connected to both the physical material world and the spiritual world.

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8 In 1996 there were 539 nuns (sadhus), 142 monks (munis), 81 semi-nuns (samanis), 4 semi-monks (samanis), 51 nuns-in-training (i.e., 36 mumukshus and 15 upasika sisters), and 4 monks-in-training (mumukshus brothers (bhais)).
and that in a sense they mediate between the two" (Reynell, 1985:241). Like Candanvala, with one foot in and one foot out of house, ascetic women are perceived by the community as 'liminal' beings.

My dissertation looks at why this may be the case and what its implications are for female renunciation in Jainism. I look at how the nuns use the dominant symbols of renunciation in the creation of themselves as ascetics and at what makes their lives meaningful and desirable to them. In a context of their daily lives, I explore what the renunciation of the world means to them and how monks and nuns use the symbols of renunciation differently.

As Caroline W. Bynum writes, "If symbols are in fact multivocal, condensing and lived, we will understand them only when we look with as well as over and beyond the participants who use them, feeling as well as knowing their dramas in their own context" (1994:51).

Fieldsite:

From December 1995 until January 1997 I lived in the ancient town of Ladnun in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan, India. Once an important trading town along the caravan routes of the Thar desert, today it is a small, quiet market town with a population of under 40,000. Digambar, Murtipujakas and Terapanthi Jains comprise roughly a third of Ladnun's population; and Hindu and Muslim communities each represent another third (Goonasekere. 1983:8). For Terapanthis, Ladnun has special meaning significance because it is the birthplace (in 1914) of

Candanvala is believed to be one of the first nuns to be ordained by Lord Mahavir. She is "one of the most renowned Jain women in the Svetambar literature and ... is one of the greatest models for women today to follow the religious path intensively as a vocation (1985:241). I paraphrase Reynell's account of the story of her life. Candanvala was a very religious princess who was taken by a merchant's family and made to work as a maidservant, but the merchant's wife was jealous of her beauty. When her husband left on business, she shaved off Candanvala's hair, bound her in chains and left her without food or water. When the husband returned he was shocked to see her in this state. He offered her some food (black lentils were all that was available), but she refused to eat until she first gave alms to an ascetic. She sat on the threshold of the house, with one foot inside and one foot outside, repeating the namaskar mantra as she sorted through the black lentils. Mahavir then appeared. He had just completed a fast of five months and twenty-five days and vowed not to break the fast until certain conditions were met: "the donor should be a royal woman yet working as a maidservant, she should be cleaning grains at the threshold of the house with one foot inside the house and one foot outside. Her hair should be shaved, she should just have undergone a three day fast, she should be unmarried, learning the namaskar mantra by heart and weeping. Candanvala fulfilled all these conditions save that she was not weeping, so Mahavir passed her by. This upset her so greatly that she began to weep, at which point Mahavir returned to break his fast... She then renounced the world and became Mahavir's chief disciple leading an order of 36,000 nuns. On death, she achieved moku" (Reynell. 1985:240).
Ganadhipati 'Guru Dev' Tulsi. And after his accession to acharyship in 1936. it became an important spiritual base for the order. In 1948, on the recommendation of Guru Dev, the

Paromathik Shikshan Sanstha (PSS) was established in Ladnun. It is an institute established primarily to provide training for young women who aspire to become nuns\(^{10}\) (Shântâ, 1985:358-361).

In the early decades after Independence, a wealthy devotee donated a large tract of land (60 acres) to the Terapanth Mahasabha (national lay organisation) for the purpose of establishing a Jain learning centre. This had long been a dream of Guru Dev and in 1970, under his spiritual guidance, the Jain Vishva Bharati was established. It presently includes a learning

\(^{10}\) The institute is also open to boys as a day school. A few boys take classes at the institute but spend most of their time with the monks within the grounds of the JVB.
institute, the JVBI (Jain Vishva Bharat Institute)\textsuperscript{11} - the "first ever Jain university" which offers degree programmes in Non-Violence and Anuvrat, Jainology, Prakrit Language, Preksha Meditation and, as of 1996, Social Work. The JVBI also has a small library, an ayurvedic clinic, a meditation centre, a video centre and a publishing house. However, the dynamism, and raison d'être behind the JVBI comes largely from the ascetic community's presence there, and it is the ascetics (especially the samanis) who form the bulk of the student population at the JVBI. At the centre of the JVBI campus is the munis' residence and a large open-air assembly hall that extends from it. To the south, and connected by a long stretch of sand, is the samanis' residence. The samanis' tiny quarters, attached to a building for lay workers, are to the east of the munis' residence. The sadhvis' residences, like the PSS, are outside the JVBI grounds. In 1996, Guru Dev was too fragile to make his vihar (pilgrimage), and therefore spent the entire year in Ladnun with approximately 200 ascetic disciples. Given the large number of ascetics

\textsuperscript{11} In 1991 the government of India notified the JVBI of its "deemed to be university" status.
and the constant flow of pilgrims, the JVB was, for all intents and purposes, transformed into a monastery\textsuperscript{12}, and I refer to it as such throughout this dissertation. At the start of 1997, after the Maryada Mahotsva (annual ‘Festival of Restraint’ in which all Terapanthi ascetics take part), Guru Dev and his \textit{raj}\textsuperscript{13} travelled to Gangashar, where on June 23\textsuperscript{rd} of that year, he died.

**Methodology & Organisation:**

The dissertation is divided into three sections: Part One, “The Ethics of Renunciation” (Chapters 1 and 2) provides a general background to the dissertation and an overview of Terapanthi Jain ethics. Part Two, “The Rituals of Separation” (Chapters 3-5), looks at the ascetics’ conceptual universe, which is largely concerned with separating and maintaining boundaries between \textit{laukik} (social or worldly) and \textit{lokottar} (transcendent) realms. In Part Three, “Being Of the World” (Chapters 6 and 7), I look at how the \textit{laukik} and \textit{lokottar} realms are, in many important ways, inseparable, and how the ascetics negotiate and reconcile the worldly in their midst. Chapter 8 provides a summation of the thesis and draws general conclusions. After an examination of the ways in which the \textit{laukik} and \textit{lokottar} are symbolically constructed and separated in Jain religious life, I consider why women remain, to a considerable degree, a link between the two.

My interest in conducting fieldwork among the Terapanthi Jains was to explore the ascetic ideal from the domain of the women who profess it – namely from that of the \textit{sadhvis, samanis, munukshus and upasikas}. Out of a total of 81 \textit{samanis}, approximately\textsuperscript{14} half were present in Ladnun during the year I was there. This dissertation, as well as my most enduring friendships, grew out of interactions with this group and, throughout, I explore similarities and differences between our different world experiences. My work is a product of my participatory experience with the Terapanthi community with whom I lived and studied. My methodology, therefore, comes under the category of “radical empiricism” as described by Michael Jackson (1989, 1996). In the introduction to \textit{Paths Towards a Clearing} (1989), Jackson writes “Radical empiricism is first and foremost ‘a philosophy of the experience of objects and actions in which the subject itself is a participant’ ([Edie 1965:119] 1989:3)”, and begins with the premise that

\textsuperscript{12} Because the Terapanthis are opposed to ascetics living in dwellings built specially for them, they would reject an understanding of the JVB as a permanent monastery.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Raj} = the group of \textit{sadhvis} and munis that travel with the leaders of the order.

\textsuperscript{14} I write “approximately” because the \textit{samanis} are a very mobile order. Small groups are often sent off to another village or city for some event, while others would return.
“[o]ur understandings of others can only proceed from within our own experience...” (ibid.:17).

Jackson adds,

A radically empirical method includes the experience of the observer and defines the experimental field as one of interactions and intersubjectivity. Accordingly, we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data.” (ibid.,4).

In the dissertation, I have done my best to portray a view of the Jain tradition that is faithful to the nuns who were my teachers, and from whom I have learned so much.

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CHAPTER 2 ETHICS, ONTOLOGY & THE HUMAN DOMAIN

The Social Worker & the Ascetic:

Suman, samaniji and I sat talking in the afternoon lull between gochari (alms) rounds. Suman was a student at the new Social Work programme at the JVB (Jain Vishva Bharati) and, like samaniji, was in her late twenties. In every other way, however, the two were different. Suman was not Jain, and though familiar with the sight of Jain ascetics, she had little knowledge or interest in their traditions. She had been in Ladnun just a few weeks and already longed for the hustle and bustle of Ajmer, her home city.

In an effort to expand its mandate and establish greater interest among the non-ascetic community, the JVBI instituted a programme of social work for lay students in the fall of 1996.15 The first group of students to attend were young middle class Hindu women from neighbouring regions. They acknowledged that the primary motive for coming to the JVBI was because admission was free. For a short time they shared a building with the samanis, much to the displeasure of both. The samanis complained that the young women were too boisterous and not respectful; and the lay students complained of the samanis solemnity. When the social-work students were given a residence of their own, the two groups had precious little to do with each other. However, until that time, some of the students, like Suman, would occasionally drop by to talk.

That afternoon, our conversation quickly turned to the differences in their careers – one a social worker trying to change the world, and one an ascetic, ostensibly trying to escape it. Suman was proud of her work and highly critical of what she considered to be the “pointlessness” of the ascetic life. She said to samaniji,

"We help people in need, not just ourselves... We go into the Harijan villages and try to make their lives better. This makes our work important What do you do? You only take care of yourselves".

Samaniji's reddening face immediately betrayed her, but her voice remained calm. "No. This is not so," she said, "We do help people, but not in your way".

15 In 1996, the majority of the students at the institute were samanis.
16 An instructor at the JVBI believed that the establishment of a social work programme was evidence of a shift in Terapanthi doctrine away from Bhikshu's radical doctrinal split between the 'social' and the 'spiritual'. The ascetics, however, did not see it in this light. To them, it simply reflected good work in the field of social duty, but had nothing to do with them: the social work programme was set up by and for shravaks (householders) alone.
“If someone is hungry, I will feed them. If they are sick, I will heal them. You say ‘ahimsa’, ‘ahimsa’ all the time, but you can do nothing”, Suman snapped.

“I am a Jain nun. I cannot feed them, this is true. But we will not do nothing. We can show the problem to the shravaks and they will help physically. We teach people religion and ...”

“What use are mantras!” Suman interrupted throwing her hands in the air and looking at me for support, “Real spirituality is social work”.

“No. It is good work and it is your social duty, but it is not dharma. We dedicate our lives to spirituality, not to worldly life. We provide the greatest welfare of all”.

“You only help yourself. What is the use of your ahimsa? You do nothing to help the suffering!”. At first samanji did not respond, and it was clear she was upset. She took hold of a few books and pulled herself off the floor. Standing at the door of the room, she spoke in a quiet but confident voice,

“Samsar is suffering”, she said, “We give the greatest help by showing how to escape samsar. That is the goal of ahimsa”.

The split between social and spiritual action is at the heart of the Terapanthi worldview. It stems from a purist and absolutist interpretation of ahimsa and a belief that, as Lawrence Babh claims, “The only truly rational and morally defensible response to this [the Jain] cosmos is the most radical withdrawal from it” (1996:52).

Ethics & Ontology:

The Jain tradition is often encapsulated in the aphorism “ahimsa paramo dharma” (“Non-violence is the highest form of religious conduct”), reflecting the centrality of the principle of ahimsa in the tradition. The image of a muni wearing a munipatti, and carrying a rajoharan (whiskbroom) to clear his path of any tiny critters is a common one. Through it we are struck by the depth of Jain compassion and commitment to non-violence. However, and in spite of its ardent compassion, it (i.e., ahimsa) is not a socio-centric ethic.

Ethics is the gateway into a culture’s worldview or ontology. The philosopher Charles Taylor argues that a community’s ethics represent the best mode of access to its reality. “Our moral reactions”, he writes, “involve claims, implicit and explicit, about the nature and status of human beings” (1989:5). Taylor argues that a moral reaction is an affirmation of a given “ontology of the human” – in other words, our morals reveal our notions of what it is to be truly
human and why humans are worthy of respect. In Jainism these ideals revolve around non-violence, non-possession and non-attachment, and are embodied in the ascetics who deserve respect because they have renounced the world to pursue these ideals totally (see Babb, 1996 for a discussion of the veneration of ascetics). Ahimsa is the central practice in the quest for liberation because it defines - negatively - a state of purity and detachment within a violent, passionate world. And in so doing it establishes difference. Ahimsa makes the human incarnation unique among all living beings by making it moral. In other words, it establishes the human domain. As it is understood in Jainism, ahimsa is an ethic of non-interference and a method of disconnecting or separating oneself from the violence which everyday life involves. However, as a result of popular works on Jainism (e.g., Tobias 1991 and Animal Rights interpretations) as well as - and interestingly - Western Jain writings, ahimsa has often been translated as a socio-centric 'ethic of succour', bearing more resemblance to the life-affirming values of Hindu and Judaeo-Christian ethics, than the renunciatory ones of Jainism.

By arguing that Jain ethics is not socio-centric, I do not mean that it is not ‘other-oriented’ or compassionate. Clearly it is, and the lives of the Jinas (or Tirthankaras) are evidence of this. Their compassion compels them to teach the doctrine of moksa before finally becoming siddhas (liberated beings) and this makes them the most highly revered beings in Jainism. Jaini writes,

The fact that first salutations go not to the perfected siddhas, but rather to the Jinas (arhats) who teach in the world, indicates the extent to which Jainas have glorified the virtue of compassion (Jaini, 1990:163).

I maintain, however, that although their teachings are compassionate, they are not socio-centric. By ‘socio-centric’ I am referring to an ethic which is concerned primarily with social morality, social stability and with the fulfilment of one’s social obligations – as is, for instance, the Dharmasastras (Jhingran, 1989:73). Compassion is not directed so much at the suffering in social life, but at the suffering of social life; it arises from observing worldly life itself. The message of the Tirthankaras is that all human beings are capable of conquering the bondage of physical existence and achieving freedom from rebirth (Folkert, 1987). Compassion, though intrinsically other-oriented, is not necessary socio-centric. Ahimsa, as Jains formulate it, is not concerned with social roles and obligations and its teachings are not

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17 The socio-centric alternative to the ascetic ethic finds expression in much of Indian thought. Jhingran elaborates, “The term dharma is derived from the root dhṛ, meaning to sustain or support, that is, dharma is what sustains or supports the society. This definition of dharma has given a slight bias to the entire Hindu thought in favour of social stability. The main emphasis of Hindu Law-givers has been on those duties of the individual which directly contribute to the stability and harmonious preservation of the social order” (1989:74)
designed to remedy social ills so much as escape them. It reveals a perception of the world as inherently corrupt and in need of transcendence, and it leads to renunciation and the desire to help individuals out of samsara, not to active social involvement. On Jain compassion, Jaini writes,

This awareness of the basic worth of all beings, and of one’s kinship with them, generates a feeling of great compassion (anukampa) for others. Whereas the compassion felt by an ordinary man is tinged with pity or with attachment to its object, anukampa is free of such negative aspects; it develops purely from wisdom, from seeing the substance (dravya) that underlies visible modes, and it fills the individual with an unselfish desire to help other souls towards moksa. If this urge to bring all tormented beings out of samsāra is particularly strong and is cultivated, it may generate those auspicious karmas that later confer the status of Tirthankara upon certain omniscients. When present to a more moderate degree, anukampa brings an end to exploitative and destructive behaviour, for even the lowest animal is now seen as intrinsically worthwhile and thus inviolable (Jaini, 1990:150 Italics added).

That ahimsa can be understood both as a socio-centric and liberation-centric ethic stems from the fact that the Indian religio-cultural complex contains both of these divergent trends; one world-and-life-affirming and the other, world-and-life-negating (Schweitzer, 1980). The two are competing ideals. There is considerable debate among scholars over whether these two currents emanated from one source, the Vedas, or as two divergent ones – perhaps even from separate peoples (Jhingran, 1989). Whatever the truth, their differences are fundamental and reflect contrasting ontologies. According to G. C. Pande,

The Vedic search for the spirit did not deny the world. It rather accepted the world as a gift and an expression of Divine reality. The Upanisadic quest seeks to go beyond the life of worldliness and ritualism centred in action, but does not usually advocate a radical renunciation of all life of action. Nor does it condemn the world as a vale of tears, although it recognizes the unsatisfactory character of worldly goods and gains and stresses the need for spiritual enlightenment... A quite different weltanschauung is expressed in the spiritual quest and thought of the wandering ascetics and mendicants whom we meet in the 6th century BC north-eastern India (cited in Jhingran, 1989:8)

The concept of ahimsa originated within the ‘liberation path’ (nivritti-marg) of the ascetic worldview – and is contrasted to the ‘worldly path’ (pravritti-marg) of the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition. Jhingran writes:

Of course, violence is also condemned by the authors of the Dharmaśāstras from time to time. But it does not seem to be the main concern of the Lawgivers. Perhaps violence was accepted as an integral part of the day-to-day life and did not bother them, unless it threatened the stability of the social order. At least, it suggests that the ideal of non-violence (ahimsā) was not fully
integrated into the Hindu social ethos till the time of Dharmaśāstras and Epics (1989:90).

The ethic of *ahimsa*, understood as non-violence and non-involvement, was a central concept of the liberation philosophies. Jhingran continues,

A great intellectual and spiritual unrest and an urge to question and find answers to the ultimate mystery of life seem to have stirred the Aryans, especially the ksatriyas, \(^{18}\) near about the 6\(^{th}\) century B.C. Jainism, Buddhism, Sāmkhya and Vedānta are the products of this spiritual unrest. All of them express the dissatisfaction felt by the intellectual elite of the society against the externalistic approach and violence of the Vedic rituals. The various religio-philosophic systems of this period rejected not only the Vedic religion, but also its goals like prosperity here and heaven hereafter. Instead, they sought to transcend them in their quest for liberation. Though they conceived liberation very differently, and also put forward very different ontologies, they shared their spiritual urge and their conviction that the quest of liberation is to be undertaken by turning the mind away from the world and towards the reality within oneself (1989:14).

Paul Dundas refers to the earliest Jain works, the Acaranga Sutra (AS) and the Sutrakritanga Sutra (SKS), for insight into its teaching of *ahimsa*. He writes,

The *Acaranga* makes a firm statement about the central concern of the doctrine: `All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, unchangeable, eternal law which the clever ones, who understand the world, have proclaimed' (AS 1.4.1.1-2; trans. Jacobi, cited in Dundas, 1992:36).

And;

The world is characterised by ignorance, suffering and pain caused by action (AS 1.1.2.1). True understanding embodies itself in non-violence through an awareness that all living creatures, including oneself, do not wish to suffer in any way (SKS 2.11.9-10). As a broad ethical principle, this is fairly unexceptional and has to be fitted into a further series of conceptions: action, whether done, caused or condoned by oneself, brings about rebirth (AS 1.1), and the world is in a state of suffering caused by actions of ignorant people (AS 1.2.1) who do not know that they are surrounded by life-forms which exist in earth, water, air and fire, a true understanding of which can be gained from the teaching of Mahāvīra (ibid.:36-37).

Despite the initial antagonism for the creed of world-renunciation among supporters of the Vedic tradition, in the fullness of time it was absorbed. In the *Dharmasastras*, for example, liberation becomes a legitimate goal for the second half of one’s life, to be taken up after first

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\(^{18}\) That a non-violent philosophy might have arisen among a warrior caste, the Ksatriyas, is, according to the Terapanthi ascetics, a *logical* development. To be a Jain, they argue, means to be a "conqueror" – not of others, but of the self, and this is the greatest of all battles. The Ksatriyas, upon realising this truth, internalised their battles (See Babb, 1993).
pursuing a life of *dharma* (righteous duty), *artha* (prosperity), and *kama* (pleasure). This synthesis led to the development of the “asramas” - a scheme delineating four consecutive stages of the ideal life, beginning with the celibate student (*brahmacharya*); followed by the householder (*grhasa*); the forest dweller (*vanaprastha*) and finally, the renunciant (*samnyasi*). Jhingran writes that the two traditions of an active life-in-the-world (*pravrtti*) and renunciation of the world (*nivrtti*) have since flourished side by side in Hinduism to this day (1989:18).

*Ahimsa*, due to this synthesis of the liberation and worldly philosophies, has come to be variously interpreted as both a this-worldly and an other-worldly ethic.

However, interpreting *ahimsa* as a social virtue in the Jain tradition estranges it from its liberation-centric, other-worldly ontology, and in addition, undermines its function in the creation of the Jain ascetic ideal. To illustrate my argument, I include here two versions of the popular story of the 22\textsuperscript{nd} prophet of Jainism - Tirthankara Neminath. The first version is a summary of the story I heard many times in India. The second version, which I came across in a book published in England, is an example of the standard way Jainism is portrayed to Western audiences:

Many years ago there was a handsome young prince called Nemi Kumar. He was to be married to a beautiful princess called Rajimati. On the arranged date the marriage procession started with Nemi Kumar riding the decorated king elephant. All the kings and princes of the Yadav clan joined the procession with their royal regalia and retinue. When the procession was approaching the destination, Nemi Kumar saw that on the side of the road there were large fenced-in areas with cages full of wailing animals and birds. Filled with sympathy and compassion, he asked the elephant driver why the animals and birds were being kept in bondage. The driver informed him that the creatures were collected to be butchered for meat for the large number of guests attending his marriage. Nemi Kumar was filled with despair and a feeling of detachment. He said to the elephant driver, “If I agree to be the cause of the butchering of so many living beings, my life and the one to come will be filled with pain and misery. Therefore, I will not marry. Immediately arrange for the release of all these creatures. Return home to Dwarka.” The driver opened the gates of the cages. The animals jumped with glee and ran away into the jungle. The driver came back and turned the elephant towards Dwarka. On the way Nemi Kumar took off all the valuables and ornaments on his body and handed them over to the elephant driver. The news spread panic in the marriage procession. All the seniors of the Yadav clan tried to change the mind of Nemi Kumar, but in vain. Nemi Kumar said to them, “As these animals were prisoners in iron cages, we all are prisoners in the cages of karma which is much stronger than those fences. See the feeling of joy evident in the animals released from the cages. Know that happiness is in freedom, not in bondage. I want to tread the path of breaking this bondage of karma and embrace eternal bliss. Please do not stop me”. One day, not long afterwards, in the Raivatak garden of Dwarka, he stood under an Ashoka tree before many onlookers. There he removed his clothes and pulled out five fistfuls of hair, initiating himself as an ascetic. He spent the next 54 days in deep spiritual practices, meditating and fasting without any attachment to his body. On the fifteenth day of the dark half of the month of Ashvin, in the afternoon, he was
observing a two day fast and was meditating under a bamboo tree when he became an omniscient. He became the twenty-second Tirthankar, known as “Arhat Neminath”.

When Rajimati [Nemi Kumar’s fiancée] recovered from her melancholy, she decided to follow the path taken by Nemi Kumar. Prince Rathnemi, the younger brother of Nemi Kumar, tried his best to seduce Rajimati, but she would not be distracted from her goal. When she learned that Nemi Kumar had become an omniscient, she took diksa (initiation). She lost herself in penances and other spiritual practices and in the end gained liberation.

NEMIKUMAR’S DECISION TO RENOUNCE THE WORLD
SOURCE: TIRTHANKAR CHARUTRA, SHRI AMAR MUNI, 1995
The following is the story as it was written for Jain children living in England. It is notable because it is the conventional way Jain ethics have been portrayed in the West.

One evening after dinner Abhaybhai told Ajay a story:

Many years ago there was a handsome young prince called Nemi Kumar. He was to be married to a beautiful princess called Rajimati. On his wedding day Nemi Kumar led the procession of his family and friends, and his princely retinue, towards Princess Rajimati’s palace. Everyone was in a festive mood. There was music in the air. The Prince was sitting calmly in his chariot, which his charioteer was driving. Suddenly Prince Nemi Kumar heard animal noises which got louder as they got nearer. They soon saw where the noises were coming from. Prince Nemi Kumar asked the procession to stop and listen. Hundreds of animals and birds were packed tightly in cages. There were fish in large tanks. The animals seemed frightened and restless. Their eyes were pleading. The Prince asked his friends why these animals and birds were captured. He was told they were for his wedding feast. This saddened the Prince, who was very kind and sensitive. The frightened sheep seemed to say, “We will be slaughtered for this prince’s feast”. A beautiful deer had his eyes full of tears, as if he were pleading “I don’t want to be killed, I want to go back to the forest and roam free”. Beautiful green parrots were flying here and there in their cages trying to find a way out. A wise bull seemed to be saying, “These men are cruel. They cry when their children die, but how can they kill our children? Why can’t they eat only plants and fruits, as we do? How can they claim to be superior to us when they kill us all the time?” The kind Prince could bear it no longer. His heart was crying at the pain and fear the poor animals were suffering. He climbed down from his chariot and walked towards the cages. The animals quietened down, seeing such a stately but kind and loving figure walking towards them. They knew that they need no longer be frightened. The Prince opened the cages, and let the animals and birds out. He told his men to return the fish to the sea without harming them. The birds flew out happy and free. The animals ran into the forest. They all seemed to be thanking the Prince for saving them.

Just then King Ugrasen, the Princess’s father, came to meet the Prince. He saw the Prince releasing the animals and asked, “Why have you released these animals, O Prince?” The Prince replied, “How can we rejoice when so many animals are suffering? How can we humans feast on these innocent animals and birds we are meant to protect? What use is happiness if it is built on the suffering of so many? With this the Prince turned his chariot and went back. The wedding was called off. After some time, the Prince became a monk. Princess Rajimati followed in his footsteps and became a nun. The Prince Nemi Kumar was none other than the 22nd Tirthankar Bhagvan Neminath.

Abhaybhai finished the story. Ajay said, “Now I can understand how the animals must feel when they are captured and killed (Desai, Kapashi & Shah, 1994:16-17. Italics added).

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19 That a traditional Jain story of renunciation is translated by Western Jains into a story espousing socio-centric ideals is interesting in and of itself, and raises many questions about the relationship between ethics, identity and acculturation among a minority immigrant community. I use this tale here, however, simply to illustrate the common presentation of Jain ethics in the West.
If we accept that morality is our mode of access to reality, we see that these stories usher us into very different realities. The “Western” version is interesting for a number of reasons: what is lost in the translation is what is most meaningful to Jains in India, namely the ascetic values of detachment and renunciation. It estranges asceticism, and makes its connection with *ahimsa* or ‘non-violence’ rather puzzling. But *ahimsa* and asceticism are variable expressions of the same ethos of “vairagya” or “complete detachment”, and are intrinsic parts of the same worldview. That they have been analysed as separate and even opposing commitments reveals that Jain ethics has been severed from its own ontology.

Furthermore, although the version retains the centrality of the doctrine of *ahimsa*, it does so within the Western emphasis on suffering. A preoccupation with the avoidance of suffering betrays a this-worldly orientation, in that it assumes suffering is so wretched because it is so meaningless. In the Western version, Nemi Kumar asks, “How can we humans feast on these innocent animals and birds we are meant to protect?” This idea of ‘protecting the innocent’ implies that it is only humans who are endowed with moral judgement, which they should use to take care of ‘instinctual’ beasts. But a central tenet of all Indian religio-philosophies (in both the ‘life-affirming’ and ‘life-negating’ traditions) is that the universe is a moral order, wherein everyone gets essentially what they deserve (Jhingran, 1989:33), and where all things are endowed with moral status. Suffering may be abominable, but it is never meaningless. Moral law, and not the mechanical forces of nature, govern and control the world and all its processes. This is distinct from the Western ‘nature/culture’ worldview which considers morality a human peculiarity in a passive, innocent nature and which, in turn, assumes an ethic of active support to be a uniquely human responsibility. Western crusades to rid the world of suffering presuppose the human ability to do so; only humans with their ‘humanity’ or ‘civilisation’ can bring morality to a profane, arbitrary ‘nature’.

*Ahimsa* refers primarily to the avoidance of behaviour that inhibits the soul’s ability to attain *moksa*, not an injunction to alleviate suffering. Charles Taylor argues that modern Westerners place an exceptional importance on avoiding suffering, far more now than even just a few centuries ago, and significantly, he attributes this to a decline in the West of the whole notion of a moral cosmic order (which gave misfortune ‘meaning’), and to a gradual “affirmation of ordinary life” (1989:12-14). His discussion of the rise in importance of suffering in conjunction with an increasing endorsement and valorisation of worldly existence is important for our discussion of Jainism, whose ultimate ethic is the transcendence of ‘this-worldly’ existence. Taylor writes.
According to traditional Aristotelian ethics, this [life of production and the family] has merely infrastructural importance. 'Life' was important as the necessary background and support to 'the good life' of contemplation and one's action as a citizen. With the Reformation, we find a modern, Christian-inspired sense that ordinary life was on the contrary the very centre of the good life. The crucial issue was how it was led, whether worshipfully and in the fear of God or not. But the life of the God-fearing was lived out in marriage and their calling. The previous 'higher' forms of life were dethroned, as it were. And along with this went frequently an attack, covert or overt, on the elites, which had made these forms their province. I believe that this affirmation of ordinary life, though not uncontested and frequently appearing in secularised form, has become one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilisation. It underlies our contemporary "bourgeois" politics, so much concerned with issues of welfare, and at the same time powers the most influential revolutionary ideology of our century, Marxism, with its apotheosis of man the producer. The sense of the importance of the everyday in human life, along with its corollary about the importance of suffering, colours our whole understanding of what it is truly to respect human life and integrity. Along with the central place given to autonomy, it defines a version of this demand which is peculiar to our civilisation, the modern West (1989: 13-14. Italics added).

We conclude from the second version of the story that Prince Nemi Kumar behaved righteously because he saved the lives of the animals. His reasons for renouncing the world and becoming a monk are not at all clear. If the alleviation of physical suffering was his motive, why not continue to do so? Almost without exception, Jain stories end with the protagonist renouncing the world and embarking on the ascetic path. We do not learn about all the further austerities Nemi Kumar deliberately put himself through on his path of asceticism, perhaps because that would be difficult to reconcile with a story first and foremost about the avoidance of suffering. The original version, by contrast, does not stress the avoidance of suffering. Suffering has never been the primary concern of the Jain ethical system precisely because its existence can be rationalised within a moral cosmic order.

The original version of the story places stress on detachment because attachment is the root of violence and the source of all bondage. The killing of animals is an extreme form of violence arising from attachment, but Nemi Kumar realises that social life itself is inherently violent. Marriage, for example, as an attachment is also a form of violence. Asceticism, as a 'stepping out' of society, becomes logical: the ascetic path is the best means to ensure a life of detachment. And while compassion is a feature of the original story, it is not understood as emotional vicarious suffering, instead it is presented as a respect for all living beings as equal souls. Every soul is entrapped in worldly bondage, and will one day have to break those bonds if liberation is to be attained. Compassion means recognising that all living beings are essentially similar: that all deserve respect and that none should be injured. It means not
interfering in another’s spiritual journey. Dundas writes that this is the essential message of the Terapanth order.

Bhikshu’s [founder of Terapanth order] message is that of the very oldest Jain scriptures: it is not the duty of the true monk to rescue other creatures but rather to concern himself with his own spiritual development. The purpose of non-violence is the purification of the soul (1992:221).

Although the ultimate goal of the ascetics is self-purification, compassion is never absent. Rather than helping others in worldly ways, which involves violence, ascetics teach primarily by example; they represent a way out of samsar. In Jainism, therefore, ahimsa is not a ‘this worldly’ ethic of active support, but an ethic of respect and non-disruption in the spiritual realm and non-involvement in the world of passion and violence. Holmstrom summarises,

As individuality is ultimately a process of separation, so the dominant vow of ahimsa, separation form the social and the violence which everyday life involves, is also concomitant with the pursuit of individual enlightenment. The aim of compassion (daya) which informs ahimsa is not to ensure that beings live rather than die per se, but the task of purifying one’s own soul from the contamination caused by violence, and to persuade others to do likewise; ahimsa is not, strictly, to do with life or death, but about freeing the soul from passions (1988:37. Italics present).

Likewise, Jaini explains how himsa (violence) is understood in Jainism as an obstacle to self-realisation.

Himsā has ordinarily been understood in India as harm done to others; for Jainas, however, it refers primarily to injuring oneself – to behaviour which inhibits the soul’s ability to attain moksa. Thus the killing of animals, for example, is reprehensible not only for the suffering produced in the victims, but even more so because it involves intense passions on the part of the killer, passions which bind him more firmly in the grip of samsāra (Jaini, 1990:167).

We see that in Jainism, non-violence is intimately connected with non-action. James Laidlaw in his book Riches and Renunciation (1996) describes ahimsa as an “ethic of quarantine” (1996:159). He argues that Jains’ elaborate practices of non-violence are neither about minimising death nor saving life, but keeping life ‘at bay’. They essentially amount to an attempt at the ‘avoidance of life’ (ibid.).

Complete detachment (vairagya), from which ahimsa is but one part, is a key virtue or attitude that pervades and determines the entire morality of the philosophies of liberation (i.e., Jainism, Buddhism, Samkhya-Yoga). In a liberation-centric morality, philanthropic or humanitarian works are not considered as relevant to the quest for liberation, even if they should be pursued by the laity as ‘social duty’. The Terapanthi Jains take this to its logical end, and the distinction they make between religion and social duty is sharper than within any other
Jain community. They argue that the building of hospitals or animal shelters must be seen as a form of social and not religious activity (see Flügel, 1995-6). If one is living 'in society', then such acts may be necessary, but they do not lead to good karma or the removal of bad karma; that is, they do not lead to any spiritual gains. Most Terapanthi ascetics are very careful not to praise or encourage these efforts for fear that they may be misinterpreted as spiritual acts, which the Terapanthi adamantly insist they are not. They continuously instruct the laity on the differences between "adhyatmik dharm" which refers to those activities that benefit one's soul along the path to liberation, and "laukik dharm" which comprises all dimensions of social duty. Jhingran, in her book Aspects of Hindu Morality, claims that the elevation of 'soul duty' over that of social duty is shared by all liberation-centric philosophies.

The tradition of liberation or nivrtti-marga is, of course, primarily concerned with man's quest of liberation (moksa). Man is constantly exhorted to seek his individual liberation and not worry about his other socio-moral obligations. It is even asserted that a man need not wait to take up the quest of liberation till he has reached the last stage of renunciation (samnyasa-asrama); instead he can take up renunciation whenever the desire for liberation is aroused in his heart. [20] In contrast, the philosophy and worldview associated with the pravrtti-marga of Vedas and Dharamasastras, is socio-centric and stresses than a man must repay all his debts and fulfil all his obligations before commencing the quest for his salvation. The tradition of liberation is also world-and-life negating, in that it conceives liberation as a state of transcendent being and consciousness, totally unrelated to this world and its values which are viewed as hindrances in a man's search for liberation. This is again in sharp contrast to the world-and-life-affirming ethos of the earlier or Vedic tradition, with its three values, [21] pertaining to the life-in-the-world (1989:115).

Interpreting ahimsa as a socio-centric ethic makes it easier to translate into a Western ethical framework, but to do so severs it from its underlying ontology and from its twin ethic of asceticism. This is not to say that ahimsa is only defined negatively as a purely a 'prohibitive' ethic designed to bring about internal purification. It is also interpreted in positive terms, "involving such qualities as friendship [with all living beings], goodwill and peace, which manifest themselves through gentleness and lack of passion"(Dundas, 1992:138-9). However, an ethic of 'good will' and 'lack of passion' focuses on creating an ideal self - which is very different from a 'socio-centric' ethic that strives to create an ideal society.

Anthropological studies of Jainism, in whose domain the study of ethics would naturally fall, are relatively few and have largely focused on issues of community identity. Consequently, they have tended to treat Jainism's rigorous ethical system as a defining feature of the community, rather than as an epistemological category in its own right. But if, as Charles

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20 This is the argument put forward by the Terapanthi ascetic order which accepts minors for initiation.
Taylor argues, ethics is our best mode of access to reality, we must try to understand the Jain application of *ahimsa*. Through it, we will develop an understanding of Jainism's unique worldview and what it means to be a moral being in the Jain tradition (see Folkert, 1993).

**Ethics & the Human Domain:**

A central focus of all cultural life is devoted to establishing what it is to be properly human; the attempt to establish human uniqueness in contradistinction to the 'otherness' of the environment is fundamental to self-definition. The Jain Ascetic Ideal must be understood in these terms, as an expression of a unique classification of the universe and the place of human beings within it. Anthropologists have long demonstrated that the creation of a boundary between human and non-human is central to humanity's definition of itself, but have paid less attention to the various forms these boundaries take. In fact, very often we assume we already know all that needs to be known about the boundary, and have interpreted it in a decidedly Western way: as an impenetrable barrier separating two mutually exclusive domains between humans and non-humans; between culture and nature.

In so doing, however, we are guilty of mistaking a cultural construct for reality; of wrongly assuming the universal human/not human distinction reproduces itself everywhere in terms of a "nature/culture" formulation. Philippe Descola and Gisli Palsson, in their recently published book, *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives* (1996) argue that this construct is so pervasive in the discipline precisely because it is indispensable to our way of seeing and valuing:

If such analytical categories as economics, totemism, kinship, politics, individualism, or even society, have been characterised as ethnocentric constructs, why should it be any different with the disjunction between nature and society? The answer is that this dichotomy is not just another analytical category belonging to the intellectual tool-kit of the social sciences; it is the key foundation of modernist epistemology (1996: 12).

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21 *Kama* = desire; *Artha* = wealth; *Dharma* = righteousness/duty

22 Given the diversity of beliefs among Jain communities, perhaps we could never speak about "Jain ethics" as a singular homogenous whole. Nevertheless, as it has been espoused in India, *ahimsa* has always been first and foremost an ethic of renunciation, not worldly involvement.

23 In an essay on the works of Kendall Folkert, Cort writes that "Folkert goes on to argue that the study of religion needs to develop a distinctive anthropology (in the older sense of the word as the study of what it means to be human, rather than in the more recent sense of a particular discipline within the social sciences), placed firmly within the realm of the humanities, which keeps the physical and moral nature of the human being at the centre of all comparative studies" (1993 xiv).
Descola and Pálsson argue that the nature-culture dichotomy has provided the discipline of anthropology with an identity marker and has served as its central dogma since the post WW2 period. I quote at length,

For cultural ecology, sociobiology, and some brands of Marxist anthropology, human behaviour, social institutions and specific cultural features were seen as adaptive responses to, or mere expressions of, basic environmental or genetic constraints... As a result, little attention was paid to how non-western cultures conceptualised their environment and their relation to it, except to evaluate possible convergences or discrepancies between bizarre emic ideas and the etic orthodoxy in the laws of nature.

Structuralist or symbolic anthropology... has used the nature-culture opposition as an analytical device in order to make sense of myths, rituals, systems of classification, food and body symbolism, and many other aspects of social life that imply a conceptual discrimination between sensible qualities, tangible properties and defining attributes. Although the cultural configurations submitted to this type of analysis differed widely from one another, the actual content of the concepts of nature and culture used as classificatory indexes always referred implicitly to the ontological domains covered by these notions in western culture. In other words, while each of the two approaches emphasised a particular aspect of the polar opposition – nature shaping culture versus culture imposing meaning on nature – they nevertheless took the dichotomy for granted and shared an identical, universalistic conception of nature (1996:2-3). [24]

Western ethics is rooted in, and inseparable from, a nature-culture dichotomy because, in the West, human dignity resides in that which distinguishes us from the non-human environment, in particular, from animals. Animals have always served as a contrast to illuminate human nature, and human worth is located in those areas that we believe we have a monopoly on – e.g. rationality, language, morality etc. Aristotle, for example, develops the idea that humans differ from animals in that we possess reason or ‘mind’ (De Anima 11,3, cited in Midgley, 1979). Centuries later, René Descartes claims that consciousness is a characteristic of humans only, and animals are simply ‘automata’, like machines, and incapable of pain (Regan,

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[24] Within the modernist epistemology, we play both sides of the nature/culture dichotomy to our advantage. Culture represents humanity and all that is moral, productive and creative. We draw upon it to distinguish ourselves from the “instinctual brutes”. But when we want to discuss ‘reality’, we turn to the other polar opposite and it becomes immutable ‘nature’ whose depths are plumbed. The nature/culture or nature/social distinction is central rhetorical device of scientific inquiry in the claim that ‘truth’ resides in ‘nature’, and all false knowledge is that which has been tainted by values, bias and beliefs – in other words, the ‘social’. Convincing others than something is a ‘hard fact’ entails the perception that a fact is something which has not socially constructed. A fact attains fact status by being freed from the social circumstances of its production (see Bloor, 1976; Collins, 1977; Latour, 1986)
1983). Establishing uniqueness is not merely a philosophical concern – moral consideration in
the West is dependent upon its existence. As Charles Taylor writes,

Culture tells us that human beings are creatures of God, or are immortal souls
or emanations of divine fire, or rational beings and thus have dignity that
transcends any other beings. The various cultures which restrict this respect do
so by denying the crucial description to those left outside: they are thought to
lack souls, or to be not fully rational, or perhaps to be destined by God for
some lower station... (1989:5 italics added).

Elaine Pagels, in her book *The Origin of Satan*, likewise claims that the method by
which we demonise our 'enemies' is by denying them the essential attribute of our humanness.
She cites anthropological studies which have demonstrated “that the worldview of most peoples
consists essentially of two pairs of binary oppositions: human/not human and we/they”
(1995:37). In addition, Mary Douglas, who devoted much of her work to the study of human
classification, and to human self-understanding, considered the conceptual boundary between
the human and not-human to be unbridgeable. She writes,

Whenever we consider the nature of things, there is this tendency to exempt
ourselves. Thus appears a boundary between us and animal creation, a
boundary between spirit and matter (1975:211).

Douglas aligns ‘animal creation’ with matter, making a jump from the universal spirit-
matter dichotomy to a culturally specific human-animal, culture-nature dichotomy. But in
Jainism, human dignity and moral consideration are not rooted in a nature-culture distinction.
Value is not dependent on that which non-humans lack. Jainism does not dichotomise the
universe in this manner since animals are no more ‘matter’ than are humans; both represent
different formulations or ‘modes’ (parayya) of spirit and matter.

Taylor, Pagels and Douglas provide examples of the process through which human
uniqueness and moral worth are established in the West. But this process is not universal. Such
an exclusionary and adversarial ontology is absent in Jainism. Although Jains treat the human
incarnation as a privileged and exalted one, they don’t believe that humans possess anything
uniquely or exclusively which should entitle them to their superior status. There exist five types
of living beings in the Jain universe, each type having either one, two, three, four or five senses.
These beings are arranged according to the following schema:

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25 Moral consideration is denied to most species, for instance, because they are believed lack some
   essential human characteristic.
26 Jains classify living beings in a myriad of ways, but there is no category that humans occupy alone.
   One division is between birth ‘by womb’ and by ‘agglutination’ (an asexual reproduction or gathering of
   materials). Interestingly, human beings fall into both categories! In comparison to the Judaeo-Christian
   view of humans as “created in the image of God”, Jain writings often reflect a rather modest and sober
NUMBER and TYPE OF SENSES

1. One-sensed beings called “nigodas” (touch) - earth-, water-, fire-, air- and plant bodied.
2. Two-sensed beings (touch and taste) - worms, leeches, molluscs (oysters, mussels, snails etc.)
3. Three-sensed beings (touch, taste, smell) - small “minibeasts” such as ants, fleas, plant-lice, cotton-seed insects, termites, centipedes.
4. Four-sensed beings (touch, taste, smell, sight) - some “minibeasts” such as wasps, flies, gnats, mosquitoes, butterflies, moths, scorpions etc.
5. Five-sensed beings, (touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing) - larger animals such as fish, birds, and quadrupeds, humans, infernals and gods

(TYPE OF BEINGS)

(Tattvartha Sutra, 1994:45).

The greater the number of senses, the greater the self-awareness and, therefore, the greater the ability to understand worldly existence as a state of bondage in need of escape. But an increase in the number of senses does not mean greater moral worth. All living beings, from one-sensed to five-sensed, are endowed with a soul, and each of these souls – however encased – are of equal value. This is a basic truth of Jain cosmology (see Babb, 1996:44-46). The nine Tattvas (‘truths’ or ‘realities’) of existence for all living beings are:

1. Jiva (soul)
2. Ajiva (non-soul, matter, karma)
3. Punya (merit or auspicious karmic matter in fruition)
4. Paap (demerit or inauspicious karmic matter in fruition)
5. Asrava (cause of the inflow of karma)
6. Samvara (stoppage of cause of inflow of karma)
7. Nirjara (shredding of karma)
8. Bandh (bondage of karma)
9. Moksa (freedom from karmic bondage or emancipation)

Consciousness is the inalienable characteristic of the jiva, however undeveloped it may be. It is present even in the nigodas (the least developed life form) and through its progressive development, it too may culminate in the supreme state of the soul, namely omniscience. Babb provides an interesting discussion of Jainism’s soteriological taxonomy, which he claims “may be seen as a conceptual scaffolding for the Jain vision of creaturely bondage and the path to

view of the human incarnation. The Tattvartha Sutra states: “The humans born of agglutination originate in human excreta such as faeces, urine, sputum, mucus, vomit, bile, pus, blood, semen, etc. Their lifespan is very short (the tiniest lifespan is 2 avalikas)” (1994:54).
liberation" (1996:44). Jains believe that the soul passes through an infinite number of states from the lowest to the highest state of spiritual development. These states have been classified into 14 stages called "gunasthanas", each of which is necessary to pass through to attain liberation (see appendix # 1).

It is the possession of a soul, and not the stage of development nor number of senses a being possesses, that entitles one to a life of dignity and respect. Therefore, unlike in the West, moral consideration does not hinge upon that which the human incarnation possesses alone, but on that which it shares with all other beings. In Jainism, human supremacy and distinction from the non-human environment is a matter of degree, not of kind, and is established through ethical behaviour.

If in fact differences between all living beings do not reside in any essential quality, but instead lie in the degree of moral perfection - demonstrateable only through behaviour - then ethical practice (of which its highest expression is asceticism) becomes a compelling and potent source of selfhood. It is my contention that ethics are a resource, and represent the primary method through which Jains define and maintain the human domain. Ahimsa becomes an active way to define human beings at the centre of a universe full of similar souls. Human worth is established through moral behaviour and not through any claim to being a privileged possessor of an essential characteristic. Voluntary restraint and steadfast ahimsa, in a world characterised by meaningless activity and violence, establishes the uniqueness of the human incarnation.

The foundation for the development of a moral self includes a classification of the world and a special status for human beings in it. No ontology considers human beings to be the same as other creatures, even though Jainism has occasionally been presented as doing just this (see Tobias, 1991). When Jains claim that all living beings are equal, they are referring to their belief that all living beings are equally endowed with souls, and that their spiritual journeys are of equal value to all others. Nevertheless, they consider human beings to be the finest of all possible incarnations. It is the human form, above all else, that is the most coveted because it is only from this incarnation that liberation can be attained, and virtually only in human life that, as a result of samyak darshan (correct view of reality), one can chart the course of one's future (O'Connell, pers.comm.n.d: Babb, 1996). Babb explains:

Almost everything he says [i.e., Muni Arunvijay in a book he wrote on the soul's journey] converges on one fundamental assertion, namely that one's birth in a human body should not be wasted. This reflects the ascetics' view of things, a view that exists as a perpetual rebuke to the more comfortable lay view that routine piety is enough. It is possible, he says, for human births to be repeated; in theory it is possible to have seven or eight in a row. But this is very
difficult and requires an immense amount of merit. Human birth is "rare" (durlabh) and in this vast cosmos very difficult to obtain. Sin is so easy, and the sins of one life can pursue you through many births. Not only will sins send you to hell, but they will result in many births in the classes of two- to four-sensed creatures after you have emerged from below. Arunvijay reflects at length on the sin of abortion, and it is significant that, in his eyes, part of the horror of abortion is that it cuts the newly incarnated soul off from the possibility of human existence (1996:50-51).

As I have argued, in all cultures the dignity of human beings is preserved by maintaining differences between humans and non-humans (especially animals because they are the easiest to anthropomorphise). However, in the West, one way through which humans maintain difference and establish dignity is through the domination of the non-humans environment (see Leiss, 1972; Linzey, 1994; Mason, 1993; Thomas, 1989). William Leiss in his book The Domination of Nature writes:

The Judeo-Christian religion...maintained that 'spirit' was separate from nature and ruled over it from without; it also taught that to some extent man shared God's transcendence of nature. Only man of all earthly things possessed spirit, and thus he did not have to fear the resistance of an opposing will in nature; the Bible seemed to indicate that the earth was designed to serve man's ends exclusively (1972:30).

In Jainism, human dignity is established and maintained through ethical practice, and ahimsa is the quintessential norm of Jain ethics. In the Jain universe, plants and animals are not believed to have autonomous and opposing existences, but rather form part of the same tragic drama of bondage and liberation that humans do, albeit with fixed roles and characters. They are all considered to be moral symbols not the 'instinctual beings' of the modern West, and therefore they are also judged according to the same moral standards as are human beings. All things, animate and inanimate, are part of the same narrative. In sum, Jains have no nature-culture dichotomy because there is only one 'nature', and it is the same for all.

We can therefore describe Jain attitudes towards all other beings as metonymical, that is, they serve as moral symbols in the same narrative; representatives of the whole, each denoting different levels of moral purity.27 It is interesting to see how parallels between the Jain

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27 The heavens and hells represent the realms of 'just deserts', i.e., where rewards (punya) and punishments (paap) come to fruition due to past life events. But the beings within them – the gods and hell-beings, are not part of this metonymical scheme (above) because they are outside of the realm of moral discourse (the karmbhumi). Babb writes that "The value of world renunciation transcends mere questions of sin and virtue", and that "[N]o karma is ever really "good" and these rewards are of no ultimate value" (1996:32). Gods and hell-beings are not represented in the stages of spiritual development (gunasthanas). They are liminal beings, and the heavens and hells represent liminal periods. They must return to the area of karmbhumi, the "land of endeavour" to become karmically active again,
and Western allegorical tradition can be found, albeit with important differences. Prior to the 16th century the West was profoundly anthropomorphic and the non-human environment was essentially “assimilated” to human society – that is, “nature” was not considered autonomous of society, and its worth was judged not according to its own intrinsic standards, but in relation to human use. Keith Thomas (1983) describes the historical erosion of this ‘metonymical’ classification of the non-human world in England from 1500-1800, and details how gradually animals and plants came to be seen as having an existence independent of humans. Thomas writes:

The tendency to see in each species some socially relevant human quality was very ancient, for man has always looked to animals to provide categories with which to describe themselves... The world was a cryptogram full of hidden meanings for man, but awaiting decipherment (1983:57)

And,

In the early modern period, the whole world was conventionally assumed to be ordered in a hierarchical scale, moving up from man to the angels and descending from him in what were regarded as diminishing degrees of perfection. And the universal belief in analogy and correspondence made it normal to discern in the animal world a mirror image of human social and political organisation (ibid.:61).

But even with its unqualified anthropomorphism, early modern Western attitudes to the non-human world were profoundly different from those of Jainism in their antagonist disposition. Keith Tester writes,

Early modern attitudes contained a direct incitement to violence; aggressive behaviour towards animals was an active way for humans to define themselves as the centre of the universe and the zenith of God’s work. The spatial blurring of classificatory difference was countered by active domination (1994:51)

The Jain approach is the very inverse of the early modern Western view, using the opposite strategy of ahimsa to achieve same universal goal of human distinctiveness.

With the decline in the West of a cosmic order came a breach with the anthropomorphic tradition, but not with the adversarial attitude to non-human nature. Today we have retained this position, and allowed it to play a part in our modern epistemology, forming an intrinsic part of our understanding of what it means to be human.²⁸

because it is only from the human form that liberation can occur. (See Babb’s discussion of the Cosmos in Jainism, 1996:38-52)

²⁸ Although the human/not-human distinction has taken the form of a nature-culture distinction in Western civilisation and has dominated our worldview since modern times, the Western adversarial relationship with the non-human environment existed long before the birth of modern epistemology, thriving in the early modern period and presumably long before it. It has shown considerable tenacity, forming a pivotal part of our earlier allegorical understanding of our environment and persevering despite the replacement of the earlier worldview by our present ‘disenchanted’ one.
Whereas Jains espouse a belief in a larger cosmic order in which human beings are at the apex of all embodied creatures, they have never posited an adversarial relationship with non-humans. Their preoccupation with ahimsa can be seen as their strategy to counter the blurring of classificatory difference in a metonymical world. In a moral cosmic order, where all beings are potent moral symbols, what makes humans worthy of their special status is not a unique possession of a soul, or reason. It is the display of moral superiority evidenced in their practices.

*Ahimsa, Ascetic Bodies & the Bodies of Animals:*

Just as plants and animals symbolise varying stages of moral purity, the body too is an index, and a profoundly intimate one since it is an index or symbol of the individual’s own soul. It is often perplexing to Western observers why ascetics’ bodies are admired for their beauty and strength, when these very ascetics preach body-abandonment (kayotsarga). And furthermore, why Jain ascetics preoccupy themselves with avoiding causing harm to the tiniest of insects, and yet appear to be engaged in punishing their bodies by such acts as the uprooting of their hair, arduous fasts, and even *santara*\(^{29}\) - the ritual fast unto death. But if one accepts that in Jainism all bodies serve as indexes of a moral state and that all bodies (including one’s own) should evoke a sense of detachment, we see that the paradoxes are more apparent than real. I will look at each ‘paradox’ separately.

Firstly, Jains contend that we each possess three bodies: the outer or ‘gross’ body, the more subtle *taijasa* (electric) body used for digestion and heat, and the most important and most subtle ‘karmic’ body, in which the soul is housed. It is believed that the soul’s rays pass through the karmic and *taijasa* body and manifest themselves in the gross body. In this way the soul can be inferred from the body. At the time of death, the gross body is left behind while the subtlest karmic body continues to be connected with the soul. When the soul enters its next birth, it carries the karmic body with it and together they create another *taijasa* and gross body. Thus despite its radical dualism, Jainism perceives the relationship between body and spirit to be intimate and indexical. Ascetics’ bodies are forever being read for signs of enlightenment – by other ascetics and by lay devotees. The lightness of the skin, the shape of the head, the compassionate eyes, and the overall beauty of the body etc. are seen as revealing signs.

M. Banks describes an ethnographic experience that is strongly illustrative of the Jain indexical body.
On the one occasion I attended the post-fast celebrations of a woman who had followed the *varsi-tap* regime, several people asked me to note how clear her skin was, almost translucent, and how it seemed to shine with inner radiance. With so many karmas burned away one could see the pure light of the soul beginning to shine through (1994:17).

Lay and ascetic Jains insist that adoration and praise does not indicate any attachment to the body of the ascetic, or to the ascetic more generally. The bodies of ascetics are admired only because they are powerful symbols of spiritual progress (This is explored in greater detail in Ch.7, "Devotion & Divinity").

Secondly, the source of the apparent paradox of protecting the bodies of animals whilst negating ascetic bodies lies in two false assumptions: 1) that *ahimsa* is a socio-centric ethic of active support and 2) that penance entails bodily torment. *Ahimsa*, as I argued above, is an ethic of detachment and it is detachment that characterises the ascetic's relationship with all living beings, as well as with her own body. The ascetic orientation of *detachment* from the body is very different from bodily punishment, a point that the Terapanthi ascetics stressed continuously. It does not give rise to the urge to dominate or punish the body, in the way the Western ethos accommodated the Christian institution of martyrdom.

Perhaps in the face of Jain ascetics' undoubtedly difficult and sometimes painful penance, we might equate Christian and Jain asceticism, and assume that similar motives underlie them. But the contemporary Jain ascetic insists that her bodily discipline is not intended to punish her body but rather to cultivate her soul, and Dundas' research would seem to corroborate it. He writes,

> Austerity was certainly regarded as something difficult to perform. A classic description of the idealised Jain ascetic is found in one of the later narrative portions of the Shvetambara scriptures which, in a grim parody of the conventions of erotic poetry, lingers lovingly on each emaciated part of the fasting monk Dhanya's body, withered and dried up, showing 'a beauty of mortification', moving only through force of spirit, yet glowing with lustre, 'like a fire confined within a heap of ashes'.

However, to insist upon the painfulness of austerity (which the description of Dhanya does not) or to suggest, as did early Buddhists, that it was both fruitless and the result of bad karma, would be to fail to grasp how in Jainism ascetic practice is underpinned by a spiritual and doctrinal rationale. In his 'Victory Banner of Relativism', Haribhadra defends the integrity of Jain austerities as being characterised not by physical suffering but by knowledge and sincere religious prompting, a course of action undertaken when bad karma

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29 Also called *sallekhana* (see Settar, 1989)

30 While psychoanalysis would surely find a common psychological origin through which to connect these practices, it is to their cultural interpretations that anthropologists must attend since it is through cultural idioms that people make sense of their own actions and beliefs.
can no longer have any serious effect and which cannot cause pain because the
mind is under control and fixed upon a pure goal (1992:142).

Punishment, stoic suffering and martyrdom were the underlying motives behind
Christian asceticism, as the ascetics sought to forge analogies between the suffering of Christ
and their own suffering. It was precisely because the body was so important that ascetic
punishment was so portentous and forceful. Punishment and suffering are not virtues to Jains;
what value could they have in a liberation-centric ethos? The ascetics insist they feel no pain
and are not suffering whilst performing austerities. The Christian martyrs used their suffering
symbolically and depended upon social acknowledgment of their suffering to inspire believers.
The Jain ascetics, by contrast, are not martyrs. They make no claims to social renewal, and
allege only to be destroying attachments and cultivating indifference to the body. As Richard
Lannoy maintains in his book *The Sacred Tree*,

The yogin does not see man as ... a dual creature at odds with himself. He does
not neglect his body, he perfects it... He makes it the effective instrument for

The relationship between the soul and the subtle karmic body is considered to be
without beginning. It is connected with the soul as long as the soul is bound with karma. When
karma particles are completely separated from the soul, it achieves its natural state, which is
formless and thereby permanently severs its connection with all bodies. Only through the
soul's own efforts can it free itself from its association with the karmic body; then it becomes
perfect and enjoys its own pure state without being affected by any other external forces. It is
these soul-centric aims that motivate the Jain ascetic, not the socially redeeming exploits of
martyrdom.

Here I digress briefly to discuss the dominant Western conceptualisation of the body,
and its main differences from that of Jainism. This digression, I believe, is necessary to assist in
better understanding Jain notions of embodiment and their importance in the ascetic quest.

**The Western Body from Acceptance to Denial:**

Two features have, throughout the centuries, characterised the Western attitude to the
body: antagonism between spirit and body, and the assumption of a connection between the
body and animal nature – however ‘animal nature’ has been understood. The analogy between
animals and the human body (especially sexuality) is widespread cross-culturally, but in the
West we have imagined that our bodies are not so much like animal nature, as they are animal nature, in terms of sexuality, appetite, aggression or instincts. Susan Bordo in her book *Unbearable Weight*, claims, “The body as animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects... are common images within Western philosophy” (1995:3). Jains too make analogies between animals and human sexuality and aggression, but these ‘passions’ are not considered to be the inherent property of animals any more than they are of humans. Passions are the product of certain karmas, which are simply in greater abundance in most animals and plants (in fact, plants are considered to be far more etnotional than most animals and humans).

The distinction is important, because for Westerners, I argue, so strong is the connection between the body and animal nature, that a shift in our understanding of the latter results in changes in our perception of the former.

In the pre-modern period, up until the 16th century, the West shared with most of the world’s cultures a belief in some form of a cosmic order, seen alternatively as the embodiment of Ideas (Plato) or as the creation of God (Augustine). In this view the cosmos possesses some transcendental order and sets the paradigm plan of the beings within it, humans and non-humans. All played a part in the natural hierarchy; and meaning was established through connections with this greater reality. Plants and animals did not exist for themselves, but for human use and edification, and thus were considered as part of the same drama as were human beings. Because of the unquestioned correspondence between the aspects of the human body and animal nature, attitudes towards the body mirrored those towards animal existence more generally. Just as the non-human environment was “assimilated” to human society (i.e., it existed for and was judged by human standards) (Thomas, 1983), the body’s ‘nature’ was likewise “assimilated” to the soul. Bodies, like ‘nature’, had no independent reality, but existed as tools for some ‘higher’ purpose and had to be dominated, managed and controlled. The relationship between the two - however antagonistic – was necessarily intimate.

Although metaphysical distinctions between the human/non-human and between soul/body existed, a shared nature bound them, and they served as analogies of each other. The soul and body were intertwined to such an extent that even knowledge was considered to be “carnal” in the sense that intimate links existed between thinking and feeling (Miles, 1979).

Mellor and Shilling in an article entitled, “Reflexive Modernity and the Religious Body”

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31 Plants and animals are considered to be governed by passions more than are human beings. The ascetics would tell me that even motionless trees, which appear tranquil, experience turbulent emotions. Indeed, embodiment as plants and animals indicates a ‘heavy’ karmic burden.
likewise assert that before the 16th century, knowledge, understanding and feeling were “corporeal products” (1994:29).

The beliefs and practices of early Christianity also reveal the intimate relationship between body and soul in the pre-modern West. Christianity insisted upon the burial of the body, with its face towards the east in expectation of the general resurrection (McManners, 1995:376). The Roman Catholic Church condemned cremation until as late as 1963, and only the bodies of criminals were occasionally “burnt into nothingness”33. Because of the intimate connection with the body, cremation was perceived as total annihilation. Tellingly, the Protestant churches never ruled against the practice formally. In fact, Catholic beliefs in general reveal this integral connection between body and soul which only came under attack with the Protestant Reformation - namely belief in transubstantiation, Virgin birth and resurrection.

Thus both intimacy and antagonism characterised pre-modern attitudes to the body: antagonism was evident in the ways in which its ‘animal nature’ or, to use Plato’s words, “the beast within” was seen to be in need of control and management: the ‘beast’ was an integral component of the self, but it had to be harmonised with, and kept under check by, the ‘higher’ spiritual self.

With the rise of a mechanistic worldview (of which the Reformation formed an important part), and the decline of the cosmic order, human beings began to envision the non-human world in less human-centric terms. Animal nature became disconnected from human society; its nature increasingly viewed as distinct (Thomas, 1983). However, the correspondence between the human body and animality was never in question, and this led to a view of the body as increasingly ‘other’ - as sharing a nature with the animal world - and thus utterly separate and alien from the nature of the soul. The intimacy between self/body was obliterated. It was replaced with aloofness and even denial of association.

Norbert Elias’ theory of the ‘civilising process’ (1978a[1939], 1982[1939]) is important in its contention that the “civilised body” of modern Western societies is highly individualistic and strongly demarcated from its environment, in sharp contrast to the “uncivilised body” of

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32 The body’s sexuality and aggression were, in particular, those aspects deemed to be ‘animal’ and in need of frequent censure, but ambivalence always characterised Christian attitudes to the body: denigration for its animality, but reverence because of being God’s creation.

33 “He will be burnt into nothingness” roared the common people when they learned that cremation would be the dreadful fate of the protagonist Arnaud du Tilh’s executed body (in the play “The House of Martin Guerre”, based on the book Arrest Memorable Du Parlement de Tholose by Jean de Cortas, 1561)
Shilling summarises Elias' analysis of the differences between the modern 'civilised' and pre-modern 'uncivilised' body:

The civilized body ... has the ability to rationalize and exert a high degree of control over its emotions, to monitor its own actions and those of others, and to internalize a finely demarcated set of rules about what constitutes appropriate behaviour in various situations. The civilized body can be contrasted with the 'uncivilized' body of early medieval times which was only weakly demarcated from its social and natural environment. The uncivilized body was constrained by few behavioural norms, gave immediate physical expression to emotions, and sought to satisfy bodily desires without restraint or regard for the welfare of others (1994:151).

With the emergence of the 'civilised body' we find a concomitant shift from "carnal knowledge" to "cognitive apprehension" where the mind is perceived to be apart from and superior to the body (Mellor & Shilling, 1994:29). Just as animals were increasingly seen as creatures wholly independent of human society, René Descartes (who along with everyone else saw the body as 'animal') considered the body to be likewise wholly independent of the human self. He formalised the emerging attitude by providing a philosophical basis to the conviction that the mind and the body were of completely distinct essences, giving rise to what we now commonly call "the mind/body problem". The modern Westerner has retained an earlier understanding of the body 'as animal' but denies, or has a sense of profound discomfiture with, its 'intimacy'.

In place of a mechanical view of the universe, in which things are symbols of nothing other than themselves, Jains live in a cosmic order where all things are imbued with meaning as they relate to the whole. Just as plants and animals are moral symbols and represent varied states of bondage, so too does the human body. The Jain conception of the human body as a moral template is, therefore, intimately connected with its view of the universe as a moral order.

**The Ascetic Ideal:**

The Jain tradition, despite its egalitarian ethic, holds a deeply anthropomorphic view of the world. All living beings are moral symbols and are judged according to the same moral standards. The whole of existence is assumed to be ordered in a hierarchical scale, moving up to the Tirthankaras, and down from them, in what is regarded as diminishing degrees of
perfection to ascetics, shrawaks, animals, plants and single-sensed beings.\textsuperscript{14} The differences between beings lie in their moral purity, which is established primarily through ethical practice.

Ascetics are considered by many to be living gods and therefore are objects of worship (Babb. 1996). Their importance is likely greater among the non-image worshipping Terapanthis and Sthanakvasis (see Flügel.1995-6:134) who have few other objects of worship. Babb writes.

In their persons, ascetics exemplify the path to liberation: in their interactions with nonascetics they draw others – less advanced than they – along in the right direction. Given these roles, ascetics emerge as the only beings truly worthy of worship. The Tirthankars, as the ultimate ascetics, epitomize worship-worthiness. . . Living ascetics partake of the same qualities, though to a far less degree (1996:62-3).

And.

Ascetics are also, in their persons, objects of worship. This cannot surprise us, for Jains, as we know, worship ascetics. Although the namaskār mantra, the all-important formula . . . singles out the Tirthankars as foremost among the worship-worthy, it also includes living ascetics, sādhus (and by extension sāthvā) (ibid.:53. Italics added).

\textsuperscript{14} Gods, like hells-beings, are outside of this hierarchical scale because they are outside the karmbhumi.
The ‘extension’ of worship to _sadhvis_ is, however, not absolute or unqualified. The female ascetic is a symbol of the cultural ideal of detachment and worldly indifference (_vairagya_), but she is also a symbol of attachment and temptation (Balbir, 1994, Jaini, 1991, Reynell, 1985). In the Jain narrative, female ascetics embody, and serve as, conflicting moral symbols. The question of women’s relationship to the ascetic ideal is, therefore, rather equivocal. I will return to discuss this in detail in Chapter 8.

The popular image of the ‘_samavasaran_’ or ‘universal assembly hall’ depicts illustratively the Jain understanding of the universe and the place of human beings in it. It is a diagram of concentric circles. In the inner-most circle sits the Jina, encircled first by the ascetics, both nuns and monks sitting separately with hands joined in devotion. Following behind them are the Jina’s devoted lay followers, and then circles of adoring animals. In the air above the Jina are gods and goddesses paying homage. The _Tattvaretha Sutra_ states:

>[E]ach unique soul possesses the inherent knowledge and intuition which can empower it to destroy the beginningless deluded world-view tormenting it. The enlightened world-view can arise at the appropriate moment in any form of life – infernal, subhuman, human or celestial – when the painful nature of life is realised, a vision of the Jina (omniscient founders of the Jaina religion) is seen, the teachings of the Jina heard or a past life remembered . . . (1994:6).

In front of the Jina, the darkness of ignorance is banished, and creatures become aware of their true nature. This ‘worldview’ is critical to understanding the role of the ascetic ideal in the Jain tradition.

Jainism’s allegorical non-adversarial relationship with the environment has important implications for the ascetic ideal. In a world where everyone and everything is hierarchically arranged, and where all classification is imbued with moral evaluation, the ascetic represents the symbolic apex of the society. In the eyes of the Jain laity, the ascetic is a window through which they can glimpse their own potential, and the giver of truths needed to attain liberation.

There exist two types of worldly souls: those that are capable of emancipation called “_bhavya_” and those incapable of it, “_abhavya_.” Although consciousness exists in each living being, only some are capable of developing their internal powers fully. P.S. Jaini writes that the quality of _bhavyatva_ “is a sort of inert catalyst, awaiting the time when it will be activated and thus trigger an irrevocable redirection of the soul’s energy: away from delusion and bondage.

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the realm of moral discourse See fn. # 27.

In the West, we often turn to the story of Genesis to understand how we inherited our particular understanding of ourselves and of our relationship with the world around us. We discover a divinely created special status for human beings and a view of the rest of the world as existing for us. The _samavasaran_ is the Jain equivalent to our Genesis story in that it sets out the ideal orientation human beings should have with the rest of the universe.
towards insight and freedom” (1990:139). The sadhvis commonly reiterate the following teachings:

Every stone has the potential to be transformed into a statue but not all pieces of stone will become statues because only those at the hands of a skilled sculptor will achieve this end. Likewise, only the living beings which have a congenial atmosphere may attain emancipation, the others cannot.

The ascetics serve as exemplars and teachers for a world full of bewildered beings in search of the same goal of liberation. Jainism is replete with stories of animals being inspired by ascetics to renounce the world, and even to commit santara, so that their earthly bondage may one day be terminated. The story of the snake Chandakausika is typical:

Once Bhagavan Mahavira was walking through the hermitage of Kanakakhala. When some boys saw him, they came to him running and said, “Sir the path through which you are going is fraught with dangers. A little ahead there is a snake called Chandakausika. The person on whom it casts a glance will certainly be burnt to ashes”. They advised him to take another route and not to play havoc with life on purpose. It was the correct advice for those who long for life. But Mahavira had renounced his craving for keeping himself alive. He had risen above life and death and become totally immersed in his soul, and adopted an attitude of equanimity towards all living beings. He did not heed the warning given to him by the boys and proceeded forward. The snake, upon seeing Bhagavan Mahavir, became suddenly enraged. It could not tolerate anyone encroaching upon his domain. It spread its hood, looked at the sun and then at Mahavira, and sprayed its poison, which spread over the aura around Mahavira’s body. The entire atmosphere became poisoned, but Mahavira remained unaffected. The snake could not believe his eyes. He was convinced that the person at whom he looked would be immediately burnt to ashes.

Chandakausika tried again to cast a dangerously poisonous glance. He moved nearer Bhagavan Mahavira and bit his foot, but Mahavira remained perfectly composed. To the snake’s surprise, milk, instead of blood, oozed from the foot. Next, he coiled himself around the body of Mahavira, but was unable to upset him. Finally the snake lost its self-confidence: its anger disappeared. When Mahavira’s meditation was over, he saw the motionless snake sitting docilely before him. He addressed the snake thus: “Chandakausika, be calm! You are born as a snake because you had been a victim of anger in your previous life. Two births ago, you were an ascetic. You had once trampled to death a frog and one of your disciples had entreated you to do a penance for the sin but you refused to do so. Enraged by the repeated entreaties of the disciple, you tried to strike him and, having lost the sense of balance you crashed against a pillar and cracked your skull. In your next life, you became the head of this hermitage where the inmates practised spiritual discipline. Again you were prone to great anger. Once the Prince of Svetambar came to your hermitage and began plucking fruits and flowers. You became so enraged that you ran after him with an axe in your hand. You slipped on the ground and fell into a ditch and were fatally injured by your own axe. After the death, there you are as a reborn deadly poisonous serpent. You have already suffered much due to your passionate nature. Leave the passion of anger like your worn-out skin and be peaceful once and for all”.

Chandakausika began to remember his past lives. All the events of his past began to float in his memory. His heart changed and the seeds of equanimity for all living beings began to sprout in him. He sat motionless and performed *santara*, a fasting until death (Ganadhipati Tulsi, 1995:30)

All bhavya creatures are invested with the potential to realise their true nature - which is the same nature for all - in the Jain anthropomorphic universe. The same ethical standards apply to *all* living beings: animals should ideally be renouncing the world and performing austerities too, just as Chandakausika did (Jainism has a number of stories in which animals are ‘awakened’ to do just this) but most souls trapped in animal bodies are simply too deep in their karmic quagmire to realise their misguided ways.

In a world where everything is classified and appraised according to a single ascetic ideal, all living beings are subject to the same totalising moral discourse and necessarily serve as potent moral symbols. The universe is a catalogue of moral development, from the lowliest one-sensed *nigodas* to the five-sensed human beings at the apex of worldly existence. Because each living being is a moral symbol, all serve to instruct and admonish. Indeed, the motive behind the celebrated and ancient Jain inquiries into plant and animal existence, as well as the ardent desire among contemporary Jains to make their doctrines compatible with science, is likely a belief that the world is akin to a laboratory filled with myriad examples of bonded souls (see Babb, 1996:44-48 for a discussion of ‘Jain Biology’). All are moral symbols, meaningful and of inherent pedagogic value.

In the Jain world, ascetics are indispensable as living exemplars for those on the path of liberation. They serve, through their own lives, to demonstrate what the ideal life ought to be. One has the choice to push forward along the spiritual path (to see one’s human body as something earned from past auspicious lives) (see Babb, 1996), or to abandon the path and let oneself tumble into the downward spiral of worldly ‘vomit’.36 One does not have the choice to not be part of this forward and backward trajectory. The whole cosmic order is hierarchically classified according to its relation with the ascetic ideal; no one and nothing is left out.37

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36 A preferred metaphor of the late Ganadhipati Tulsi for the mess of worldly life.
37 This does not mean, however, that all Jains must become ascetics (although most believe that they will embark on this path in a future incarnation), and indeed, only a tiny fraction of the community (considerably less than 1%) do become mendicants. Instead, their worldly life incorporates ascetic values and in so doing becomes endowed with moral qualities, and indeed, evidence of spiritual purity is sought in worldly success (see Reynell, 1985, Laidlaw, 1996, Flügel, 1995-6).
In sum, Jain ethics revolve around the ideals of renunciation, detachment and dispassion, and *ahimsa* is the means to these idealistic ends. It is a 'demarcator' between the worldly and the spiritual, and a creator of a moral sphere – or a human domain. In the quagmire of worldly existence, it creates an oasis by defining itself in opposition to worldliness. And in a world filled with identical souls, different only in their degrees of karmic bondage, *ahimsa* makes the human incarnation distinct by making it ethically superior.
PART 2:
THE RITUALS OF SEPARATION
CHAPTER 3  CREATION THROUGH NEGATION

The Rite of Bhiksha

Defence of the Lokottar:

It was the commotion created by bhiksha rounds that would wake me up during the early weeks of my stay in Ldnun. The sounds of happy activity coming from just outside my room, near the kitchen, would rise and fall as the ascetics glided in for their alms collection, and then be gone. Lay devotees (shravaks) nearby, would rush forward to show their respect and would often compete among themselves to serve the ascetics. Bapu, the Hindu cook who prepared the food, looked indifferent to the drama and appeared glad to allow the lay devotees serve the mendicants.

One day during the second week of my stay, I was awoken as usual by voices full of cheer and urgency, entreating the maharajas to approach; but the sounds were more numerous and more intense than most mornings, and the excitement more prolonged. I peered out and saw Acharyasri Mahaprajna and several munis slowly entering the guesthouse. The crowd of followers hindered their normally quick pace. As Acharyasri stepped forward, devotees rushed in front of him to touch his feet in veneration. Others stood to the side, lining the munis' path and prostrating themselves as the ascetics passed. I was surprised to spot the Hindu cook Bapu among the worshippers, pulling himself up after kneeling on the sandy ground. The ordinary sadhvis and munis that daily visited his kitchen did nothing to evoke his admiration, but clearly, the power and spiritual greatness associated with the senior ascetics was awe-inspiring for Jain and non-Jain alike. Given Guru Dev’s and Acharyasri’s positions as leaders of the order, it was not often that they personally ventured out to collect alms, as this task was typically left to the more junior members. So when they did, there was always considerable excitement among the lay community. It had its effect on the ascetic community too, according to Samani Urmilla Prajna, who once told me that if Guru Dev and Acharyasri could go for bhiksha, then no muni or sadhvi should consider themselves too senior to do so.39

With my door ajar, I watched the crowd grow around Acharyasri who stood patiently and spoke gently with the gathering devotees. Today the alms would be offered by one of the

38 The terms householder, lay person and shravak are synonomous, and I used them interchangeably.
39 Samani Urmilla (not her real name), my closest friend within the Samani order, explained that when Guru Dev wants the order to be more disciplined, he will often encourage it through his own behaviour. In that way, he humbles the others to do the same.
families staying in the guesthouse, and not directly from Bapu’s kitchen. The honoured family was frantically setting their full pots and containers on the cement floor outside their room, just several doors from mine. Since the rooms in the guesthouse are without kitchens, the family must have had Bapu prepare the enormous meal at sunrise. They could now generously offer some to the dispassionate munis. It is a sin for a shravak to prepare food specifically for the mendicants; it leads to the accumulation of paap – or bad karma. But it is also a duty of a religious shravak to offer alms to the ascetics, and this act leads to the accumulation of punya – or good karma. Very often the ascetics will ask the householders routine and general questions about the food’s preparation – e.g., for whom was it prepared; how was it prepared etc. The householders will emphatically reply that it was prepared for themselves alone and according to the strict code governed by the vow of ahimsa.

GURU DEV IN FORE. FOLLOWED BY ACHARYASRI AND A GROUP OF MUNIS ON THEIR VIHAR (PILOTTAGE). MUNIS ARE CARRYING PATRAS (ALMS BOWLS) IN JHOLIS (SLINGS), AND RAJCARAN (WHISKERCOMBS) SOURCE BHATNAGAR, 1985

The elderly and gentle Muni Dulharaji (or ‘Muniji’) once told me that when he and a group of munis were travelling with Guru Dev and Acharyasri in Gujarat several years ago, they entered a village where everything appeared pre-arranged for their stay. And although it is common for the villagers to be notified of the approaching ascetics, on this occasion things appeared overly orchestrated. The mendicants went out for bhiksha and quickly returned with
full patras (alms bowls\textsuperscript{40}). Guru Dev suspected that the delicious foods had been prepared on account of their visit to the village, so before the monks gathered to eat, he called a snap meeting with the villagers. He asked if anyone had prepared food especially for the monks. After a moment of uneasy silence, a man stood up and admitted that he had. Guru Dev then thanked the villagers for their generosity but reprimanded them for their sinful acts. He told them that because of their misconduct, the monks would now have to go without the food. So instead of taking their meal, the monks had the food disposed of in a deep sandpit\textsuperscript{41}. Muniji was wide-eyed and serious when he recounted the story – clearly the event impressed him as much as it was intended to impress me. However, despite such occasional instances of vigilance, householders do indeed prepare food for the ascetics and it is hardly disguised. It seems obvious that they do not take the threat of this form of accumulated paap very seriously, or they believe that the punya gained from giving will outweigh any paap accrued in the process. The ascetics would not be implicated in this sin because they accept what the householders tell them as the truth. So long as the roles of the generous householder and restrained ascetic are well executed, rarely is any attention focused on the events which conspire to produce the exemplary encounter. The family down the hall from my room surely knew that monks would be collecting alms at the guest house - as they do nearly every day - otherwise they would not have had such a great quantity of food prepared so early. Whether or not they knew Acharyasri would be amongst the monks is another matter. I decided to join the gathering.

I stood off to one side where I could see all the activity. Acharyasri and the munis were now just outside the door of the family’s room, removing their patras from the white jholi (sling made of cloth) in which they carry them. Acharyasri is often called a ‘philosopher saint’ by his followers, and he has an air that befits that description. He stands taller than average and the straightness of his posture and thinness of his body add to his already dignified appearance. His small light blue eyes (made smaller still by thick wide-framed glasses) bald head and thin

\textsuperscript{40} ‘Patra’ literally translates as ‘container’ or ‘vessel’. When used by the ascetics, it refers to their alms bowls.

\textsuperscript{41} The ascetics could never return the food, since it is not theirs to give away. It was given as a sacrifice to them by generous householders and it would be sinful to distribute it to non-ascetics. I once asked ‘Samanji’ [Saman Stithprejna] why the ascetics are compelled to bury excess food, and why they could not leave it outside for beggars or hungry animals. He explained that to leave it outside would result in tremendous violence. Insects would come to eat, dogs would also come and eat the insects. Perhaps dogs would fight over the food. He could imagine a number of potentially violent scenarios. The ascetics would then be implicated in that violence. But it is a very rare occurrence indeed when food has to be so disposed. In fact, the ascetics are obliged to finish every last scarp of food given in alms. If food is left over, it must be redistributed within the group until it is all eaten. It is only on rare occasions when too much food is gathered that they are required to dispose of it. Usually, the mendicants know in advance how much milk, kheer or rice (for example) they should collect, because they have inquired of their fellow mendicants how much they can eat.
face, partly covered by the *muhpatti*, give him a severe and even glacial appearance that conceals a warmth that is immediately obvious when speaking with him. His movements appear calculated, as the ideal monk’s should be. Guarded bodily movements ensure that karma is inhibited. The first of the five *Mahavratas* or “Great Vows” that an ascetic accepts upon initiation is *non-violence* in action, speech and thought. An aspect of this vow, condensed in the term ‘*samitayah*’ compels an ascetic to “walk, speak, seek alms, handle objects of daily use and dispose of excreta in the correct manner” (Tattvartha Sutra, 1994: 220). I watched as Acharyasri made sure only a small quantity of rice was placed in his bowl by the attending woman. His reluctance to take alms appeared earnest and, standing motionless in the midst of the excited crowd, he radiated a sense of “*otherness*.”

In 1977, when he was still known as ‘Muni Nathmal’ (before being nominated as Yuvacharya (successor) in 1979 and then as Acharya in 1994, he was given permission from Guru Dev (then Acharya Tulsi) to leave monastic life for a year of solitude and study. That year, he was free from the many obligations associated with membership in a monastic community (e.g. group duties, *vihar* (pilgrimage)) and free from contact with lay followers. He devoted himself to the study of Jain scriptures in the hope of reviving the ancient Jain practice of meditation which, over the centuries, had largely been abandoned. Muni Nathmal was convinced that the Jains had their own meditation techniques, unique from Hindu and Buddhist ones, which deserved investigation. Through his research, he revived what he calls “Preksa Dhyana” or “Insight Meditation” in which one learns to “engage the mind fully in the perception of subtle, internal and innate phenomena of consciousness” (cited in Dundas, 1992:

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42 The Great Vows are 1) Non-violence; 2) Truth; 3) Non-stealing; 4) Celibacy and 5) Non-possession.

43 ‘Correct manner’ refers to that which is approved by monastic rules for avoiding injuring any form of life while performing the duties necessary for religious life.

44 Although Muni Nathmal was described as living as a hermit – and was exempt from daily lectures and meetings with householders – he must have continued to collect *bhiksha* from a community of lay Jains since he could not prepare food himself.

45 Yuvacharya Mahaprajna explains, “The word *preksa* is derived from the root *iksa*, which means ‘to see’. When the prefix ‘pra’ is added, it becomes *pra* + *iksa* = *preksa*, which means ‘to perceive carefully and profoundly’. Here ‘seeing’ does not mean external vision, but careful concentration on subtle consciousness by mental insight. Preksa Dhyana is the system of meditation engaging one’s mind fully in the perception of subtle internal and innate phenomena of consciousness” (1993:1). In addition, he writes that the terms *preksa* and ‘*vipasayana*’ are synonymous, but that since the latter is commonly used in Buddhism, he adopted the former for his system. He claims that the Jain canonical aphorism “See you thyself” (*Sampikkhe/Appagamappaanam*) forms the basic principle for *preksa* meditation. It is a method aimed at perceiving the most subtle aspects of consciousness by one’s own conscious mind. He continues, “In *preksa*, perception always means experience bereft of the duality of like and dislike. When the experience is contaminated with pleasure or pain, like and dislike, perception loses its primary position and becomes secondary. Impartiality and equanimity are synonymous with *preksa*. *Preksa* is impartial perception, where there is neither the emotion of attachment nor aversion, neither pleasure nor displeasure (ibid.3).
224). Muni Nathmal's research led to major changes in the training of ascetics; viz. it made Preksha Dhyana a major part of their sadhana (spiritual practices). Today all Terapanthi ascetics (except the elderly) including samanis, samans and mumukshus are well trained in the techniques and rationale behind Preksha Dhyana. Indeed, for many, it was their attendance at summer Preksha Meditation camps that inspired them to join the ascetic order. One mumukshu sister that I came to know well was so impressed with the technique that she decided to dedicate her life to mastering it. Also, many lay followers attend these camps and have made Preksha Dhyana an important part of their spiritual lives. Lay and ascetic Terapanthis have worked together to promulgate the theory and practice of Preksha Dhyana in primary schools, camps and health centres throughout India, with varying success. It, along with the Anuvrat Movement, begun in 1949, has brought the Terapanthi community out of isolation and onto centre stage among Jain communities.

Standing at the back of the gathering, I watched as the monks resisted the family's onslaught of generosity. With one hand they each held their alms bowls cautiously close to their own bodies - so as to be able to withdraw them at any second, and held their free hand high in the air before them, palms upright and fingers outstretched as in a permanent yield sign. The family continued to implore them to accept ever more, and the lay spectators likewise urged them not to take so little. But they had had their share. Agilely, they placed empty patras over those filled with food and secured them in the jholi. The family continued their appeals even though the ascetics had turned to leave.

As Acharyasri and the munis approached, I lowered my head and pronounced aloud the words of respect I had recently memorised "Matthayena Vandami" ("I bow before your greatness"). I had met Acharyasri just a week earlier, on the second day of my stay. Mostly speaking through a translator, I had explained to him, as I did to Guru Dev, my long-term interest in the Jain doctrine of ahimsa, and my goal to learn more about the community. He had appeared happy with my interest and gave me his blessing. He had become the formal Acharya of the Terapanthi at the Maryada Mahotsav festival in 1994 when Guru Dev 'retired' from the position, but his status was clearly subordinate to that of his predecessor. Lay followers

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46 A number of 'Preksa Dhyana' centres have been established in India. The Adhyatma Sadhna Kendra (ASK) in New Delhi is the largest and attracts individuals of all faiths with its promotion of Preksa Dhyan as a secular, health-promoting practice. The ASK holds special meditation camps for asthma, cancer and heart disease patients. There is also a centre in the United States (Orlando, Florida), where samanis and samans are sent by Acharyasri to instruct both the Jain and non-Jain communities in the techniques of preksa meditation.

47 "Anuvrat" means "small vows" and refers to the code of conduct followed by shravaks. In 1949 Acharya Tulsi initiated a national social reform movement based on the observance of the anuvratis.
flocked from all over India to receive *darshan* from Guru Dev because they believed he had tremendous spiritual power. Innumerable miracles are associated with him. Acharyasri, though he is acclaimed for his sharp intellect, is more of an introverted thinker than a charismatic leader like Guru Dev. And now, since the recent death of Guru Dev Tulsi in the summer of 1997, Acharyasri will be without his mentor for the first time in 66 years. He was initiated into the order as "Muni Nathmal" at the age of 11 and immediately came under the direction of the then 17 year old Muni Tulsiji.\(^48\)

Acharyasri appeared surprised to find me among the adoring followers, and raised his hand as in a blessing. Perhaps he thought I had been amongst the onlookers throughout the event, because he quickly turned to look back in the direction of the family and it became apparent to everyone (but me) that I was being offered an honour – he was allowing me to give him *bhiksha*.

\(^{48}\) A booklet written by two Terapanthi monks on Acharya Mahaprajna’s life, entitled "A Living Legend", describes his early life with Guru Dev: “Born in Tamkor a very small village in District Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, on 14th June, 1920 and baptised as ‘Nathmal’, this child, on 29th January, 1931, renounced the family and worldly pleasures and started on the thorny path of asceticism. He was taken as a disciple by Acharya Kalugani, the eighth Acharya of ‘Terapanth’ of Jainism and the child dedicated his whole Being at the feet of his Master. Acharya Kalugani then entrusted this child to the care of his young and talented disciple Muni Tulsi, and by his simplicity and unaffectedness, the child instantaneously endeared himself to his new teacher. With Muni Tulsi, the child’s intellectual development accelerated and he memorised thousands of sermons and verses in Hindi, Sanskrit, Prakrit and Rajasthani" (Munis Prashant Kumar and Lokprakash Lokesh, 1995:12).
At first hesitant about what to do, the surrounding crowd were not reticent in instructing me. We all moved towards the table where the food was laid out in pots of various sizes, and I found myself standing amongst a vast selection of delicacies. Within closest reach was a bowl filled with peeled and halved bananas. Amid sounds of agitated impatience as well as encouragement, coming from the gatherers, I picked up a single piece and placed it into Acharaysri’s *patra*. The householders were urging me to be more generous, but Acharaysri raised his hand in the yield gesture and was shaking his head, saying ‘Bas’ (‘enough’). I was unsure as what to do. Under the vociferous pressure of the family, I placed another piece in Acharaysri’s bowl but — inauspiciously — I did so with hesitation. He then pulled the *patra* away and with the *munis* left the guesthouse. There had been no haggling — no real resisting on Acharaysri’s part and no beseeching on mine. The faces in the crowd around me were full of disappointment. Perhaps I had even put Acharaysri in an awkward position. I had had an opportunity to demonstrate my spirituality — through generosity — but had failed. To perform the perfect householder role, I should have tried to give everything in sight, against which Acharaysri could have been resolutely restrained and adamantly opposed. By not offering much, the act of renunciation could not be fulfilled.

Through the ritual of alms-giving and alms-taking, renunciation is performed daily, and the roles of ascetic and householder are reinforced, in fact, are created through it. Laidlaw describes the interaction between householder and ascetic at the juncture of *bhiksha* as “the relationship which stands at the centre of Jainism” (1996:320). Given its importance, its enactment is not usually left to chance or to the vagaries of individual aptitudes. Instead it is a ritualised, codified and compulsory performance for religious Jains. The *Aitihisamvibhoga Vrata*, one of the twelve compulsory vows for lay Jains, states that it is the duty of every householder to offer alms to the ascetics (Jaini, 1990:217-220). The scriptures are specific about what should be given:

Offering alms to ascetics must be undertaken with care to follow the strict prescriptions of the scriptures. The ascetics should be offered suitable food and drink with devotion and humility befitting the custom and etiquette of the place

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49 Most fruits and vegetables require boiling (killing) to be rendered *ajiv* (not alive) and therefore suitable for the ascetics to consume. Bananas and oranges need only to be peeled.

50 The 12 vows include the 5 ‘*anuvrats*’ or ‘small vows’ modelled after the ascetics’ ‘great’ or ‘*mahavr̥as*’, viz., non-violence, truth, non-possession, celibacy (understood at non-adultery) non-attachment. The 7 supplementary vows are: refrain from moving outside a limited area so as to restrict the sphere of activity; restrict movement, avoidance of wanton thoughts and actions; keep aloof from sinful conduct for a set period, observe sacred days by fasting and not bathing etc (8th, 14th or 15th day of the fortnight), limit consumable and non-consumable goods; offer alms to ascetics (TS, 1994: 176-7)
and occasion. The SS\textsuperscript{51} lists food, religious equipment, medicine and shelter as necessities to be offered to ascetics. The SBT recommends food, drinks, dainties, delicacies, clothes, towels, shelter, beds and medicine as alms that can be given. The householder observing these vows is described as partially self-restrained (Tattvartha Sutra, 1994:178).

As well as how alms should be given:

The worth of a charitable act is determined by the manner of giving, the nature of the alms offered, the disposition of the giver and the qualification of the recipient (ibid.).

The translator’s explanation follows:

The giver’s motives and enthusiasm and the quality of the alms offered determine the worth of the act of charity. The genuinely monastic life of the recipient adds dignity to the act. The worth of the charity is enhanced if the giver gives with a sense of duty and the recipient accepts what is a bare necessity of monastic life (ibid.:183).

Jain children grow up knowing the minute details of bhiksha protocol. They learn through observation - by watching family members interact with mendicants, and through instruction - most commonly through story telling. The story of “Sangam and the Muni” is one of the most popular tales told by both householders and ascetics, and it depicts their ideal encounter.

**Sangam and the Muni:**

There was once a very poor boy by the name of Sangam who lived in a small village. He faced many hardships in his childhood because of his family’s lack of money. One day he watched a child eating kheer,\textsuperscript{52} and longed for it himself. He returned home to his mother weeping, “I want to eat kheer” he demanded. The mother said, “Dear son, how can I afford it? I am hardly able to get us enough food for our meals”. But Sangam wanted kheer so much he couldn’t stop crying. The neighbours heard and asked, “Why is your son crying so loudly?” His mother explained to them that he wanted kheer but that she could not afford it. The kind lady living next door was very fond of Sangam so she gave the mother milk, sugar and rice to make the dish. When the mother was preparing kheer Sangam stopped crying and came to watch. She served it in a big dish and told him he could eat as much as he liked. Then she left for a while to fetch some

\textsuperscript{51} The Tattvartha Sutra (TS) was written in the 2nd century CE by the Jain philosopher-monk Umasvāti. It translates as “A Manual for Understanding All That Is”. It is accepted as authoritative by both the Svetambars and Digambars, though some sutras and their commentary are interpreted somewhat differently by them. These sectarian variations are dealt with in the 1994 translation of the TS. The SS refers to the “Sarvārthasiddhi”, a commentary considered by the Digambars to be a faithful rendering of Umasvati’s sutras. The SBT is the “Svopajna Bhāsyā Tikā”, a Svetambar commentary on sutras they believe to be of Umasvati’s own writings.

\textsuperscript{52} Kheer is a sweet mixture of rice, sugar and milk.
water. But just as Sangam was about to start eating, he saw a monk passing by. Overcoming his own hunger and desire, he decided to offer the kheer to the muni as bhiksha. Sangam became filled with joy at the idea. He ran outside and asked the monk to come to his house and receive alms. When the muni saw his offering, he asked, “Did you ask your mother if you can give this?” Sangam replied, “It was made for me; I have no need to ask my mother. Please accept my kheer in your bowl.” The monk raised his alms bowl and Sangam poured all the kheer into it. Sangam considered himself to be very lucky because the great monk would help him achieve emancipation. The muni left and Sangam’s mother soon returned home. As she entered her house, she saw her son licking an empty dish. She felt sadness in her heart. Sangam had eaten so much kheer but remained hungry! She felt that she was not providing enough for him and that the boy was starving. Sangam did not say anything to his mother about giving all the kheer to the monk. After a short while, Sangam fell ill. He tried to cry out to his mother but could not utter a single word. Within moments he died, and was reborn the only son of a wealthy merchant.53,54

The story of ‘Sangam and the Muni’ is paradigmatic in that it depicts the ideal relationship between householders and ascetics as an encounter of ‘personnages’ (Mauss, 1986) or ideal roles. It represents a coming together of ideals: an unknown Jain ascetic arrives unannounced at the house of a pious individual and takes only ‘surplus’ food. The householder eagerly gives, and is profoundly grateful for the muni’s acceptance of alms. Of course, within the contemporary Terapanthi community, it is rare that a householder and an ascetic would meet as strangers and accidentally. More often than not, they meet as individuals who know at least something about the other’s background and family. And often enough, they meet as “onetime” relations55. Nevertheless, in the bhiksha rite, they come together as householder and ascetic, as ‘personnages’. The bhiksha ritual creates their categories by delineating their identities.

In his book Riches and Renunciation, James Laidlaw discusses Jainism’s otherworldly values, which, in their concern with the state of the individual soul or self, transcend the social. Drawing on Marcel Mauss’ theories of the person, he treats Jain cosmology as a ‘moi oriented’ moral system. He writes that “A moi theory is one which conceives the individuality of the human being in a cosmic (physical and/or spiritual) as opposed to social context; a conception of the individual as a spiritual and moral agent rather than as the subject of a political or social

53 Sangam was reborn as Shaalibhadra in the Gobhadra family, the richest family in town. The family was so rich that even the king could not compete with them. Shaalibhadra grew up in luxury and was married to thirty-two beautiful women, but eventually realised the pointlessness of worldly life, renounced the world and attained moksa.
54 This is Samani Urmilla Prajna’s version of the well-known tale.
55 They are ‘onetime’ or ‘former’ relations in the sense that they no longer (officially) recognise familial ties. The family represents the most tangible form of worldliness that is renounced at the time of diksa (ascetic initiation).
order" (1996: 16). Laidlaw writes that Jainism can be characterised as a moi theory because Jain thinkers have been centrally concerned to develop and explore a distinctive vision of the predicament "of the individual soul alone in an impersonal cosmic system of cause and effect, and burdened with the consequences of its former actions" (1996: 17). That Jain cosmology espouses a universal ethic is undoubtedly true, however, to make sense of the bhiksha ritual, it is more appropriate to consider Mauss's discussion of 'personnages' or idealized social roles. Mauss was interested in tracing the origins of the modern self from early, tribal roles (personnages) to the individual in modern society. He believed that for most of human history, individuals were not distinguishable from their social roles. Interestingly, the bhiksha ritual -- through which Jain 'moi universality' is established -- is achieved through social roles or personnages. In the ideal bhiksha interaction, individuality is concealed within the idealized roles of householder and ascetic. It is largely a stylised and scripted piece of drama through which the role of the householder and ascetic are created: the two come together and 'haggle' over alms and over identities.

*Bhiksha & The Jain ideal of Renunciation:*

In his book *The Jains*, Paul Dundas writes, "...[T]here is one basic and essential institution which brings ascetics and laity together and at the same time defines their radically different positions in the world: religious giving" (1992: 150). Religious giving in general, and bhiksha in particular, stands at the centre of Jainism because it establishes the Jain ideal of renunciation.

Because shravaks and ascetics are well-established and definable groups, we tend to treat them as representatives of distinct ontological realms. We consider the laity and ascetics as separate groups, representing separate realms that come together during certain interactions, most quintessentially in the act of bhiksha: like billiard balls, they briefly impact before shooting off in separate directions. But, I suggest it is bhiksha that creates the two groups as much as it represents a point of contact. Out of a homogenous whole, division is created and the laukik (worldly) and the lokottar (transcendent) come into existence.

Transactions between renouncers and householders constitute Jainism by rejecting society. Only by renouncing the world can Jain transcendent values be established. In Jain

56 The Jain tradition goes further than most (than any?) in its ethical universality. It treats all living beings as ontologically moral equivalents. It is a central feature of Jainism, and I consider it to be of central importance in understanding how and why the human ascetic ideal is of such significance within the tradition, as was argued in Chapter 2.
cosmology, the ‘spiritual’ is revealed through the rejection of the ‘worldly’, which clouds and contaminates it. All interactions with the laity provide an opportunity to delineate and demarcate the two, but it is the rite of bhiksha, above all others, that serves to demonstrate the renunciatory worldview on a daily basis. Bhiksha is the quintessential denial of exchange; it is an act that distinguishes the worldly from the spiritual in order that the worldly may be renounced.

The ascetic and the shravak are defined and distinguished in the bhiksha ritual by their contrasting approaches to spirituality, namely through ‘generosity’ and ‘restraint’. ‘The worldly’ and ‘the spiritual’ are an outcome of an essential rupture created by the juxtaposition of the competing orientations: the ‘generous’ householder and the ‘restrained’ ascetic. The roles and performances are foreordained, fixed and necessarily contradictory. Although both householder and ascetic are ultimately seekers of liberation, their methods – stemming from their positions either “inside” or “outside” the world – are contrary. The ascetic is counselled to take only ‘surplus’ food – a small quantity so as not to deprive the householder or cause her to make a sacrifice. But, as the Sangam story reveals, the householder – to be generous – must make an offering that is a sacrifice. Within the act of alms giving, therefore, we find the co-existence of conflicting demands: the householder is compelled to give whereas the ascetic is oblige to resist. Success depends on the realisation of ideal roles: i.e., the degree to which generosity is displayed by the householder and the degree to which the ascetic resists this generosity. But as in any bargaining transaction, there can be no absolute “winner”: restraint is established within a context of generosity; and generosity is established within a context of restraint. The success of the ascetic ideal requires that a certain balance be struck between the ostensibly ‘competing’ positions. In the absence of this ‘competition’ of orientations, bhiksha becomes an undisguised form of social exchange instead of an act of worldly renunciation, and is dispossessed of its raison d’être:

Stated crudely, the ascetics carry the spiritual burden of the community in return for which they receive maintenance by the laity. Ascetics own no possessions and are prevented by the tenet of ahimsa from performing many tasks necessary to sustain life; they cannot cook, construct shelters, light lamps or use electricity, earn or carry money, or drink unboiled water, to name but a few restrictions. Furthermore, as enlightenment is attained through austerities and meditation, ascetics have neither the time nor the inclination to pursue such mundane tasks (Marcus Banks, 1986:449, Italics added).

In the absence of a framework of spiritual haggling between the generous householder and restrained ascetic, the interaction appears as lay material support of the ascetics “in return” for spiritual guidance and an opportunity to earn punya. But it is precisely this ‘exchange’ or
appears as a social act and a form of interdependence only to the extent that we divorce it from its underlying soteriology. Any attempt to understand the Jain lay-ascetic relationship in terms of the socio-economic mechanisms that underlie it would – (inverting Marxist logic) – obfuscate its religious ideals. Exchange or reciprocity would involve the ascetic in worldliness, implicate her in violence, and thereby undermine the Jain claim that escape through renunciation is possible. It would threaten Jain society, founded, as it is, on the very idea of renunciation (Banks, 1986; Folkert, 1987). When bhiksha is ideally executed, it is meant to be an inversion of exchange, a rejection of social bonds and an act of world renunciation.

Laidlaw describes the bhiksha rite as “the exchange which constitutes and reproduces the Jain religion” (1996:300). He writes,

The exchange between renouncers and lay people differs from the ‘give and take’ of society at large. The highest kind of gift is that which renouncers (or Tirthankaras) give to the laity, and the next highest, the best that householders can do, is gifts from them to renouncers . . . (ibid.)

Non-reciprocal unilateral giving is antithetical to the give and take of normal social relations in that it repudiates fellowship and thereby undermines future interaction. Instead it affirms a different set of non-communal values viz., individualistic, otherworldly ones. Within the Jain context (on the ideological level), the denial of exchange champions an elusive and intangible good: the accumulation of spiritual merit in opposition to social merit. If the gift takes on even the slightest sense of an obligation for return, it is no longer bhiksha. With reciprocity comes attachment, the primary evil leading to rebirth. Jonathan Parry summarises the ideological function of bhiksha when he writes, “The reciprocated gift belongs to the profane world; the unreciprocated gift belongs to a quest for salvation from it” (1986: 462).

Parry considers the Indian ‘unreciprocated’ gift to be a challenge to Mauss’ theory of gift-exchange and an exception to the anthropological norm. Whereas Mauss argued that gifts contain some part of the spiritual essence of the donor which constrains the recipient to make a return and thereby creates spiritual bonds, Parry counters,

In the Hindu context this notion that the gift contains the person is associated with the idea that the gift is a kind of sacrifice . . . There is no question, then, of the gift being a loan or pledge. It is alienated in an absolute way, and the very

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57 For example, Flügel writes “The various forms of Jainism and other religions . . . are rationalisations of the socio-psychological processes involved” (1995-6:169). Jains, however, would likely see it conversely: viz., that socio-psychological processes are outcomes, not determining factors; they are products of the phenomenon of svayampravya (the mutual influencing of jīv and ajīv), which combine and transform (srstivada) to create all we know of worldly existence.
definition of the gift is that it involves the complete extinction of the donor's proprietary rights in favour of the recipient... The gift does return to the donor, but it does so as the fruits of karma... The return is deferred (in all likelihood to another existence); its mechanism has become entirely impersonal, and the recipient is merely a 'vessel' (patra) or conduit for the flow of merit and is himself in no way constrained by the gift or bound to the donor (1986:46).

And.

Whether we emphasise the impersonality of the return, or the ideology which denies that a 'true' gift is made 'with desire' for any kind of reward, it seems clear that we are dealing with a transactional theory quite unlike Mauss' Melanesian, Polynesian and American examples. The Hindu "law of the gift" does not create society by instituting that constant give-and-take which Malinowski described for the Trobriands..." (ibid.:462).

Instead, bhiksha creates the renunciatory ideal through the denial of give-and-take; what Folkert describes as an "anti-social religious ideal" (1993:180). It is only because gift exchange normally leads to the development of social bonds, that renunciation is established through its denial. As much as reciprocity constitutes the material basis of society through the formation of necessary alliances (cf. Mauss, Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss); the denial of exchange constitutes the ideological basis of Jainism. As Parry writes,

While Mauss originally introduced this notion of 'spirit' to explain the inalienability of the object and the necessity of making a return, what it in fact explains in this context is why the gift must be alienated, [and] should never return... (1986:461).

The institutional denial of exchange is tantamount to a repudiation of this-worldly values and of the building blocks of society itself. Strenski's argument about the orientation of the Theravada Buddhist sangha

applies equally well to the Jains. He claims that,

... civilisation or society has never for Buddhists been an end in itself; it is itself to be transcended, and that transcendence is nowhere better symbolised than in primary Nibbana-questing activity of the sangha (1983:476).

Religious giving (dana) in general, and bhiksha in particular, is denied as a form of reciprocity because it is an inversion of all normative social exchange where there exists a donor and a recipient, and where exchange establishes social bonds between the two parties. In theory, the householder and ascetic meet 'by chance'; it is the householder who urges the ascetic to accept alms, offers more than is accepted and is delighted to have given. The interaction benefits the giver more than it does the recipient. Jaini writes,

... [I]mportant benefits result from the widespread practice of sharing one's food with others. This activity... is called *atithi-samvibhaga*. sharing with

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58 *Sangha* = religious order
59 *Nibbana* = nirvana, emancipation
guests. The terms *aitthi* literally means "no date"; such a "guest," therefore, is one who arrives without invitation, who is simply passing by the door in search of alms. In Indian society only those who are brahmacharis (celibate students) or who have renounced the world altogether are allowed to beg food. A normal householder must never do so; his position is to give, not take. In those cases where extreme poverty drives ordinary people into a beggar's role despite this cultural restriction, it is understood that alms will be offered them only out of compassion on the part of the donor; no great spiritual merit accrues to such charity, since householders are not considered "worthy recipients." Presenting alms to an ascetic, on the other hand, is thought to bring one closer to salvation (1990:218).

And, unlike normal gift giving, it is the giver (not the recipient) who is in a subordinate position. As Laidlaw notes, "supatra-dan [dan given to ascetics; *bhiksha*] is the only form of gift in the classification which is always given by definition to a superior. So the recipient is not demeaned in receipt" (1996:316). The ascetic is neither demeaned, nor obligated as in normal gift exchange. Instead she acts as a vessel through which 'give and take' comes to pass. The giver (of alms) is also the taker (of merit), and no bonds are (in theory) forged. Both ascetic and householder seek moral excellence; each pursue spiritual progression through their particular methods (generosity/restraint) - stemming from their respective orientations to the world. Therefore, although the *shravak* and ascetic act out opposite sides of the *laukik / lokottar* divide, they are united in the *bhiksha* rite in esteeming otherworldly values.

The householder is worthy to give, and the ascetic worthy to receive because both are joined in the pursuit of 'spiritual' rewards alone - in opposition to 'worldly' ones. However, it is not always easy to distinguish between the rhetorically60 persuasive realms of 'the spiritual' and 'the worldly'; and indeed, householders often blend the two together. We see, for example, that the 'physical' or 'worldly' is assumed to be a reflection of spirituality in Jainism. One's position in society (both caste and class) is said to derive from one's 'gotra' or 'status-determining' karma; and one's physical appearance results from 'nama' or 'body-determining' karma. Thus, karma plays a central role in many aspects of life that are considered to be 'worldly'. We recall that Sangam, as a result of the *punya* he earned from his spirituality (demonstrated by his generosity to the monk), was reborn in a wealthy and privileged family. Audrey Cantlie, in an essay on Assamese Hindus, writes,

The western model of physical and mental as separate interacting systems is foreign to the holistic view of man taken by the Assamese. Thus physical beauty indicates a mental state in that it is a manifestation of moral character, and all the Assamese saints, following Krishna, are credited with outstanding beauty of appearance and athletic prowess (1981:43).

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60 See fn # 7
Likewise, the Jain Tirthankaras are invariably depicted as strong, intelligent and beautiful – as are senior ascetics in the order. Guru Dev’s paleness, large ears and sloping shoulders were considered to be signs of spiritual greatness by both the lay and ascetic Terapanthi community. This indexical relationship between body and soul makes the rhetorically and ontologically sharp distinction between ‘the spiritual’ and ‘the worldly’ difficult to distinguish in practice. Furthermore, because the present era is one of decline (we are now living in the cycle of Kaliyuga\textsuperscript{61} - a time of degeneration and instability) moksa is not possible, therefore the most that an ascetic and householder can hope for is that their accumulated punya (merit) will translate into a good re-birth. Whether this is a spiritual or worldly boon is contestable\textsuperscript{62}. Nevertheless both householder and ascetic assume the proper execution of bhiksha will progress them along their spiritual paths until that time when they can attain moksa.

When properly performed, bhiksha is an embodiment and dramatisation of difference. By defining and delineating the ascetic and the householder, it creates the essential division in Jainism between the laukik and the lokottar. The institution of bhiksha therefore creates the different positions in the world as much as it defines them, and it divides lay and ascetic as much as it brings them together. Bhiksha is as much a cause of the boundary distinction as it is a consequence. Thus to the extent that the bhiksha ritual is ideally executed, it acts as a great divider, separating the worldly from the transcendent.

When the ideal roles are not properly enacted, distinctions between the two groups become harder to detect, and the worldly and the spiritual become dangerously fused. If strong, bhiksha stands as a great fortification between two realms, but if it is weak it acts as an open portal, leading to assimilation or to ‘domestication’ (Carrithers, 1979).

\textsuperscript{61} Time is understood cyclically, as a wheel with 12 spokes; 6 inclining and 6 declining called the utsarpini and the avasarpini respectively. In the 6\textsuperscript{th} spoke of the avasarpini, Jainism is unknown and it is a period of utter bleakness. It will be followed by the 1\textsuperscript{st} utsarpini, the beginning of renewal. We are now in the 5\textsuperscript{th} spoke of the avasarpini – called the Kaliyuga – a period of decline. Dundas elaborates, “The Jains share with the Hindus the notion of Kaliyuga, the Corrupt Age, which for them involves a gradual diminishment of culture, religion and eventually even human stature. This age, in which we are living now, has been continually invoked by Jain writers from the early medieval period and provides an overarching principle with reference to which the tradition can explain the course of its own immediate fortunes after the death of Mahavira . . . as involving a continual tension between decline and attempted reform” (1992:12).

\textsuperscript{62} The ascetics are generally more careful than householders in distinguishing between spiritual and worldly rewards. For example, whereas they acknowledge that wealth, intelligence and beauty are likely the result of spiritual merit, they insist that a spiritual person would never yearn for such things. Instead, by leading a spiritual life aimed at salvation, these may result as beneficial ‘side-effects’ (see Babb, 1996).
Bhiksha is the paradigmatic relationship for all other interactions between lay and ascetic. Where normal social interaction leads to interdependence, bhiksha leaves ascetic autarky and the renunciatory ideal intact. It is those interactions between individuals defined as "not-exchange" – these denials of interdependence – which negate normal social bonds and authenticate the renunciatory ideal. But within it exists the seeds of its own destruction because, as Jonathan Parry writes, "the gift threatens to cement the two together in a dangerous interdependence" (1986:461). Ostensibly it brings the worldly and the spiritual together under a common spiritual motive, but it nevertheless results in the juxtaposition of the competing needs for generosity and restraint. If one party is more 'successful', and equilibrium does not ensue, the public act of renunciation is foiled. This is why bhiksha is codified and ritualised; it is a coming together of personnages rather than of individuals. Behaviour is highly stereotyped and theatrical, leaving little room for individual variation or deviation. If a householder is too generous, or not generous enough, or if an ascetic is too restrained, or – more likely – not restrained enough, the relationship at the centre of Jainism is imperilled.

The Threat of Assimilation:

Michael Carrithers suggests that the barrier separating lay-ascetic communities is inherently unstable and its eventual disintegration is inescapable. Writing on the history of the Theravada Buddhist monastic order, he observes:

There is a gradual, unconscious, apparently inevitable, and in these senses natural tendency for the Sangha to become domesticated, so that the monks are no longer truly homeless, either in fact or metaphorically (1979:296).

Paul Dundas, likewise, notes the historical 'laicisation' of Jain monasticism (see Cort, 1991, on the historical and cultural development of Jain ascetic orders). The original mandate (shared with Hindu renunciants), prohibiting ascetics from remaining more than one night in a village and five in a town, was eased, and with time replaced, by a myriad set of rules which focused instead on how ascetics should comport themselves whilst in householders’ dwellings (1992:150). Dundas writes,

Cf. Folkert, for an opposite view. He writes, "When one looks more carefully at the actual history of Jain asceticism, one sees that the Jains have been far more willing to be 'mathavasis,' or temple dwellers, than our standard sketches indicate. The ideal sadhu, eternally wandering, staying no more than a day or two, must be adjusted" (1993:171). But adds, however, that "Modern groups, especially the Terapanthis, have sought to break this pattern [of a monastery-dwelling ascetic] (ibid., 172).
in more recent times, lay-ascetic relations have altered somewhat compared to the old textual prescriptions. For example, monks, rather than travelling from place to place in self-sufficient small groups, are today usually accompanied by lay followers who form an almost triumphal procession and see to their needs on route in a variety of ways (1992:150).

According to Carrithers, reform and domestication marks the ebb and flow of monastic life;

A simplified picture of the history of the Theravada Sangha is as follows. The order of ascetics, separated from the world, gradually evolves towards the equilibrium state, the domesticated Sangha. Once this is reached, reformers may then arise from within the ranks, and though the majority of the Sangha remain domesticated, there appear groups, necessarily small because necessarily self-referring, of reform monks. As these settle and grow, they evolve towards domestication, and though associated in name with reform, come to entertain in fact the opinions of village literary specialists.[64] Within these overgrown domesticated erstwhile reform groups there then appear further reformers . . . and the process continues (1979:297).

'Laicisation' and reform similarly mark the pattern of Jain monasticism. Within ascetic communities, fission occurs due to a perceived move towards 'the worldly'; discontent manifests itself as a revolt against domestication. The Terapanthi sect itself came into being this way. Its origin story recounts a revolt against domestication and a move towards purity and reform. Bhikshu – its founder – broke with his sangh because of what he perceived to be its corruption. He believed his contemporary ascetics were leading such undisciplined lives that there was hardly a distinction between them and the householders.

The Birth of the Terapanthi:

As the Terapanthi ascetics tell it,65 Bhikshu (or Bhikanji – the Marwari version of his name) was initiated as a Sthanakvasi monk into the order of Guru Sri Raghunathji in 1751. Because of his intelligence, charisma and loyalty, Bhikshu soon became Raghunathji’s favourite disciple. Several years later, the householders of Rajnagar, a far-off village, grew so frustrated with the lax conduct of the ascetics that they unanimously decided not to honour or offer alms to them until the situation improved. Raghunathji decided to send his most

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64 Carrithers traces the pattern of the sangha development in its agrarian environment in Sri Lanka, whereby monks who are dispersed throughout the rice-growing valleys have little choice but to spend their time with the lay community.

65 The following is a compilation of accounts from monks and nuns.
intelligent disciple to quell the householders concerns and convince them to resume paying homage to the ascetics. So Bhikshu was sent to the village of Rajnagar for chaturmas (the four month rainy season retreat). When he arrived he was disturbed to find that his fellow monks were very lax in conduct, ignorant of the scriptures and deeply involved in worldly affairs. Bhikshu met with the householders and, after hearing their complaints, decided they were right. But he said nothing because he deeply admired his guru and did not want to oppose him. However, his internal angst was more than he could bear and, that first night in Rajnagar, he fell deathly ill. He knew that if he did not uphold the truth, he would die. He then became resolved to study the scriptures and discover for himself the “distinction between right and wrong”, and his illness suddenly disappeared. The next day he asked the householders to be patient, explaining to them that he intended to devote his entire chaturmas to finding the solution to their concerns through a study of the scriptures. At the end of the chaturmas he told the householders that their complaints were justified: that the ascetics were indeed violating Lord Mahavira’s ideal. But again he asked that they be patient. He was convinced that once he presented his findings to Raghunathji, everything would be resolved. At the end of chaturmas, he, along with the other Sthanakvasi monks, left Rajnagar. But unbeknownst to Bhikshu, two monks had left ahead of the group in order to reach Raghunathji first to tell him what Bhikshu was up to. When Bhikshu finally arrived, he found Raghunathji hostile towards him. Nevertheless, he pleaded his case, urging his guru to return to a purer form of ascetic practice. Paul Dundas writes,

Bhikshu railed against Sthanakvasi ascetics living permanently in lodging houses built especially for them, taking food from the same families every day and compelling lay people to take initiation from them exclusively (1992:218).

For two years Bhikshu debated and pleaded, but Raghunathji had no interest in reforming the order and persisted in his lax ways. Dundas describes the controversy:

In one of the anecdotes recorded about Bhikshu’s early career, Raghunathji is depicted as arguing that, since the time in which they lived was the fifth spoke of the wheel, the corrupt age, everything was inevitably in a state of decline and that as a consequence anyone who could maintain fully correct ascetic behavior for as little as an hour would become an omniscient kevalin. Bhikshu mockingly retorted that if that was the way to achieve the goal, he would sit and hold his breath for that period. For Bhikshu, the Jain path could involve nothing less than total commitment. As he is reported to have told Raghunathji, he had taken ascetic initiation to do something about the state of his soul (1992:219)
In 1759 Bhikshu felt he had no choice but to act, so in the town of Bagari, he and 12 other monks broke with the order. Present day Terapanthis maintain that Bhikshu had no desire to start a new sect; he simply wanted to re-establish the truth. Raghunathji was outraged and quickly spread rumours among the community that the 13 monks were troublemakers, and should be avoided. The householders ostracised Bhikshu and his disciples because, though dissatisfied with current practices, they deeply respected Raghunathji. So the breakaway group was immediately faced with serious obstacles. It had nowhere to stay and no food or drink, as no householders were willing to offer accommodation or bhiksha. They fasted and during the night, stayed in cremation grounds. One day they were performing their religious duties in a small shop stall when a minister of the state and a local poet passed by. Surprised to see them there, instead of in their own lodgings, the minister asked, “Why are you at this place?” Bhikshu explained that he and the monks considered the owning of sthanaks [lodgings] to be a violation of the true ascetic path, because it involved possession. Instead they considered any place as appropriate for religious duties. The minister was impressed and asked, “How many ascetics follow this view point”. They answered “Terah” (“Thirteen”). The poet said aloud “Terahpanth” (“The path of thirteen”). Bhikshu, upon hearing this, raised his head to the sky and, making a play on the appellation, declared, “Lord, we have accepted Tera Panth” (“Thy Path”). Later, they added another auspicious interpretation of the name: they were representatives of the path of thirteen principles: 5 mahavratas, 5 samitis, 3 guptis. In 1760 Bhikshu initiated himself into the Terapanthi order, started a campaign for purity of conduct and wrote a constitution (maryada parr) that establishes a single acharya as the absolute leader of the order. As the story goes, the Terapanthi sect grew slowly but was eventually victorious and the number of lay and ascetic followers steadily increased.

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66 Later renamed ‘Sudhari’, the town is now a pilgrimage site for religious Terapanthis.
67 The 5 Mahvratas are =non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession , 5 Samitis = careful conduct in walking, speaking, seeking alms, handling objects and disposing of excreta . 3 Guptis = the control of the mind, body and speech.
68 The salient features of the constitution are 1) There will be only 1 acharya in the Terapanthi order, 2) All disciples will remain under 1 acharya; 3) caturmahas, travelling etc, will be done according to the direction of the acharya; 4) the present acharya will nominate his successor who will be accepted by all, 5) no monk or nun will initiate their own disciples, 6) all books and manuscripts will remain under the control of the acharya.
Confines of the Lokottar:

One of the most interesting aspects of the Terapanthi 'origin story' is the prominent role it accords householders in the push to reform. More typically, if ascetics acknowledge a threat of domestication in their order, they generally see the source of the problem as external to themselves. Many Jain stories depict 'unfavourable' lay-ascetic transactions, and the problems are almost exclusively presented as originating amid householders, who are blamed for either being irreligious and stingy, or demanding and over-desirous of ascetics. The scriptures, too, see the greatest threat coming from householders. Paul Dundas writes,

One important text describing normative ascetic behaviour points out the potential danger of the relationship with lay people by describing the monk as a deer and the layman as a hunter (NBh 1649:curni comm.) (1992:149).

Therefore, unlike the Hindu narrative literature in which there is an abundance of stories warning of corrupt ascetics – what Kirin Narayan calls “an enduring cultural theme” in Hindu storytelling (1989:144) – there are few such stories in the Jain pantheon.⁶⁹ This is likely a reflection of the singular importance of the renunciatory ideal in the Jainism. Folkert writes

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⁶⁹ Consider the story of the wayward Jain monk: Greedy for food, he resolves his dilemma by becoming a Buddhist monk! (see Granoff, 1993). A story which is critical of a Jain monk does so in a circuitous way that avoids criticism of the institution of Jain asceticism itself.
the Jain tradition one does not find *sadhus* being treated as “the objects of suspicion and occasional outright hostility” (1993:183), as they occasionally are in the Hindu tradition. He explains: “Because Jain teachings as a whole are critical of the standard values of engagement in social and economic life, one would not expect to see the ascetic viewed in such ambivalent fashion as is true for Hindu culture as a whole” (ibid.). The Terapanthi’s own origin story is a conspicuous deviation from this norm. Inverting the normal logic, householders are presented as defenders of the tradition, and it is the ascetics who are chastised for their worldly ways. Of course, this single inversion of the more typical ‘infallible ascetic’ theme undoubtedly had rhetorical purposes for a reform movement eager to distinguish itself from its predecessors, and to establish its own ascetic credentials among a lay community.

Acharya Bhikshu was determined to establish an order in which the ‘*laukik*’ and the ‘*lokkottar*’ would be clearly delineated, and in which the lay and ascetic realms would never overlap, making ‘domestication’ an impossibility. Holmstrom describes the Terapanthi’s doctrine as follows:

The Terapanth was an offshoot of the Sthanakavasis from 1760 AD, and much stricter. One of their basic principles is a very strict division between religious action and social action. Two ways of expressing this are; the terms *dharm, * taken in the sense of “religion”, as opposed to *adharma, * not “irreligion” in the sense of going against religious tenets, but simply not to do with religion; or the terms *adhyatmik dharm, “duty” as benefiting one’s soul, *atman, * as opposed to *laukik dharm, one’s social duty, e.g., supporting one’s parents or offering hospitality to one’s guests. Both are important, but only if recognised as essentially separate (1987:13).

This ‘worldly-transcendent’ division is central to the Terapanthi’s understanding of Jainism (Flügel, 1995-6), and from very early on in my stay it was important to the ascetics that I understood it. On many occasions, they would concoct hypothetical scenarios and then quiz me to see if I knew the difference between social and religious duty. Samani Urmilla, the nun with whom I quickly established a friendship, listed by rote Bhikshu’s twenty principles of *dharma* (gloss: religion*70*)

1. *Dharma* is *tyag* (restraint), not *bhog* (enjoyment of pleasure).
2. *Dharma* is in compassion, not in violence.
3. *Dharma* is that which is permitted by Lord Mahavira, not what he prohibited.
4. *Dharma* is in efforts to change the heart, not in force or bribery.
5. *Dharma* cannot be bought, it is priceless.
6. For *dharma, one life cannot be taken to save another.
7. *Dharma* and *adharma* cannot be mixed.
8. A ‘right’ end can only be achieved by ‘right’ means.

*70* *Adharma* glosses as “not religion”
9. It is a form of attachment (adharma) to yearn for another being to live long.
10. It is a form of aversion (adharma) to want others to die early.
11. To leave a home where the activities are not good is dharma.
12. When a being dies is not violence.
13. When a being lives is not compassion.
14. To kill is violence.
15. Not to kill is compassion.
16. To save a large being by taking a small one is not dharma.
17. Worldly duty and spiritual religion are different.
18. Necessary violence is still violence (except for ascetics[71]).
19. The spiritual religion of ascetics and householders is one and the same.
20. Non-violence and compassion are one and the same.

After rattling off the list at great speed, Urmilla then sought to explain what these points mean to the Therapanthi community in practical terms;

Laukik dharma is related to the world, and lokottar dharma is related to moksha. Only those acts concerned with moksa are true religion. If one is in society, one must perform one’s duties, such as helping each other, feeding each other. Monks and nuns are strictly within the realm of lokottar dharma, so they cannot involve themselves in worldly activities. For a householder to do anything for a nun or monk is lokottar dharma because the ascetics have renounced the whole world.

For householders therefore, only those acts deemed as purely spiritual acts, principally religious giving to the ascetics, (and most quintessentially bhiksha), are of religious (lokattar) worth. For a renouncer, no involvement in worldly existence is permissible. In its purest form, observance of this doctrine means that an ascetic can not only not physically help others, she cannot even advise the laity to do so.

If there is one story that the ascetics feel encapsulates their doctrine, it is “The merchant and his Son”. This is a popular tale recounted by ascetics to householders of all ages because of its simplicity. I present its summarised version;

One day a merchant had errands to run so he decided to leave his son in charge of his shop that sold butter and tobacco. The father instructed the boy on how to serve the goods to customers, and then left. The boy was anxious to please his father, and came up with an idea. He saw that the containers for the butter and tobacco were only half full, and since the cost of the products was identical, he thought he could save space by mixing the two together into one. When the father returned he was aghast — in front of him was a pot full of buttery tobacco! Now no one would buy either. The substances, useful when separate, were no longer of any use, and were even harmful when confused and mixed together (see Holmstrom, 1988:13, for a similar version).

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[71] Because ascetics take a vow of non-violence daily, and are vigilant in its observance, any life that may be lost (e.g., trampling to death a tiny invisible being) is not defined as ‘violence’ and will not lead to the accumulation of karma. The reverse is also true however: if an ascetic is careless, karma will accrue even if no violence has occurred.
Thus the Terapanthis stress that although a householder has social duties to perform, they do not constitute ‘religion’ or ‘spirituality’ because some form of violence is inherent in their performance. Samani Urmilla asked rhetorically, “How can I tell a householder to build a hospital when such an act would involve digging the earth and killing so many living beings?” But she added that householders “should” fulfil their worldly duties; and if they don’t want to, they should become renunciants.  

The Terapanthis’ narrow interpretation of what constitutes ‘the transcendent’ (lokottar) has led to misunderstandings and often harsh criticism from other Jain communities. Regrettably, scholars have largely depended on sources not favourably predisposed to the reform sect for information on the Terapanthis – often resulting in the presentation of a rather negative portrait. For example, Padmanabh Jaini (1990), discusses the sect as follows;

[The attempt by a renegade Sthānakavāsi monk called Bhikhanji (eighteenth century) to establish a sect based on the doctrine of total non-assistance to any living being (except mendicants) was greeted by protest from nearly all members of the community. It is said that Bhikhanji could initially gather no more than twelve disciples; the sect he founded, therefore became known as the Terāpantha, which means “the path of thirteen” (1990:313-4)

Jaini elaborates in a footnote;

Bhikhanji’s theory was that saving the life of a dog, [for example] makes one responsible for the violence committed by that dog in the future and thus should be avoided. He also claimed that “helpful” behaviour almost always involved some interest in the result, hence brought an increase in karmic attachments. Bhikhanji here exploits the doctrinal split inherent in any community that preaches the ideals of total renunciation and mokṣa, on the one hand, and the value of compassionate and charitable behaviour (leading to heaven) on the other. Pushed to a purely logical extreme, the canonical teachings might well be thought to justify the Terāpanthi interpretation. Even so, such interpretation violates the spirit of anekāntavāda and has been considered a form of ekānta by most Jains[73]. Since its inception, therefore, the Terāpanthi sect has lived in virtual isolation from the larger Jaina community (ibid.:314 in footnote).

Laidlaw’s presentation also reveals an over-reliance on non-Terapanthi sources. He writes:

72 Flügel’s interprets Bhikshu’s doctrinal innovations as an attempt “to eradicate the legitimacy of religious property once and for all” (1995-6:123). He argues that by distinguishing social acts of charity from religious acts of penance, “Popular puja-rituals of material gifts were thus deprived of religious value” (ibid.)

73 Anekantavada is the Jain epistemological doctrine of “many-sidedness”. It states that truth is not singular. Instead, truth is multiplex and depends on a variety of viewpoints. Ekanta, meaning “one view” is its antithesis.
One of the consequences of Terapanthi doctrines on compassion, non-violence, and intervening in worldly affairs . . . is that in that sect supatra-dan is the only kind of gift which has any religious sanction. The Terapanth does not coordinate and organise charitable projects, animal homes, and the like, as other Jain traditions do. Its arguments carry weight even with people from other traditions, despite its troubling consequences. Once when I was asking a Khatar Gachh friend about dan, he brought up the Terapanth doctrine.

“They say that patra must be supatra. Acharya Tulsi’s people, that’s what they say. If I give to a poor man, he may do some bad thing and they say the sin will come to me. They say it is not dharma to give to the poor. Of course it is good to give to someone who is worthy, and it is best to give to sadhu-sadhvis. But how much do they need? And if I see a beggar in the street and I feel something, it is my duty (kar~avya) to give. And how can I know what is in his heart? It is not my duty to ask, “What will he buy?” or “What will he do?” It is my duty to help, because I feel compassion (karuna bhav). Didn’t Mahavir Swami feel compassion for everyone? And we should do what we can” (1996:300-301).

The comments of Laidlaw’s friend reflect common, if not stereotypical, misunderstandings of the Terapanthi and are therefore worth considering. Contrary to common assumptions, no Terapanthi would disagree with the idea that a householder has a “duty to give”. However, an ascetic would maintain that such an act is not ‘dharma’ – but, not for the reasons the friend assumes. Contemporary Terapanthis do not claim that one is responsible for the ill thoughts or actions committed by, for example, a beggar after helping him. It is only the repercussions of the immediate act itself that are of concern. An example that Samani Urdinilla gave me to distinguish between the two was this:

Suppose a man is sick and his wife gives him medicine hoping to help him. But, by chance, the man is allergic to the medicine and dies. In this case, the woman is responsible for violence. If however, the man got better from the medicine and at some later date commit murder, or told a lie, she would be not responsible.

Giving food to a beggar is adharma – not because of what the beggar might do in the future – but because it involves violence [preparing of food] and it encourages non-restraint. And violence and non-restraint are never ‘dharma’.

Muniji, the elderly monk with whom I would meet most evenings, told me many times that whether or not householders follow the religious advice he gives them has no karmic effect on him. While he hopes that they become more spiritual, if they persist in their worldly ways, he is not responsible. In fact, he still succeeds in burning away karmic matter (nirjara) for
having preached the ‘Right Faith’.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, Muniji insisted that the ascetics’ involvement with
the lay community in general (daily sermons, individual consultations etc.), is performed
because it is spiritually beneficial for the ascetics, whether the laity follow their teachings or
not. During the year in which I was Muniji’s ‘disciple’, he was incredibly gentle and kind, and
always had endless patience. But when I would try to thank him for his special kindness, he
would become serious and inform me that his primary motive for instructing me was that it was
a helpful part of his own sadhana (religious practice). This view seeks to clearly delineate the
spiritual from the worldly, and to deny that ascetic instruction is given ‘in return’ for lay
material support.\textsuperscript{75}

According to the Terapanthi, ‘dharma’ is that which leads to ‘effecting a positive
change of heart’. The Terapanthi assert that the common Jain practice of purchasing an animal
at a market to prevent it from being butchered is not a religious act because it does nothing to
courage the butcher to abandon his violent practice. Laidlaw quotes Acharya Tulsi on this
issue and on the Terapanthi understanding of mercy (daya):

Mercy can only be done when the opponent’s heart is changed. When we save
someone by force, or by some wrong means, or by tempting, then we do not
consider it spiritual (adhyatmik) mercy. It can be from a worldly point of view
(laukik drishtikon), but not from the spiritual. Suppose we save a rat by beating
the cat who is chasing him, that is not pure daya. Suppose some person is
killing some creature and we give him money, that is not pure daya. Until the
heart of the killer is changed, it cannot be considered pure daya. Changing a
violent man to a non-violent man – that is daya (1996:164).

Furthermore, and contrary to Laidlaw’s assumption, lay Terapanthis do co-ordinate and
organise charitable projects – and many of them. The Terapanthi have an active Women’s
Organisation (Terapanthi Mahila Mandal) that is very involved in social work projects (e.g., it
co-ordinates eye clinics for poor families, educational projects and camps, to name but a few).
And the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute is open to all students free of charge. However, as
Laidlaw noted, what does distinguish the Terapanthi from other communities is its conspicuous
absence of animal shelters, and this is likely to stem from its doctrinal peculiarity. Even a few
Terapanthi ascetics accepted that perhaps the Terapanthi distinction between worldly and

\textsuperscript{74} Jains believe that there are three essential and interdependent components of the spiritual path: Right
Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. Right Faith or ‘Enlightened Worldview’ brings forth Right
Knowledge and then Right Conduct. Right Faith means a belief in the categories of truth (see chp. 2). A
person with Right Faith is full of compassion, believes in the transmigration of the soul and has a ‘fear
of, and distaste for, worldly life’ (Tatvarthha Sutra, 1994: 6).

\textsuperscript{75} Muniji’s interpretation is the official Terapanthi assessment of lay-ascetic interaction. Nevertheless, on
many occasions the samarins would interpret the relationship in a more reciprocal way, saying that since
the householders “do so much for us” they felt that they ought to make themselves available to the
householders.
spiritual duty has been wrongly interpreted by householders to mean they shouldn’t involve themselves in such activities. But they insist that householders should perform such social duties, even though they do not lead to good karma. It is reasonable to assume that householders, believing no good karma will be gained through such efforts, might abandon them altogether. Whether the lay community believes their philanthropic works are only ‘socially good’ and do not lead to the accumulation of merit is hard to know. When I spoke with members of the Terapanthi Mahila Mandal, the majority believed – through a creative interpretation of their doctrine – that their efforts would benefit them karmically. As one woman explained, “Perhaps the acts themselves are not dharma, but the compassion that drives them is, and this surely leads to punya.” And I knew of at least one saman who interpreted philanthropic acts in the same way.

Today, despite these often-painstaking efforts to separate the worldly from the spiritual, the unqualified interdependence between the laity and ascetics is one of the most conspicuous aspects of Terapanthi religious life – as it is a feature of monastic life more generally. It is ‘conspicuous’ because it clashes so sharply with the Terapanthi ideal. The divergence from the ideal of Lord Mahavira is rationalised, in part, by the fact that we are presently living in an era of decline, which makes the rigours of heroic asceticism impossible. But generally speaking, laxity is not acknowledged and, in fact, most householders and ascetics spend a considerable amount of time talking about the hardships of the ascetic path. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, however, interdependence and mutual accommodation is a salient feature of monastic life.

Like Janus, the Roman god of doorways, bhiksha has two clearly distinguished aspects. It is both a menace (in that it juxtaposes competing interests), and a creative force (in that the

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76 During my stay, I would throw scraps of bread to hungry dogs who had entered the monastery and made it their home. One day during the morning sermon, when I was sitting amongst the samanis, Guru Dev announced to the large gathering that he was happy to learn that I had been helping the dogs. By this he did not mean that I was gaining punya for my deeds, but rather that I was – in his mind – acting according to the duties of a householder. It must be said, however, that Guru Dev appeared more willing than most ascetics to implicate himself in social affairs. The gentle and elderly Muniji, for instance, adopted a more purist approach. He explained that he would never praise a householder for performing social duties because in so doing he would be tacitly approving of violence. This view may have been the dominant one within the sect before the leadership of Acharya Tulsi (Guru Dev), leading to its reputation for rigidity.

77 As mentioned earlier, the distinction between worldly and spiritual boons is not at all easy to make. Jains assume an indexical relationship exists between the two, so that an individual may be materially blessed because of a spiritually pure past life.

78 The ascetics claim that because we are living in the 5th cycle, the ‘kaliyuga’, the human body is relatively weak in comparison with earlier epochs. For example, our bones and joints are less well formed, and less able to withstand ascetic rigours. I was shown illustrations depicting the changes in the human skeletal system. Whereas we have poorly formed joints connecting our bones, human joints in earlier epochs were literally nailed together. In addition to a decline in physical might, human will and mental strength have also deteriorated.
Juxtaposition is necessary to delineate the two realms in the first place. Ivan Strenski considers the unavoidable interaction between householders and ascetics – (whether defined as exchange or not) – as the root cause of domestication. In particular, ritual giving to the sangha is at the centre of both the creation of the renunciatory ideal and its erosion. He writes, “The problem of how domestication came about is, then, the problem of how Buddhist society was formed in the process of ritual giving” (1983:470). He continues,

[R]egular patterns of social relationships grow along with regular patterns of giving... [and] [I]t is not so much that the material nature of monastic residences made them the agents of domestication as it was their status as gifts which in turn called forth certain social obligations (1983:470).

And,

Perhaps the first thing one comes to appreciate is how treacherous exchange can be for a social formation of renouncer ascetics such as the sangha. If no qualification were placed upon the exchange between sangha and laity, the sangha would soon become laicised. A sangha which exchanged food given it for food it preferred would ipso facto have taken the first plunge into merchandising; in the south Asian context, it would simply be another jati (caste) among others. . . On the other hand, without exchange between sangha and laity, the sangha would either have to become economically (and in all other ways) self-sufficient, or would simply cease to exist . . . . if the alternatives of unqualified exchange and no exchange lead to dead-ends, then perhaps we can understand why and how the laity and sangha entered into relations of qualified exchange (1983:472).

In his essay On the Moral Perils of Exchange J. Parry talks about the similar danger of obligation facing the Hindu Brahmin priest in his acceptance of dana.

The ideal Brahman should as nearly as possible approximate his life-style and behaviour to that of the world-renouncer, but the problem with dana is that the priest’s acceptance of it irretrievably compromises this ideal of ascetic autonomy and inextricably enmeshes him in the material and social order. It is the Brahman’s ascetic transcendence of the world which qualifies him as a ‘worthy vessel’ for the gifts of the pious; but the paradox is that his receipt of such gifts inevitably endangers this very transcendence (1989:74).

80 Interestingly, unlike Carrithers (1979) and Tambiah (1976), Strenski takes a rather positive view of ascetic ‘domestication’. He states, “...domestication is no fall, no decline in the fortunes of Buddhism, it is a legitimate and natural development of ancient strands of the Buddhist tradition. It ought then to be seen as part of the process of expressing and achieving certain Buddhist goals – in particular that of Buddhist culture, society or civilization (Ames 1966:32), or what Tambiah calls Buddhism as a ‘world religion’ (1976:16). Domestication is first of all part of the formation process of Buddhist society, growing slowly into the early sangha itself, then expanding to embrace ever larger spheres...” (1983: 470). Likewise, Folkert writes, “[T]his phenomenon [of caityavāsī, i.e., monastery-dwelling ascetic order] has commonly been portrayed as ‘decay’ in the Jain community. I would propose that it was more likely an innovation that put and kept the community and the śādhus together in ways that, had there been no caityavāsīs, they would not have been bonded. One must note here the specific place this institution allows for a prolonged lay-guru relationship (1993:172).
Interestingly, Parry considers the non-reciprocated bhiksha given to an ascetic to be of a completely different order, and not to pose a danger at all. He claims that bhiksha in no way entails the kind of moral difficulties associated with dana. The crucial point here, I suggest, is that such prestations are given to the renouncer, with whom no relationship is possible since he is outside the social world (1989:77).

I would, however, counter by arguing that the renouncer is “outside the social world” only to the extent that she and the householder collude to deny bhiksha as a form of exchange. If an ascetic were to appear overly eager in accepting alms – thereby violating the demeanour of detachment, or if a householder were a reluctant giver, forcing the ascetic to solicit alms, the ascetic ideal would be weakened. The ideal relationship between the two should not be assumed, since it must be re-established in each transaction. Bhiksha is the litmus test of healthy lay-ascetic relations. When it serves as an interaction between ‘personnages’ it is a creative force maintaining householders and ascetics as two distinctive – even to some degree – opposing domains. But, when roles are poorly performed, it is the first step towards domestication. Therefore the relationship between the state of the sangh and the state of the rite of bhiksha is intimate. The latter is a microcosm of the former. The constant tug of war between the shravak and the ascetic, and between the worldly and the spiritual, is at the centre of Jain religious life.

The Drama of Bhiksha:

The months passed and bhiksha became a common and predictable daily rite for me. Many mornings when the ascetics would arrive at the guesthouse, I would join the encircling devotees and follow them into Bapu’s kitchen. There, along with the others, I would try to have a turn at making a generous offering of rice, roti, or kheer. And although almost all the nuns and monks would be familiar to me, and some I knew as friends, we would meet as personnages. We would not greet each other by name, or talk of our mutual concerns as we normally did. Instead, we would come together as representatives of ‘the worldly’ and ‘the spiritual’. Bhiksha is the drama through which the roles of householder and the ascetic are recreated daily; and through it we embodied ideals and demonstrated our worthiness as moral beings. Although to some extent householders and ascetics are always embodiments of ‘the worldly’ and ‘the spiritual’, the categories themselves are more negotiable outside of the
bhiksha ritual. Variability, versatility and dynamic identities are more characteristic of private lay-ascetic encounters. For example, on those mornings when I would join the sadhvis on their vigorous jaunts around and about the town of Ladnun in search of bhiksha, we would juggle with our roles, putting on and taking off our bhiksha masks. Our identities would be as limber as our steps, as we would weave our way through the narrow village streets, darting in and out of homes for alms.

Joining the sadhvis on their bhiksha rounds meant an early start to the day: at 4am I would leave my room quietly, so as not to wake Bapu. He would be stretched out on his charpoy immediately in front of the door to my room. He and the other workers at the residence had no rooms of their own, and would invariably set up their charpoys in some corridor to protect themselves from the chill of the night. His day began at about 5:30 a.m., and on these mornings I envied him the extra 90 minutes of sleep. He always looked so warm, wrapped and secure in a large woollen blanket. Yet it wouldn’t be long before he would be woken by a holler from the guesthouse superintendent, gasping for his morning cup of chai. And Bapu would make many pots of sweet tea before his day would be done. I, too, would later come asking. Whenever I went on bhiksha rounds with the sadhvis, I returned to the monastery too late for breakfast and would rely on Bapu’s chai to sustain me. However, when I would tag along with the samanis on their swifter rounds, I would be back in plenty of time for breakfast at 7:30 am.

The lives of sadhvis and munis are considered to be much more rigorous than those of samanis/samanis, in part because of the rules governing their bhiksha collections. Unlike ‘full’ ascetics, the latter accept from householders food that has been specifically prepared for them. It often seemed as though the sadhvis’ days were organised around alms collection – first at sunrise, then again before noon, and finally in the late afternoon. It takes time to collect the alms, since like ‘grazing cows’, they take just a small amount from a large number of houses so as not to burden any one household unnecessarily. They then return to their residence, often a thirty minute walk, divide the food among their group of 6 or 7, eat and clean up. From start to finish, the procedure can take a good two hours and is a thrice-daily occurrence. The samanis, by contrast, unencumbered by the rule of seeking alms at homes unannounced, are

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81 Other modifications to ascetic conduct are also of considerable importance. Unlike full ascetics, the ‘semis’ are allowed to travel by means other than by foot, and are allowed to use flush toilets. The vow of ahimsa prevents the ascetics from engaging in these activities. Travelling by any means other than by foot results in the killing of innumerable life forms; flush toilets are inherently destructive devices due to their considerable use of water – which itself is alive. And to accept alms prepared for them specifically would implicate them in the violence committed in its preparation.

82 The ascetics refer to their rounds of alms collection as “gochari” from the Hindi cognate ‘gao’ meaning ‘cow’. Like grazing cows, the ascetics only ‘nibble’ [or take tiny amounts of food] from many householders.
free to collect all their alms at the same place, if they so wish. In practice, lists are prepared in advance by the Niyojika (head samani) designating the places from where each group of samanis will collect alms for the upcoming week. When they are in Ladnun they mainly collect from the Jain Vishva Bharati’s ‘institutional’ set-ups: the meditation centre, the guesthouse, the kitchen for workers, etc. Each week the groups are rotated, to prevent the formation of attachments between the lay servers and ascetics. The collection usually does not exceed twenty minutes, so the samanis can be finished eating their morning meals by 7:30 a.m. – a time when the sadhvis are typically still on their bhiksha rounds.

The ‘semi-ascetic’ or saman category was established to enable a group of ‘ascetics’ greater freedom to proselytise. The traditional restrictions on ascetics in the areas of travel, toilet and alms collection were considered by Guru Dev to be obstacles to the spread of Jainism, and especially to his Anuvrat Movement, both within India and outside. There were six initiates into the semi-nun (saman) order in 1980, and by 1996 there were eighty-one. Four semi-monks (samsani) were initiated in 1986 and it was this same group that still comprised the order in 1996.83

Standing on the terrace of the guesthouse at 4am and looking out across the stretch of sand leading to the Gautam Shalla (the samanis’ residence), I could feel only stillness – a calm that easily lures one back to slumber. At daybreak, I would make my way to the sadhvis residence outside the monastery with the samanis. But we would have to wait first for the sun to rise to light our path for the trek. Crossing the cold sand to the samanis residence – no more than 100 metres away – I held out hope that the desert’s night air would invigorate me. The stars, showing no signs of weakening, would be high and mighty in the sky. The ascetics insist that this tranquil hour is the most sublime for meditation, when the rhythms of the universe are at their most harmonious and most peaceful.

In the predawn hours, the samanis would be gathered together in a single room, each sitting in a lotus position, their eyes shut. An exposed yellow light bulb, burning the whole night, jutted out from high on the wall.84 It radiated a dreary, sleepy yellow hue across the room, and made the faces of the nuns appear harsh as they quietly recited their prayers. Muted beneath their muhpattis, their voices seemed to come from far away. I would sit and listen to

83 The saman category is not seen as a stepping stone for monks as it is for nuns. Instead, only those male aspirants who can speak English and are good public speakers are considered for it. Because there are far fewer monks than nuns in the order (approx. 1/3rd), the Terapanthi leadership has been less inclined to delay full initiation for them.

84 Since ascetics are prevented from using electricity – because of its violence to fire-bodied beings – householders turn on and off lights for them. The housekeeper at the Guatam Shalla, (a simple man in his
the deep hum until the gloomy yellow of the room became washed in white light with the
beginnings of sunrise. When the light is sufficient to read the lines of their fingerprints, they
begin pratilekhna – the practice of examining their belongings for insects before changing into
their daytime saris. After this, they leave the monastery grounds to head to the nuns’ residence
for darshan from Sadhvi Kanak Prabha and the other sadhvis. From there, with the sadhvis,
they return to the monastery for guru darshan. It is the one time of day when all the ascetics
(and many householders) converge in the assembly hall to receive Guru Dev’s and Acharyasri’s
blessing.

Sadhvis, like all ascetics, take turns collecting alms for their group, and today it was
Sadhvis Malatiji and Bhavitaji’s duty. Sadhvi Malati (not her real name) had been to America
when she was a samani and learned to speak English very well. She now loved to practice. She
was extraordinarily busy, most of her time being taken up on a new project with Acharyasri to
produce an English language dictionary of Jain philosophy. I would meet her daily to work on
this project. In the presence of Acharyasri we focused on the task at hand and never talked of
anything beyond it. We found the best time to talk of other matters was on the bhiksha rounds.
On this morning I caught up with her and Sadhvi Bhavita immediately after arriving at the
nun’s residence with the samanis. Together we walked back to the assembly hall for guru
darshan, and then headed off on our rounds.

Even though the night had given way, the village was still covered in a great sleepy
shadow, and the bite of the night air lingered. Only when the morning sun began to break
through the darkness, did I feel myself waking up. The village animals – the cows, dogs and
horses – were still nowhere to be seen, and many of the villagers had not yet emerged from
their homes. We were well bundled up, snug in our shawls as we walked briskly down the
narrow village paths in search of bhiksha.

Sadhvi Malatiji is one of the more ambitious nuns in the order, and has many ideas on
how she can use her ability in English to promote Jainism. She had been sent to travel outside
India in the hope that she and the others could strengthen the religious commitments of the
[assumed to be ] spiritually beleaguered Terapanthi Jain families in England and the States.
To many in the Terapanthi community, with its base in rural Rajasthan, “the West” symbolises
early 50s), is responsible for this task and, for the sake of convenience, usually leaves on a light in the
main room the whole night.
85 That is, we paid homage to Guru Dev and Acharyasri. Those responsible for alms collection have no
time to wait to hear the morning blessing (the mangal path). Many homes must be visited before
sufficient alms are collected for the group.
86 The Terapanthi Jains are unique within the larger Indian Jain community in their proselytising
aspirations
amorality and corruption. The *samanis* and *samans* are often described in ways reminiscent of the literature of Christian missionaries – as pioneers bringing light to an area of darkness. Sadhvi Malatiji has great plans to write books on Jainism in English and was eager to have me help her. We talked about working together on various projects – children’s books, vegetarian cookbooks – all in the hope of reaching an English speaking audience. Though often engrossed in our own conversation, we kept up a fast pace, with Sadhvi Bhavita never more than a stride ahead of us. We walked and talked as companions – as individuals with particular and mutual interests. But as soon as we stepped into the home of an entreating householder, we stepped into our *personnages*. The shared interests that had bound us as we walked together were trivialised before the differences created, highlighted and juxtaposed in the *bhiksha* rite.

The *sadhvis* entered the cement courtyard ahead of me and stood momentarily at its centre, waiting for an invitation to proceed deeper into the house. Decoratively painted arches leading into small rooms surrounded us, and the sun, which was now asserting itself in the sky, shone down into the courtyard through the exposed roof. Soon a middle aged and heavy-set woman appeared at one of the doors. Her body was slightly bent over in a posture of humility and, with hands joined, she urged the *maharajas* to enter. Without hesitation, the nuns headed into the main room of the house, and I followed behind them. It was clear that this was a home they had frequented many times before. Two young girls approached and, with their hands joined, moved over to touch the *sadhvis* feet. A sleepy-looking man in his thirties joined the group, followed by a woman of about the same age – perhaps his wife, and then another man and a young boy. An elderly woman, whom I had seen stretched out in bed in a tiny dark room as we entered, now slowly approached the *sadhvis*. All bowed as they came closer, repeating ‘*Matthayena Vandami*’ and the women touched the feet of the *sadhvis*. If the family was surprised to see a foreigner in their home, they didn’t show it. It would have been the height of rudeness to inquire about me at such a ‘spiritual moment’. The *sadhvis* stood at the tiny kitchen entrance and busied themselves with their task at hand, paying little attention to the humbling efforts of the devotees. Slowly the *sadhvis* placed the stacked *patras*, still in their *jholi*, on the ground before them. The *jholi* keeps the *patras* secure when the ascetics walk. They carefully untied it, uncovering the alms bowls. Sadhvi Malatiji had four *patras* stacked one on top of the other, each fated to carry a particular type of food: milk, rice, *kheer*, tea, sweets etc. The *patras*

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87 When instructing me in its usage, the ascetics explained it to mean “I bow before your greatness”. ‘*Matthayena*’ or ‘*Matthaen*’ Vandami literally translates as “I honour you with my head bowed down”.
are made by the nuns themselves out of coconut shells, and some are remarkably beautiful. Stotras (stanzas) from the scriptures are painted in the minutest letters along the sides of the bowls, and most bowls include a sign of some sort by the nun who did the work. The family gathered around the pots and pans filled with food, hands still joined. The drama was about to begin. The woman who had invited us in was now squatting on the floor beside her stove, in front of her preparations. With a ladle, she dug deeply into the rice porridge and leaned over to pour. With one hand, Sadhvi Malatiji held her patra towards the woman, while with the other hand she indicated restraint. But the woman poured quickly, and scooped for some more. Soon Sadhvi Malatiji was saying 'Ras' (enough), but because the bowl had not yet been withdrawn, the woman kept filling it.

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88 The nuns make the patras and the rajoharan for the entire ascetic community, monks and nuns. Also, they mend the robes of the monks and nuns alike. Here is one instance where we see the domestic role of
When all her family members had given generously, the woman gestured for me to make an offering. With appreciation, I approached. Sadhvi Malatiji kept her eyes on her *patra*. She stood still, her posture perfectly straight. I found myself bending slightly, paying homage with my posture along with the other humble devotees. A stack of warm and crispy *pappadum* sat in a deep aluminium dish and I reached over, managing to get hold of a goodly number. Sadhvi Malatiji frowned and clicked her tongue in disapproval, but the *patra* was not withdrawn. As I placed them in her bowl she exclaimed "*Bas! Bas!*", pulling the *patra* out of my reach. "So little?" I heard myself asking aloud, just as a generous householder ought to. Quickly the *sadhvis* placed the bowls one on top of the other, pulled the *jholi* over them and created a knot to form a handle. We were off. Stepping out of the house, Sadhvi Malatiji and I stepped out of the scripted roles and we took up our talk where we had left off.

Soon we would be at the next home, where again our 'likenesses' would give way to our differences, and where we would stand facing each other, rather than side by side. Above all else, the ritual of *bhiksha* is a confrontation of difference, and we each would play our parts. But for the moment, as we strode shoulder to shoulder through the sleepy town, enjoying each other's company, we could forget just how important our differences were.

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women carried over to the ascetic domain.
CHAPTER 4: THE MAKING OF AN ASCETIC:

The Construction of Difference

Wrapped in an oversized shawl, I shuffled through the stretch of sand that separates my room from the assembly hall. Ahead was the blurred outline of women sweepers, barely visible in a dense cloud of sand lingering in the air around them. Throughout the day they would battle the Rajasthani desert with twig brooms as weapons, striking and flattening the mounds of sand, spreading them upwards and outwards. And for a short while, the beaten sand was easier to walk on.

The ascetics only rarely cross the sand for fear of crushing the swarming ants, preferring the longer walk along the paved path encircling the monastery grounds. But really the ants are too big to be accidentally crushed, and many times, in the short but slow walk to the hall, it was my step that was halted when our paths crossed. I would watch with curiosity as these bulbous black critters, almost bureaucratic and officious, marched through the tiny spoors left by the sweepers’ brooms. The area immediately around the hall is nearly devoid of ants because the sand is packed tightly after years of sustaining the weight of thousands of devotees. I slipped off my chappals and stepped bare foot onto the cold marble of the open-air assembly hall.

Today, for once, I was early.

The hall was empty except for some sweepers clearing the floor of the ubiquitous sand with their long brooms. A handful of elderly women sat silently in prayer. But it would not be tranquil for long. Signs of the coming excitement were everywhere: a banner covering the back wall announced the occasion of the Terapanthi diksa (initiation) and a pile of technical equipment, microphones, speakers and video cameras stood neatly organised around the stage. The elderly women wearing the mupattu fingered their mala beads, marking their prayers. They come here most mornings to spend much of their day listening to sermons, talking with their favourite ascetics or lost in private prayer. Today they would be joined by several hundred others in the ‘celebration of renunciation’—the public affirmation of worldly negation and

Renunciation establishes Jain identity negatively, *vis-à-vis* the external world, that is, Jain moral identity is defined in terms of what it is not. The ascetics, by embodying the negation, are symbols (and creators) of the distinction between the worldly (*laukik*) and the transcendent (*lokottar*), of Jain reality itself. The ascetics are at once the purest expression of the worldly-spiritual ontology, and also the main foot soldiers in its construction and maintenance. *Diksa* is more than an initiation of an individual into the ascetic order; it is the idealisation and dramatisation of Jain reality, *through negation*. As Michael Lambek demonstrates in his analysis of taboo among Malagasy speakers in Mayotte, “structure can be located in negation, prohibition and restriction”(1992:253). His recognition that “[t]he observance of a taboo is a kind of continuous performative act in the sense that it brings into being and maintains - embodies - a particular moral state” (ibid.) is applicable to the Jain understanding of the world, in which the renunciation (or negation) of ‘worldly existence’ is the only true moral path.

*Diksa* lays bare the two primary forces of Jain reality: *jiva* (soul) and its negation *ajiva* (non-soul), and allows us to see how these opposed essences are constructed and affirmed. Through *diksa*, Jain ontology is objectified, embodied and shored up in pageant. The ascetics symbolise and embody the inversion of worldly existence – they are purity within pollution, order within chaos. *Diksa* is the formal acknowledgement and observance of difference. It is the intensified celebration of boundary demarcation; an enthusiastic and explicit observance of differentiation that otherwise forms an implicit part of Jain day-to-day existence. *Diksa* is the culmination of a long process of constructed demarcation and distinction that begins with the girl’s first musings about becoming a *sadhvi* (nun). Because *diksa* is the publicly recognised crossing over of the boundaries between householder and ascetic, it makes explicit, by summoning into relief form, precisely what the boundaries consist of. On this day, three young women would publicly make that crossing. In so doing they would show that the ‘rupture’ between the *laukik* and *lokottar* is real, and that although the span between the two realms is great, with effort it is attainable. I want to suggest an understanding of the Jain worldview as a consequence of a boundary demarcation between the *laukik* and the *lokottar*. It is critical to understand the essentially rhetorical devices used in the process of banishing “the worldly”, and the central role the ascetics play in constituting Jain reality. As I argued in Chapter 2, human distinctiveness and dignity is established in Jainism through ethical behaviour, not through any claim to being a privileged possessor of an essential, exclusive characteristic (such as having a
soul or a monopoly on reason as is claimed by many in the West). Human uniqueness depends above all on the construction of difference. Humans are superior only to the extent that they can demonstrate difference from the worldly existence around them. Rather tautologically as it may be, we can see that humans are ethically distinctive because they are ethically different. But significantly, human difference in Jainism is neither intrinsic nor necessary – it must be displayed, expressed, illustrated etc., and it is the ascetic, above all others, who best exemplifies difference. Demolishing homogeneity and constituting difference is at the heart of Jain ontology, and it is the ascetics, by embodying worldly negation, who are the trailblazers.

Each morning before the sun has risen, the ascetics and householders assemble in the open-air hall in the centre of the monastery to start their day with communal prayer. It is a spacious hall and well suited to Rajasthan’s climate and is the axis around which the ascetic community revolves. Except for narrow support beams, it is completely open on three sides, and serves as an airy refuge from the cruel sun and hot blowing sands in the summer months. Even now, in the winter, it is warmed by the morning sun and is a shelter from the cool desert winds. Pre-dawn sermons are moved indoors in the winter, into the largest room of the monks’ residence. But by mid morning, with the sun high in the sky, it becomes warm enough to sit in the open assembly hall, as hundreds would today, for the diksa.

WOMEN’S SECTION OF ASSEMBLY HALL
The hall is surrounded everywhere by sand, interrupted only by other buildings and parched shrubs. The top end of the hall is connected to the monk’s residence - a large whitewashed terraced two-storied building that is home to all 165 monks while they are in Ladnun. At the opposite end, a narrow canopy providing shelter, stretches over a walkway from the hall to the samanis’ residence. The samans, due to their small numbers (just four in 1996), do not have their own building, and are housed in a small section of a worker’s residence about fifty metres from the hall. This area constitutes the main centre of action in the monastery, where on a daily basis all ascetics converge and where devotees come to pay their respects to ‘their’ maharajas. The remainder of the monastery is comprised of the ‘worldly’ administrative buildings, residences for the workers, an educational institute and a library – and it is to this surrounding area, as well as the town outside, that ascetics venture three times daily to collect alms.

The sadhvis have two residences outside the monastery grounds, about a 10-minute walk nearer the town. The first building along the road is where the majority of the sadhvis reside when in Ladnun. It is a grand L-shaped building, located at an intersection of two main paths in the town, safeguarded behind high walls and an immense solid gate. Like the monk’s residence, it is a busy place with devotees coming and going all day long – except during the lunch hours when entrances to the nuns’ small rooms are blocked by two rajoharan, criss-crossed like swords at the entrance.

The second residence is a much older building, a little further up the main road leading into the market place and, unlike all other ascetics’ residences, it is the permanent home for very elderly and very sick nuns. Ascetics are ostensibly homeless nomads, wandering from village to village all year round except for the four months of the rainy season (chaturmas) when continuance of their nomadic lives would result in too much violence. During the rainy season, the abundance of life is overwhelming: plants and insects and rain (itself considered to be alive and sentient) are everywhere, making it impossible to avoid causing them injury. But even at the end of the chaturmas, when the ascetics resume their wanderings, the old and infirm remain at the residence, and depend upon a few younger sadhvis (appointed by Guru Dev) to collect alms for them, wash their saris, and sometimes even say pratikraman⁸⁹ on their behalf.

Turning east from the sadhvis’ residences is a path that leads in the direction of the Parmarthik Shikshan Sanstha (PSS) – the boarding school for aspiring nuns. The girls are called Upasika and Mumukshu sisters. “Upasika” (‘worshipper’) is the name given a girl during her

⁸⁹ Prayer of penance that the ascetics are required to recite twice daily, after sunrise and before sunset. See fn. # 111
first-year at the institute. After the introductory year, if she still wants to pursue the ascetic path, and if the superiors consider her eligible, she will move on to the next stage, that of a “Mumukshu” (‘one who is desirous of emancipation’). She will remain at this stage anywhere from 6 months to over 10 years, depending on her rate of spiritual development, before finally being given permission to take diksa, or initiation, into the ascetic order.

The sadhvis, samanis and ‘sisters’ make their way to the assembly hall several times a day; for early morning prayers, for mid-morning sermons and then afternoon meetings. And they come for important events or lectures, provided they occur during the day, since by sunset they must be gone. Nuns and monks are forbidden to meet together after dark. (The upasika and mumukshu sisters, because they are still “householders”, are allowed to remain at night). Most of my days would be spent making the rounds from the assembly hall to the monk’s residence, back through the assembly hall to the samanis’ residence, then into the village to meet the sadhvis, and finally to the PSS to see the mumukshus and upasikas before returning to the assembly hall in the evening. Every morning I would come to the assembly hall to hear part of Guru Dev’s sermon on the virtues of a religious life. I would take a short cut from my room along the southern grounds of the monastery and enter the hall from the right. This was the ‘men’s section’, so with chappals in hand I would cross the hall to join the mumukshus, samanis and lay women on the left. There were always a couple hundred people in attendance on any given day. The atmosphere was relaxed, but not informal. Children, for instance, were expected to sit still, if not listen attentively, and no one got up to leave without bowing the requisite three times in the direction of the ascetics.

Sermons were almost always in progress by the time I arrived. I would usually end up sitting and talking with some of the women before leaving to meet Muni Dulharaji. Dulharaji (or just ‘Muniji’) is a gentle elderly monk with enormous dark eyes that droop slightly under bushy brows, which give his face a perpetually mournful look. Because of the muhpatti, which like a huge white bandanna blots out half the ascetic’s face, the eyes above it take on exaggerated importance. Muniji’s eyes are strong and steady, and not without irony. Perhaps his age and experience have softened him, allowing room for humour not readily found among the younger more earnest ascetics. Muniji took time out of his translation work to see me during the mid morning sermons, and again in the evening. As a rule, a monk can never be alone with a member of the opposite sex. Another monk must always be present. And the same rule applies for the nuns. Muniji told me that Guru Dev made an exception in our case, because as a foreigner, my time in Ladnun was relatively limited and, more importantly, because of his age— a factor Muniji himself found comical. No such exception was made for my meetings
with the younger monks Munji told me that brahmacarya (celibacy) is a difficult vow for the monks because of their constant contact with women householders. It is a sin even to have to an erotic dream - requiring special penance - let alone to think of such things in a wakeful state. In all my time in Ladnun, I never heard a sadhvi, samani or mumukshu use her vow of celibacy rhetorically to gain prestige and admiration. By this I mean, for the nuns, sexual continence is not a quality that they could put forward in order to gain personal status and honour. Indeed, it is a striking difference between the nuns and monks' strategies of ascetic self-affirmation. Given the Jain cultural context, in which female sexuality is considered threatening and in need of control (Reynell, 1985:176), it is not surprising that nuns should chose to depict themselves as without desire. It is not uncommon for monks to speak of their ascetic steadfastness in the face of worldly (sexual) temptation in order to demonstrate their spirituality, as Munji did. But given that, in the ascetic literature, women are typically portrayed as symbols of attachment, lust and temptation, this is not a viable method to demonstrate their ascetic credentials. We find Mahavir himself asserting;

The greatest temptation in the world is women . . . Men forsooth say, 'These are the vessels of happiness', but this leads them to pain, delusion, to death, to hell, to birth as hell-beings or brute beings (cited in Nevaskar, 1971:159)

For the nuns, the vow of celibacy is treated as categorical and unconditional as are the vows of ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth) and acchoria (non-stealing).90 These first three of the five mahavratas ("great vows") adopted at the time of initiation have no rhetorical power for the ascetics vis-à-vis the lay community because their violation is unthinkable. and because the identity of both the laity and ascetics is rooted in their observance. Indeed, Muni Jineshkumar defines a shravak as "one who follows ahimsa, satya, and acchoria" (1990:22). The real difference between the lay and the ascetic community lies in the observance of the vows of celibacy and non-possession. Married life and possessions are not 'evils' in and of themselves the way himsa (violence), asatya (non-truth) and acchoria (stealing) are considered to be. Rather, they are vigorously pursued and praised by the householders without censure from the ascetic community. Only the elite and the enlightened are considered capable of renouncing married life and possessions, and for these reasons these vows (especially aparigrha 'non-possession') have considerable rhetorical power to create boundaries and to demonstrate difference between householders and ascetics; between the laukik and lokottar. In fact, the preparation for ascetic life and its fulfilment in the diksa ceremony reveals that within

90 Reynell’s study demonstrates that Jains equate moral purity with sexual purity and are deeply concerned with the need to control female sexuality (1985:176-182). As ascetics, the nuns renounce their sexuality and demonstrate their moral purity through the absence of sexual desire.
a wealthy business community, no other factor demonstrates spiritual progress as much as the renunciation of wealth.

Unlike the majority of monks, Muni Dulharaji had been married long ago, and had a daughter. A year after his marriage, he and his wife travelled to Rajasthan to receive a blessing from Guru Dev [formerly, Acharya Tulsi], as is common amongst Jain newlyweds. Something magical happened to him at that encounter. Seemingly out of the blue, he was struck by the righteousness of the ascetic path and wanted to renounce on the spot. But his wife was already pregnant and so he could not join the order immediately. Nevertheless he told her his wishes and she too shared his worldly disenchantment “because she was a very pious woman”. She accepted that they lead a ‘restrained life’ (i.e. without sexual relations), and so they lived as ‘brother and sister’ until she died suddenly a few years later. After her death, he joined the order. He insisted that he was the “last person anyone would have thought would become a monk” implying that he was once very attached to worldly pleasures, but that sometimes “enlightenment strikes out of seemingly nowhere”. His parents reared his daughter, and now his granddaughter is a sadhvi in the Terapanthi order. Muniji also has permission to instruct her without having another ascetic in attendance – another exception to the rule that reveals the continued importance of family relations, in spite of the order’s great efforts to deny them. Today Muniji and I would forego our meeting and attend the diksa instead. Of course it was not a matter of choice. A diksa is one of the most important events for both the ascetic order and the Jain lay community and no one would intentionally miss it.

I stood and watched the hall being transformed from a place of solitude into a lively scene of pomp and splendour. I had wanted to arrive early to secure a good place from which to observe the ceremony. Thousands of devotees had descended upon Ladnun from all over India, from as far as Calcutta to the east and from Ahmedabad, Bombay and Bangalore to the south. Although the Terapanthi community has its roots in Rajasthan, the past few generations have witnessed a large migration of the business community out of the poor desert state to settle in major business centres in India, and overseas.

Over the past several days, the monastery had been transformed from a sanctuary – deserted except for the wandering ascetics – into a bustling pilgrimage site with all its attendant commercialism. Around the monastery gates, stalls had been set up to sell books and

91 "Dulha" means 'groom'. "Dulharaji" therefore (and interestingly) denotes his former householder status.
92 'Guru Dev' is the term of affection. He was 'Acharya' (leader) of the Terapanthi order from 1936 until he relinquished his position to then successor Yuvacharya Mahaprajnaji [now Acharya Mahaprajnaji] in 1994. After 1994, his official title became Ganadhipatti – leader of the order - (Guru Dev) Tulsiji.
paraphernalia (posters, photos, pens, music cassettes) all bearing images of the ascetic leaders – in particular that of Guru Dev, but also Acharya Sri, Sadhvi Pramukha Kanak Prabhaji, and the young monk Yuvacharya Munditmuni - widely assumed to be the future Acharya of the order. Rhythmic, repetitious bhajans (devotional songs) filled the air, competing with recordings of Guru Dev’s sermons blasting from mini speakers attached to the makeshift stalls. A canteen was opened for the occasion and was doing a brisk business selling Indian fast food (e.g., utapams) and the cola ‘Thums Up’ to the new comers. Large buses carrying devotees had been arriving all week. They lumbered through the village, moving at a snail’s pace along the narrow and uneven paths, forcing the passerby and horse-and-carts to move dangerously close to the open drains that lined them. The arrival of the first buses looked decidedly odd in Ladnun, but in just a few days the festival atmosphere transformed the monastery into a bustling market centre where their appearance no longer seemed incongruous. Another three tour buses arrived earlier this morning, carrying hundreds more devotees. So now, seven buses stood idle inside the gates of the monastery. No one, except for the manual labourers employed at the monastery (mostly Harijans from a neighbouring village, responsible for the general upkeep of the grounds) seemed harassed by the noise and ballyhoo. But since the bigger the celebration, the more meaningful its negation, the hullabaloo had been steadily increasing over the past few days. There was, however, considerable consternation among the families that had arrived this morning. It hadn’t occurred to them that they would have difficulty in finding accommodation after their long trek, but upon arrival they were told that that all living quarters were full within the grounds of the monastery, and that they would have to make arrangements for themselves in the town. For many, that prospect was disheartening. Except for the few elegant homes belonging to mainly absentee Jains now living in India’s big cities or abroad, Ladnun is a poor town with no urban amenities.

I laid my carry-bag to the side of a support beam, and arranged my shawl to serve as a seat. In all my time in Ladnun, I never got around to getting my own ‘darshan mat’ – a small square piece of cloth the devotees carry with them to sit on during darshan. I would usually just sit down on sand or marble, but my cavalier conduct was considered peculiar behaviour to those around me, and was almost always commented on. Women carrying extra mats for their children who, in turn, preferred to stand or use their mother’s mat, would insist that I use their extra one so as not to ruin my clothes on the sand.

93 Harijans “people of god”, Mahatama Gandhi’s term for the scheduled castes or so-called “untouchables”
I could see two emaciated and mangy dogs curled up like snails under the shade of a
tree. Each night stray dogs dig small dens in the sand as beds to sleep in. Soon they would be
scared away by one of the workers, either with a stone or with a yell. After months of
perseverance I befriended a timid scrappily black dog with offers of biscuits. I called him
“Kalu”. He would join me on my walks around the monastery and the village, but always shied
away from the grounds around the assembly hall, where most of the workers would be found.
Indian dogs may be terrified of people, but they are vicious with each other. The monastery
grounds had long been divided up among the rival gangs of dogs who ferociously guarded their
turf from ‘outsiders’. One morning, after having my breakfast at the meditation centre at the far
end of the monastery, I saw one of the sick dogs that was ravaged by mange. Every day, as I
would approach with some scrap of food, he would pull himself up off the sand, the open sores
on his hairless and cracked grey skin festering, and begin to dance around me expectantly. But
this morning he was so engrossed with something that he didn’t see me, devouring some piece
of food, I imagined. When I approached him, I could see he was eating the front leg of another
dog – a black dog – who must have wandered onto alien turf and been killed by a pack of
hungry dogs. I was tormented that it might be Kalu. To the nuns, that I told, it was a lesson on
the evils of attachment. My dear friend Samani Urmilla Prajna asked sardonically “And if it is
not ‘your Kalu’, then what? Would that make you feel better?”. I admitted it would make some
difference but that I would have been disturbed no matter what. And like all the nuns, she
reminded me that saving a life should not be one’s goal, since death is inevitable. “What is the
point of saving one, when you can not save it forever, and what is the point of saving one when
you cannot save all?” she asked. Terapanthi Jains sharply demarcate between social and
spiritual action in a way that makes them distinct among the other Jain orders. Only religious
guidance that leads to “a positive change of heart” is truly spiritual and earns good karma. They
argue that while acts of charity (feeding, clothing, healing etc.) are social duties, they cannot be
considered religious or spiritual acts.

Of the three “diksarthis”, I knew only one fairly well, Mumukshu Jyoti. Unlike the
other two, who were in their early twenties, she must have been in her mid-thirties. She had
been a mumukshu for 11 years, and had seen many girls come and move on to the samani life
before her. Neither she nor any of the other mumukshu sisters ever suggested to me why she
was so tardy, but for one reason or another the authorities had reservations about her ability to
cope with the ascetic life. I had my suspicions that the trouble lay in her innocence. She was a
plain, overtly friendly and almost child-like woman. Most problematic of all, I suggest, was her
incapability of projecting an attitude of worldly indifference (vairagya) essential to the life of an ascetic. Shântâ describes this demeanour as follows:

Voilà un mot très souvent utilisé par les sâdhvî dans leurs conversations, instructions, écrits, biographies. Il exprime le fondement de leur vie avec ses implications et ses conséquences. Vairagya a un aspect très négatif et un aspect très positif. Aspect négatif : vairagya est l'indifférence foncière envers tous les plaisirs de la vie, les honneurs, l'argent, le bien-être, les liens familiaux, ceux de l'amitié. . . . Aspect positif : ce dépouillement de toute possession, de toute attache, de tout ce qui est la vie de ce monde – vie qui, suivant la doctrine, est un enlisement dans la matière – conduit à l'unique nécessaire : la connaissance et la réalisation de l'âtman (1985:343).

And,

Une vairâgini est une candidate admise à partager la vie des sâdhvî; ces dernières l'appellent par son nom, mais elle a déjà quitté ce monde, elle est entrée dans un état encore intermédiaire, certes, mais orienté vers un engagement définitif, elle a tout laissé pour écouter, apprendre, s'initier, se préparer (ibid.:347).

Mumukshu Jyoti's behaviour did not suggest a 'departure from the world'. She smiled constantly, and would show deference to all the 'sisters' around her, even her juniors in rank. The Terapanthi order observes a very strict and well-defined set of hierarchy rules. The 'youngest' (most recent initiate) must show deference to all above her in a variety of ways (perform most chores, touch the feet of her superiors as a sign of respect, etc). When the hierarchy is not observed as such, difficulty arises. For example, during the early weeks of my stay, I would greet the samanis no different from anyone else – with hands joined in "namaste". But I soon learned that this was entirely unacceptable behaviour for a householder like myself.94 So when Mumukshu Jyoti would touch the feet of the upasika, it was seen to disturb the natural order of things, and certainly it made the upasika uncomfortable. Nevertheless, in public she was quiet and retiring, always keeping to the back of the group and this was more in keeping with the ideal of worldly detachment (vairagya) than her giddiness at the PSS. Whatever her shortcomings, the authorities must have felt they didn't warrant being held back indefinitely, and now the day she had for so long anxiously awaited had finally arrived.

The morning was growing warmer. The crowd was getting larger, filling the front section of the hall. The top 20 feet or so on the left side is reserved for the samanis, mumukshus and upasikas, and a low wooden banister marks the area beyond, where the householders can

94 The samanis instructed me in the appropriate comportment. I learned to memorise the required terms of respect for samanis, sâdhvis and mumis, and for Guru Dev and Acharya Sri – each set increasingly deferential – and to kneel and touch my forehead on the floor before them. This 'performance' of veneration was eased as time went on. It was almost totally abandoned with those samanis with whom I
sit. I could see that some women were ‘reserving’ a good seat by placing their *darshan* mats as close to the banister as they could, and then wandering off to talk with other women. As I sat and waited in my ‘seat’ some distance back, I knew that Mumukshu Jyoti and the two other young women were spending their last ‘private’ moments with their families in their respective villages, not terribly far away. Really, however, there was very little that was private or personal about the activities of the past few weeks of intensified family contact. A month previously, the three chosen by Guru Dev for initiation returned to their homes to be ‘daughters’ for the final time. The weeks in between the announcement and the *diksa* are a magical and exhausting time for the *diksarthi*. They return home as veritable *maharanis* and indeed are treated as royalty during the interim. Presents are lavished on them, usually in the form of luxurious saris and jewellery, and they are fed enormous quantities of delicious foods – the idea being that they will never again have the opportunity for such things. The same reasoning motivates many families to take their daughters (or sons) on trips to see some of India’s famous historical sites. Mt. Abu, home to the magnificent Jain Dilwara temples of the 11th century, is a common pilgrimage for the *diksa*. And because it is considered a great privilege to spend time in the company of the *diksarthi*, she will be invited to visit many, many homes for an honorary meal. It is a period marked by the intensification of all things worldly (reduced in reality to eating and gift giving), of which the *diksa* ceremony is its subdued culmination. The real drama occurs ‘behind the scenes’ in the home villages and the climax (the *diksa*) is not intensification, but a negation of all that preceded it. The *samantis*, having already gone through this worldly rite of passage - insist that the whole experience is overwhelming and exhausting.

“My parents and my aunts and uncles all bought me saris. It was ludicrous, I could only wear them once, and then give them up. So my aunts now wear them. They fed me so much food. Really it was exhausting! Every day I would be brought to meet my relatives, always in a new sari. They too would have gifts for me, and so much food! I would want to burst. Then I would have to get dressed up in another fancy sari, and go visiting again. I wasn’t interested in any of this. I did this for my family. Why would I be interested in such things?” (fieldnotes, March '96: Samani Prasandji)

‘Worldly existence’, which the young *diksarthi* is preparing to renounce forever, is objectified and mainly reduced to clothes, jewellery and rich foods. Since she cannot effectively opt out of the world, the world must be made manageable and *renouncable*. Many times the ascetics would inquire about my ‘worldliness’ through questions of possession and

became very close. But when we were ‘in public’, I would always be expected to play my deferential part.
restraint: How many clothes do you own at your home? [my limited attire in Ladnun being seen a sign of spirituality], How many shoes do you have? How many books? How big is your house? How many rooms do you have? How many items of food do you eat each day? etc. “Worldliness” is circumscribed, reified and transformed into discrete things to be catalogued. Like an inversion of C.B. McPherson’s (1962) notion of the ‘possessive individual’, the ascetics acquire identity through a lack of possessions. But possessions are central all the same. The monks and nuns were quick to tell me that almost all their members come from well-to-do families. This point was meant to be evidence of their genuine spirituality. Renunciation is meaningful only within a context of abundance, and a life of detachment can be best observed in a vicinity of wealth. As Muniji once asked me rhetorically: If one is poor, what can he possibly renounce?

I witnessed a few instances of pre-diksa ‘celebrations’ when invited to the home where one of the diksarthis was visiting. In a state of uninterrupted excitement, bodies would flit from humbling to jostling in an effort to offer respect, food, and gifts to the young ascetic-to-be. The beautifully decorated diksarthis embodies contradiction. She enters a home like an ornamented doll, with paint, powder and jewels, but she remains detached from her ‘external’ self. Her body represents all that which she seeks to reject.

I gained a fuller understanding of the scope and importance of the festivities from the photo albums and videos that circulate widely amongst family members – or, more precisely, from the tremendous interest the mumukshus姐妹 and householders take in these recorded memories. On one occasion, Samani Sharda Prajna and I watched the video of her diksa together. It had been held in Delhi in 1994 when Guru Dev was spending his chaturmas there. It was a truly a tremendous affair to observe: the lavishly dressed diksarthis sit in ornamented horse-pulled chariots, moving behind bedecked elephants and camels in an enormous procession spanning many streets in downtown Delhi. A large percussion band marches ahead, and thousands of spectators line the streets for as far back as the eye can see. The drummers play with increasing speed, and young marchers enthusiastically wave banners announcing the diksa to the world. Trucks with loud speakers blast music, and floats carrying life size cardboard figures of Guru Dev and Acharya Sri make their way down the busy streets. On other floats, young people dressed in elaborate costumes enact scenes from the lives of the Jinas, while hundreds of members of the Terapanthi Mahila Mandal (Women’s Organisation), all dressed in identical orange and red saris, march behind in unison. Jain school children in their

95 Those who have ‘conquered themselves’ i.e., their passions, and attained omniscience
nave uniforms sing songs and wave banners, while great numbers of men, all dressed in white khadi pyjamas, follow behind singly joyously. Near the back of the procession, the upasikas and mumukshus in their kavatchan (tunics) move slowly, quietly singing devotional songs. The samanis, carrying alms bowls for later collections, walk behind in total silence, forbidden to celebrate in the worldly aspects of the diksa. The video shuts off as the procession slowly makes its way through the northern part of the city, ending at the Terapanthi Jain meditation centre (the Adhyatma Sadhana Kendra) where Guru Dev and Acharya Sri are staying along with the other munis. The video then resumes recording in a room at the meditation centre, where the mumukshu sisters merrily fuss about a table of sweets and other foods in preparation for the diksarthis' arrival. It would be their first chance to meet their former 'sisters' since Guru Dev chose them for initiation well over a month before. The video captures the diksarthis Mumukshu Sharda entering the lively room: upon seeing the exuberant 'sisters' she allows herself a smile only to have a sweet put unexpectedly into her mouth. As the other diksarthis follow behind her, the 'sisters' set upon them in a feeding frenzy, until the diksarthis gain some control and begin to stuff the mumukshus' faces with goodies as well. A few householders also participate in the celebration, handing the diksarthis gifts of framed pictures of Guru Dev and Acharya Sri, which they accept and then put aside for good. The gifts are symbolic, and represent the final intra-worldly exchange the young women will ever be allowed to participate in. After initiation, all exchange between the ascetic and lay community is strictly forbidden, and the cross-boundary transactions that do occur (e.g., bhiksha) is translated into a language that does not include exchange (see Chapter 3). For the remainder of the day, the diksarthis are on display before the lay community, listening to songs and speeches by family members and community, and making their own speeches about their decision to renounce the world. The public celebrations continue late into the evening, and then during the night, the diksarthis' female friends and family relations sit up singing bhajans (devotional songs) in her honour.

It is an extravagant procession, financed in part by the diksarthis families (close to the cost of a middle class dowry) and by the Terapanthi community. They recreate the archetypal renunciation scene common to many of the Jain Tirthankaras as well the Buddha—but with an important difference. Whereas the celebrated renunciants were moved to renounce by the contradictions they saw in their lives of abundance, today, the Jain community recreates those contradictions so as to make the renunciation meaningful. We recall for example, the 22nd Tirthankara Neminath decided to renounce after realising that his marriage would be the cause of so much violence; and the Buddha's decision was prompted by his first exposure to human misery. The modern day community recreates the opulence so as to make renunciation a
momentous and purposeful event. Babb’s description of the display of wealth at periodic Murtipujaka (idol-worshipping) Jain rites of worship is insightful:

The ceremonies supported by this cascade of wealth are typically sumptuous, lavish occasions—full of color and suggestions of the abundant wealth of the supporters. They seem to have little to do with liberation from the world’s bondage. And yet here is the paradox. If we peel away the opulence and glitter from these occasions we discover that liberation is there, right at their heart. At the centre of all the spending, the celebration, the display, the stir, is the figure of the Tirthankara. He represents everything that the celebration is apparently not, for he is, above all else, an ascetic. His asceticism, moreover, has gained him liberation from the very world of flowing wealth of which the rite seems so much a part. Liberation and the asceticism that leads to liberation are thus finally the central values, despite the context of opulence. Wealth is not worshipped; wealth is used to worship the wealthless (1996:26).

The morning hours before the diksa are the diksarthis last as ‘householders’, and they are spent with their individual families. Over the period of my stay in Ladnun, I was shown innumerable family photos and several home videos of these ‘private’, emotionally charged scenes. In the last hours with her family, the young woman has her last-ever bath and then is bejewelled in gold and dressed in the most beautiful of saris by her family, usually in the mangalik (auspicious) colours of red and gold. As in a pre-wedding celebration, henna patterns are drawn on her hands and on the soles of her feet, and a saffron tikka marked on her forehead. (In previous times, before the present Acharya, the young woman would also wear the headdress of Rajasthani married women. Young men—diksarthis still continue with this practice and wear the large and elaborate men’s marriage headdress during the ceremonies).

There is typically a large crowd of family, relatives and neighbours present and singing bhajans when the diksarthis’s long dark tresses are released from their braids and let to tumble splendidly down her back. Her mother first combs out and then washes her hair for a final time in mangalik curds. Lastly, in a rarefied atmosphere of intensifying bhajans and whimperers from family members, and before an expectant audience, the barber shaves off all her hair with a long blade (save for a small tuft that will be ceremoniously plucked out at the diksa). As her long locks of hair fall to the ground around her, her family weeps. The grey shadow of her shaven scalp appears improper and even a little disturbing atop her decorated body. Her relatives then draw a swastik in red on top of her shaven head with the edge of a coin. It is a terribly difficult time for the family as they prepare to relinquish all ties to her, and tears flow freely. But the diksarthis at the centre of all the attention remains steadfastly resolute. Her determination is greatly admired and praised, but in reality it is a dubious praise for if she were to falter, and display any emotion, it would be catastrophic. My thoughts returned to
Mumukshu Jyoti, in her home village about a 100 kilometres away. Surely by now she had passed through this rite. I wondered had she managed not to smile or weep.

"Apka nam kya hai?" "Apka nam kya hai?" A group of excited children had gathered around me, demanding to know my name, but before I could answer, they darted off giggling to where their mothers were sitting. The hall was now full, but it was not yet overrun. As the adults sat in prayer or talked among themselves, smartly dressed children played about freely, mainly sticking to their respective side of the hall. Little girls, many with Western-style smocks and ribbons in their well-groomed hair, ran around the support beams at the back of the hall, and on the right side, the boys did the same.

Many youngsters, caught up in the exceptional event, insist that they too want to become ascetics. And it is no wonder why: the diksa is so spectacular an event that it cannot but leave an impression, and, even so, it is merely the culmination of a long phase during which the young ascetic-aspirant enjoys an elevated moral status (see Reynell, 1985:248-254). I met many young girls who, while visiting Guru Dev with their family, would tell me that they too wanted to be sadhvis. Parents do not always react happily to these statements from their daughters. Often they try to dissuade their daughters and sons from pursuing the ascetic path, and in so doing, they display the cultural norm of the worldly and attached family that is expected of them. The gap between the worldly and the spiritual is always presented as great and insurmountable, and the drama between the two is played out continuously. But from the moment the young person convinces her family that her intention to become an ascetic is genuine, she becomes a distinguished member of her family, gaining almost celebrity status. Her special standing only intensifies with her stay at the PSS boarding school, where each year she becomes more and more ‘ascetic-like’. The girls self-consciously strive to be ‘different from householders’ in bodily comportment. They try to be more careful in the way they walk, sit, talk, eat, etc. They straightforwardly assert that the cultivation of difference is one of their goals and many times I was asked whether the distinctions were as obvious to me as they appeared to them. The first-year girls – the upasikas - are allowed the greatest number of possessions (e.g., 5 saris) and greater lenience (e.g., they can wash their hair up to twice a week). With each year, the girls try to make do with increasingly less, and thereby come to see the distance between themselves and householders as great. This distance is perceived, in large part, through the contrast between the relatively ‘indulgent’ life of the householders and their own. Mumukshu sisters come to see ‘worldliness’ in the relatively narrow terms of “possessions”, because it is in relation to the practices of their own community that they come to judge their own lives.
That “worldliness” is viewed by ascetics primarily through a narrow discourse of ‘possessions and indulgence’ is a function of the affluent community – both the source of prosperity and its rejection. Because all Jains esteem the ascetic ideal, and try to incorporate ascetic values into their lives, the nuns and monks – who fully embody the ideal – are seen as outstanding and courageous; as representatives of the community’s elite. Affluence (or more precisely, its manifestation in possessions) and householders’ limited efforts at ‘restraint’ provide a readily available gauge against which to map their own lives of total self-denial. Although violence, lust, greed, etc., are the worst forms of ‘worldliness’, and lead to the greatest and most dense forms of bad karma, they are not used rhetorically in the constitution of the ascetic self. The relationship with “the renounced” – to have any rhetorical power – is complex and must allow for a degree of manoeuvrability not possible with more serious forms of ‘worldliness’. In addition, these ‘gross vices’ are not used rhetorically because of their distance from the community’s day-to-day live, and significantly, because they are universally condemned. Renouncing violence, lust, and greed may reflect righteousness, but it does not reflect extraordinary restraint or enlightenment – the domain of the ascetics. For the ascetics to assert and maintain a moral monopoly, they must be seen to renounce what others cannot.

Although lay Jains clearly do not devote themselves entirely to renunciatory goals, ascetic values and practices are the measure against which they distinguish themselves from non-Jains (Babb, 1996; Banks 1992; Dundas, 1992:ch.7; Jaini, 1979:ch.6; Reynell, 1985, 1987). Ascetic values are at the core of their identity, defining who they are and permeating their daily lives. Babb writes,

Jains say that once the seeds of righteousness have been planted, progress is always possible, no matter what the ups and downs in the meantime. An Ahmedabad friend once told me that if you possess right belief [samyaktva] for as little time as a grain of rice can be balanced on the tip of the horn of a cow, you will obtain liberation sooner or later. Therefore, even if one has little immediate interest in the ultimate goal of liberation or little sense of its personal gainability – which is in fact true of many ordinary Jains – one can still believe that one is on the right road if one has been touched by Jain teachings and if one has the necessary “capability” (bhavyatva) (1996:36).

Jain lay codes of conduct allow individuals to practice as much renunciation as they are capable – as is clear from the set of fourteen principles (chauda nyem) which a person is encouraged to follow everyday:

1. To restrict the use of green vegetables and fruit.
2. To limit the amount of dhal, rice, chappatis and sweets eaten.
3. To abstain from meat, liquor, butter and honey and to abstain from one of the following daily: ghee, milk, curd, sugar.
4. To limit the number of slippers or shoes worn.
5. To limit the number of clothes worn to 11 items a day.
6. To limit the number of pan and supra eaten.
7. To limit the number of fragrances enjoyed to 15 a day.96
8. To limit the number of vehicles used to two a day.
9. To limit the number of chairs, sofas and beds used in a day.
10. To limit the ornaments and cosmetics used per day.
11. To limit sexual intercourse.
12. To limit the distance travelled in one day.
13. To limit water used whilst bathing.
14. To limit the overall quantity of eatables and drink consumed within a day.

(Reynell, 1987:21).

The degree to which lay Jains incorporate ascetic practices into their lives is a reflection of their moral status, and is tied to family honour. This is especially true for women. Female religiosity takes the form of ascetic practices (especially fasting), whereas male religiosity is more often expressed through dan, the giving of donations (Reynell, 1985). What is most striking about the chauda nyem - more than the self-imposed restrictions - is the prosperous context that evidently gives it meaning. To the poor, this list would not only be meaningless, it would be absurd. But this is precisely the point: voluntary poverty requires a context of affluence in order to be consequential; renunciation is not for ‘the have-nots’.

We recall Muniji’s observation: “If one is poor, what can he possibly renounce?” In this context, Muniji told me the story of the beggar and the ascetic:

A notorious beggar in the neighbourhood was not successful at obtaining food. Every day he would go to many homes, but the women would rarely give him anything. One day he saw a monk approaching one of the homes he often went to and, to his amazement, he saw that the woman of the house was eager to feed him. He was equally amazed to observe the monk’s bizarre behaviour: he refused most of the things she offered, and of those he accepted, he took only the tiniest quantity. The beggar had an idea. He thought that if he disguised himself as a monk, he too would be fortunate. So the next day he went to the same home dressed in white robes. At first the woman was happy to offer him food, but she soon realised he was an impostor when he eagerly accepted all she offered. His greedy, gluttonous behaviour betrayed him.

To Muniji, this story demonstrated the differences between ascetics and beggars: whereas the ascetic is disciplined and motivated by restraint; the beggar is unrestrained and driven by desire. Clearly, restraint is the most cherished of virtues, but it requires a garden of temptation to burgeon, and to be acknowledged.

Swiftly the hall filled. The crowd became tremendous and its intensity was palpable. Men, women and children of all ages were entering in large numbers now and settling down as

96 ‘Fragrances’ include scents from food.
close to the stage as they could. Dozens of pairs of chappals that had been neatly placed against the support beams of the hall were quickly disappearing beneath the onslaught. Invariably, a few pairs would be lost in the scramble afterwards. The high ceiling fans, which provide some respite from the afternoon sun, had not yet been switched on, and pigeons, who make homes for themselves in the high wood planks, seemed to know it. They frolicked carelessly about them, resting like daredevils on the immense blades. I wondered if they ever get cut down during the daily religious services, and how the community, overtly anxious as it is about even the smallest signs of violence, would react to a mangled bird in their midst.

The mumukshu sisters could be seen entering from the eastern gate of the monastery. The start of the ceremony could not be too far off now. Like the ascetics, they moved quickly and kept their eyes focused on the path before them. As is the rule, all were silent as they walked toward the assembly. Today they would be on their very best behaviour, for the audience observing them was large, and likely filled with members of their own family. Other than the actual diksarthis and their families, the mumukshus were without doubt the most excited by the day’s events and, as if conforming to their role as novices, most would openly admit to being thrilled. The ascetics, as a rule, would not. The mumukshus had been talking of little else for the past weeks, anxiously awaiting its arrival. Today three more ‘sisters’ would be honoured and they could revel in the ceremonies knowing that their day would soon come. Characteristic of the mumukshus is their single-minded focus on attaining diksa. Their years at the PSS are spent in anticipation and preparation for the day they will be allowed to take initiation, and for many, it is difficult to even imagine beyond it.

As the group approached, their faces were visible and I could see that quick bashful smiles were passing between each other. For many of the girls, the overt and exaggerated attention they receive from householders is unwanted and even embarrassing. They have not yet come to see themselves as the symbols of purity and representatives of the human ideal that the community projects onto them. But in time they would (see Reynell, 1985:248-250). Indeed, acceptance of this role, embodying it and mastering its particular demeanour is a prerequisite for the ascetic life. Most of the ‘sisters’ made no eye contact with the householders, retaining a detached facial expression as they entered the hall before the hundreds of gathering devotees. The difference between the girls’ comportment was almost always a function of years spent at the PSS boarding school. The longer their stay, the better they performed their expected roles. Although I never heard it put so directly, it is highly unlikely a girl would ever be given permission to take diksa until she had mastered and embodied the outward guise of the detached ascetic (vairagint). (Publicly, even Mumukshu Jyoti was proficient in this
demeanour). In addition to learning basic prayers and scriptures, the aspirants learn to behave in a very specific way, reflecting the ascetic cultural norms of restraint. Above all, they learn to see themselves as different from the householders. Many samanis - though experts at projecting a demeanour worldly detachment (vairagya) - find the post-diksa period an especially awkward time because they are immediately treated as 'maharajas' by the householders who accept the crossing over of the boundary from householder to ascetic as complete (see Babb, 1996:62). I would watch as women and men of all ages would now approach recently initiated samanis, looking for advice for their worldly problems, seemingly indifferent to their novice status. The expression on the samanis faces would betray intense discomfort, as they would look around to the more seasoned samanis for assistance.

The 16 upasikas (candidates in their first year) entered the gates directly behind the 53 mumukshus, and were only barely distinguishable from the householders who accompanied them. However much they dislike it, they resemble the worldly householders more than any other in the ascetic community. Although all are eager to immerse themselves in ascetic life immediately, the pace at which they do so is fixed. The operating logic is that the ascetic life is very trying and so radically different from worldly life that the girls should be eased into it gently. In the first year the upasikas must wear flower-patterned saris when they are at the PSS. They dislike their 'pretty' uniforms, since their prettiness identifies them with the worldly life of pleasures that they are so eager to renounce publicly. The visual, aesthetic element of the ascetic life cannot be underestimated: the bare feet and identical uniform of white robes are taken as indexes of spirituality both for the lay community and within the ascetic community itself. In addition, the aesthetic factor plays an enormous role in the recruitment of girls and boys, many of whom yearn less for a life of meditation, than to belong to the charismatic and powerful group of ascetics (see Reynell, 1985:249-252). When the upasikas go on their daily visits to the monastery and to the nuns' residence, they wear the same simple white saris with thick colourful trim (usually they opt for a deep blue or purple band) as the mumukshus wear. But even here, their difference is marked: their saris are tucked in on the right and draped counter clock-wise, distinguishing them from the mumukshus who secure their saris under their left arm and drape them clock-wise over their faces. And, more conspicuously, the upasikas do not wear the kavatchan (tunic). To an outsider the differences between the 2 groups seem minor, but they are important to the girls themselves. The construction of difference is important in itself: the further the girls' progress into their ascetic career, the greater the distance between them and the householders should be. The distinction between the worldly and the spiritual is never categorical; instead it is mapped according to the constructed
'worldly'. It is negotiable with, and contingent upon, the worldly. In fact, the changes from one stage to another in the ascetic hierarchy are not so great as the outward signs would suggest. Instead, the outward signs are the main differences between the *upasikas* and *mumukshus*. But difference is the important factor, the 'truth' that must be demonstrated and observed. *Meaning lies in difference because difference is meaning*. It is not evocative of anything other than itself. Difference is indicative of division, of contrast and this is precisely what is constructed through the rhetorical discourse of asceticism, which supports an ontology that distinguishes two realities: that of *jīv* and *ājīv*; the *lokottar* and the *laukik*.

As the 'sisters' approached, I could see Mumukshu Promika – one of the girls I was closest to at the PSS – near the back of the group. Her long hair had been meticulously secured under the hood of her tunic, and she was carrying with her a small book, probably of prayers. I always enjoyed Promika's happy company. Forever bubbling over with energy, she would jounce about her chair delighting in our talk about *mumukshu* life. The first time I met her, she had been fasting for four days, only taking boiled water, but her energy and enthusiasm was strong even then. Whenever she would become enthused about something (which was very often indeed), she would punctuate her sentences with spirited hand gestures, and then laugh at her own vivaciousness. Strands of long braided hair, hastily tucked beneath the 'hood' of her sari, would fall before her eyes and her thin fingers would scramble to secure them again.

During our very first encounter, Promika confidently announced that she would be one of the initiates at next *diksa* (today's event). Although the decision about which girls would renounce had not yet been made, she was confident because her family, who were visiting at the time, had specially requested Guru Dev to consider their daughter for early initiation. I remember being surprised at her self-assuredness, but her confidence was as much a strategy as it was wishful thinking. Many of the girls assert that they will soon take *diksa*, as a way of demonstrating their strong desire to renounce the world as well as their preparedness to do so.

When the novices first arrive at the PSS, all are eager to prove their ascetic credentials, and fasting is the quintessential method – not just for the 'sisters', but for the lay community and the ascetics themselves. (This is truer for lay women than men, just as it is far more common among nuns than monks. I will return to this in the chapter on Devotion and Divinity. See also Reynell, 1985, 1987) Asking about the motivation for a fast will always result in an answer about getting rid of karma. But these acts must be seen within the context of the ascetic ideal where such self-imposed deprivations and concomitant stoicism are a powerful form of currency. When I asked Promika if she felt any hunger, she just laughed saying "No! Of course not!". Hunger would have represented attachment and weakness, and could never be admitted –
perhaps not even to herself - and certainly never to an outsider! She was already known among the ‘sisters’ and the ascetics as a ‘champion’ faster. And this, she felt, would be evidence of her maturity for ascetic life. But almost in the same breath as her assertion of ascetic fitness, she added that everything depended upon “His Holiness”; only Guru Dev would know when she was really ready to renounce. This tension between independence and dependence runs throughout every aspect of the ascetic life, and will be discussed in Part Three of the dissertation.

Over the months, I had grown quite fond of Promika and marvelled at her unflagging good humour. We had been meeting at the school several times a week since I first arrived, usually in the afternoon. I would always come early, when the girls were still in class, and make my way to the reading room. Automatically, I would open the old wooden shutters of the one small window to allow a little natural sunlight to pierce the darkness. The sunlight would throw into relief the long bookshelf that stretches the length of the back wall, and above which hangs a large black and white portrait of an early administrator of the PSS. In front of the bookcase is a long reading table with old newspapers strewn on it. The walls are covered with artwork done by the girls themselves, and perhaps not surprisingly, the subjects of the works all concern one aspect or another of the ascetic life. Many are paintings of Guru Dev, or of Acharya Bhikshu, the founder of the Terapanthi order, or of a famous scene from the life of Lord Mahavira. I was struck by one large piece - part painting, part collage - that hangs high on the wall. It is a depiction of Jain reality from the point of view of these young women. It presents an upward trajectory of five possible states of human existence – beginning with the lowliest: at the bottom corner on the far right, is the female householder shown in a colourful sari standing over a low cooker. A little further over to the left and higher up on the canvas comes a mumukshu sister, dressed in a pink and white striped sari and looking upwards. About midway up the painting is a samani, followed by a sadhvi, represented by an actual picture of Sadhvi Kanak Prabha, the head nun of the order. Finally at the top centre of the painting is an image an emancipated ‘male’ jina, sitting cross-legged, eyes closed in deep meditation and a halo around his head. Promika, like most of the ‘sisters’ at the PSS, were in constant contact with the direction their lives should take.

As soon as she would see me in the reading room, she would rush off to bring me a glass of water or a cup of sweet chai. One day when I asked her the already hackneyed question I had been asking the ascetics: “Why have you chosen this life?”, she surprised me. I
had been used to speaking with the *samanis*, *sadhis* and *munis* whose different tales invariably centred upon disillusionment with worldly life (with marriage, violence, possessions, childbearing etc.), but instead of providing a negative response (negative in the sense of being a rejection of the world that led them to the order), Promika gave an unselfconsciously affirmative reason: the tunics. "I love the *kavacham*! I saw the girls in their white *kavacham* and I wanted to wear one too. They look so-o-o lovely!" She laughed when she spoke, and said that since arriving, she found so many other things to interest her, but that the tunic had been the beacon. The *mumukshus* provided a wide range of answers to the question and, for all but a handful (of the 53 sisters), their answers involved the aesthetic element of asceticism as well as a communal aspect of belonging to a special group or clique.

There is little doubt that the notions of heroism and nobility associated with asceticism are also of central importance in inspiring young women to renounce, as Carrithers hypothesises (1983). Carrithers argues that motivation to renounce the world finds its origin in the cultural valorisation of asceticism (1983:8-15). Following Carrithers, Reynell claims that Jain society’s positive evaluation of asceticism is a key motivation for its young women. She writes,

> What is important here is the allure of a noble ideal in terms of the circumscribed role held by Jain women. I suggest that this ideal is particularly attractive to young women for two reasons. Firstly, the avenues of public prestige are largely closed to women, and secondly, the status and prestige which a married woman does accrue, comes after many years of marriage (1985:249).

Although the allure of power and prestige undoubtedly informs many young women’s desire to renounce the world, it is clearly not a motivation that they themselves would put forward.

The PSS was born out of the desire to allow young girls who wanted to be initiated into the order of nuns, first to undergo a preparatory training for full-fledged monastic life. The aspirants should be ‘exposed to austerities’ in stages and provided with opportunities to understand Jainism. It was founded in 1948 with only 20 girls, and amidst great controversy. Many within the community saw it as a break with tradition, and a scandalous suggestion to have their daughters living in a boarding school, without family supervision. The only criterion of admission was, and is, that the aspirant should “display a positive evidence of her desire to attain to the state of final emancipation from worldly bondage” (Bhatnagar, 1985:82). Although

*97 All Tirthankaras - and other emancipated beings – are depicted as male, though the image is genderless. The 19th Tirthankara (Malli), believed by the Svetambaras to have been a woman, is depicted like all the rest.*
the school was designed with the goal of providing training and education for girls, a few boys also attend day classes when they are not at the monastery. Training for young men and women is considerably different because of the relatively small number of male candidates “desirous of emancipation”. They typically have much shorter training periods, usually gaining entrance into the monkhood within a year. The practical consequence of these arrangements is that young women are far more prepared for ascetic life than are young men at the time of diksa.

Yet, I would argue that this has the ironic effect of underlining the glory of female asceticism; of downplaying its extraordinary nature. Renunciation is paradigmatically a bold and courageous act; it is an occasion of high drama in which all ties with social life are ostensibly severed. Although the diksa ceremony itself attempts to recreate this drama, the fact that women go through a long term training programme where they essentially ‘learn’ to renounce, undermines the impact of renunciation at the public level. The drama of the young male renunciant is more true to the ideal. Even though the Terapanthi ascetics are today far removed from the original ideal of isolated mendicant wandering, and are instead very much ‘public persons’ (Babb, 1996:52), women’s symbolic separation from society is somewhat equivocal (I look at this in detail in Chapter 8). In addition to spending years at the PSS, after initiation, the vast majority of the girls first become samanis (the semi-nun status) for a number of years before finally becoming sadhus. Although a parallel category “samans” exists for boys, only those with exceptional oratory powers and knowledge of some English are selected for it.

Across the sand where the dogs had been sleeping, the samanis could be seen filing out of their residence. Two by two, they moved quickly and purposefully, with long strides and serious faces. Their walk distinguishes them as ascetics in the calm of village India. They act, look and feel important because they are important. They constitute Jain reality by embodying its principle of worldly negation. Without the ascetics actualising the renunciatory logic, there would be no examples of the distinction between the worldly and the spiritual; only endless expressions of the jiv ajiv combination in the absence of a pathfinder. The ascetics are important because they create the very reality that in turn determines their lives, and their demeanour conveys this sense of self.

The Terapanthi Jains, unlike all other Jain communities, are a proselytising order, and it was in this spirit that Guru Dev created the saman samani order in 1980. His goal was the spreading of Jain teachings throughout the world. Unlike full ascetics, the samans and samanis are allowed to travel by any means of transportation available and to accept food that had been

98 For a discussion of lay and ascetic women’s comportment, see Chapter 8.
specifically prepared for them. Whereas the lives of the sadhvis and munis are considered completely non-violent, the ‘allowances’ implicate the samans and samanis in some degree of violence. After a number of years, they take “muni diksa”, as it is called for both nuns and monks. The saman/samani stage is not considered permanent; instead, like the upasika and mumukshu stage, it is yet another step in the life of spiritual advancement. Interestingly, many samanis do not yearn to move on to the next ‘sadhvi’ stage, and this sharply distinguishes them from the upasika and mumukshu sisters, who dream of moving ‘upward’. Samanis almost never talk about the change, except when pressed. They typically declare that “It is my ultimate goal of course”. In confidence, a few have told me that they never wanted to become sadhvis, because at that level, all their time would be taken up with bhiksha, panchami (toilet), vihar (pilgrimage), and making the rajoharan (whiskbrooms) and patra (alms bowls) and mending robes, both for themselves and the monks. They lamented that they would have little time for their education and –ironically- their sadhana (spiritual practice)!

In a moment’s time they would be in the hall, and I would be expected to sit with them. I was happy with where I was, on the periphery, because nothing was hidden from my view. Not only would I be able to see the diksa ceremony on the stage ahead, but I would also see the reactions of the householders, upasikas, mumukshus, and samanis on the floor around me. I was most curious about the mumukshus since it was, after all, the day in which their ‘sisters’ cross the boundary in the rite of passage from householder to ascetic, once and for all.

The seating arrangement in the hall reflects the ascetic hierarchy: On the stage with Guru Dev and Acharya Sri sit the ascetics - sadhvis to the right and munis to the left. Occasionally, a few very prominent lay persons (men) share the stage with the munis. On the left side of the floor, directly beneath the stage, sit the samanis (the samans, because of their low numbers, sit among the munis). Behind the samanis, sit the mumukshus and upasikas, and behind them are the women householders. On the right side of the hall, separated by an aisle, sit the male householders; the more prominent, the closer to the stage. The placement of the mumukshus and upasikas reflects their liminal status: as a buffer between the ascetics (in front of them) and the householders (behind them), it symbolically represents their ambivalent status as neither ascetic nor householder.

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99 A yearly quota of rajoharan and alms bowls is imposed on the sadhvis. The brooms are made from yarn, and the bowls are made from coconut shells. The sadhvis are responsible for making these essentials for both themselves and the monks. The monks, for their part, are required to transcribe a certain number of texts per year. A point system, with bonuses and penalties, keeps track of each ascetic’s efforts. I will explain this in Part 3, in the context of the rules and regulations of monastic life.
I would be expected to sit with the *samanis* because I spent practically all my time with them since my arrival. The *mumukshus* had initially been much easier to befriend, but it was amongst the *samanis* that I learned the most, and formed my closest friendships. The *mumukshu* sisters had been easier to approach and to form friendships with because of their ‘in-the-world-status’. I was able to meet with them as relative equals, whereas I was required to show deference before the *samanis*. Although “attachments” in the abstract were shunned, our meetings did not constitute an attachment or a threat to *mumukshus* the way it did for *samanis*. They spoke freely about their families, (with whom they continued to spend several months of the year), whereas, initially, the *samanis* only spoke grudgingly. In general, the *mumukshus* had no reservation in expressing their excitement about their lives and tended to provide positive reasons for renunciation, whereas the *samanis* provided negative ones (e.g., disenchantment with the world). Although the *mumukshus* were warm, they resembled a group of highly motivated teenagers studying for their final exams – in this case, for *diksa*. Few had begun to imagine what kind of lives they would lead after becoming *samanis*, other than saying “It is up to my Guru”. The simplicity and uni-dimensionality of their lives ends with *diksa*, when a single goal no longer looms large before them.

Not shifting from my seat, I watched as the *samanis* entered the hall. Many were carrying things to busy themselves with during the ceremony (books, saris to mend, scriptures to memorise etc.). For the *samanis*, the impending *diksa* was not a topic of great interest. They had seen so many and, of course, had experienced their own (of which they liked to talk). I watched as they stood, knelt, bowed and stood again doing ‘*vandana*’ to their gurus. They did so with such poise, effortlessly moving up and down, before settling into a more settled cross-legged position. The elegance of their movements was only slightly lessened by their worn and weathered feet peeping out below their saris. Like rusty old hubcaps, ugly calluses cover their anklebones, from years of sitting cross-legged and bare footed on hard surfaces. Probably more than any other part of their bodies, their feet suffer the brunt of their ascetic lives. Burned by the sun in the summer, and chilled in the winter, they become the symbols of hardship and worldly abandon, and almost signify group membership! When I would sit with the *samanis* in the early evenings of winter, I would watch them put ointment on the cracks of their torn feet and then bandage them with scraps of old sari cloth for the night. I would be

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100 Paying hommage
101 I.e., before sunset, since no ointment (or food, water etc) can be taken after sunset.
102 All ointments, creams, medicines etc. belong to the householders who lend them to the ascetics for a limited time. The ascetics “return” them each night (to a caretaker) and “borrow” them again in the morning.
shown their wounds, and my ‘abhorrence’ was the appropriate response from which they then could demonstrate ascetic stoicism: “It is nothing”.  

Finally, the monks could be seen emerging from their quarters. The ceremony was about to begin. A small group stood at the threshold between their quarters and the stage, allowing Guru Dev and Acharya Sri to come out and take their places on the elevated dais. A young thin monk with a surprisingly full coif of hair, supported Guru Dev by holding his arm and moved him toward his seat. The youngest and most recent initiate, just 11 years old, followed directly behind them, and waited for Guru Dev to take his seat before sitting down at his feet. The youngest monks usually sit in a half circle around the leaders, reflecting the intimate relationship that exists between them. Quickly, the lay followers rose to their feet, and held their joined hands high in the namaste position. They began to pay homage: in a standing position, they moved their joined hands in three circles high in the air in the direction of the ascetics, then knelt and touched their foreheads on the floor. They would repeat this two more times. It was a difficult ritual for the very elderly or the overweight, and occasionally such challenged devotees would perform the act of humility and respect without standing up. Their hands joined, they would do three circumambulations in the air whilst on their knees, and then lower their heads for a few seconds, mimicking the prostrations. This they would do three times before settling into a more comfortable cross-legged position. Among idol-worshipping Jains (i.e., most other Jain orders other than Sthanakvasi Svetambars), the devotees circumambulate three times around an idol of a Tirthankara. But since the Terapanthi forbid idol-worship, householders symbolically circumambulate around the living ascetic instead.

As the lay devotees moved up and down like broken waves, the sadhvis were arriving from the left, from behind the stage wall. The greatness of their numbers was impressive: at least half (approximately 250) of the entire population of all the Terapanthi nuns were in Ladnun for the ceremony. The mass of flowing white gowns, moving in pairs briskly and assuredly, ushered in a sense of immediacy and solemnity to the charged atmosphere. On the other side of the stage, the stout and sweet-faced monk, Subritmuni, was actively involved in directing the ‘traffic’ away from the ascetics, urging the lay followers to settle down and keep back. Whether it was an assigned task or of his own doing, I don’t know, but he often assumed the role of a ‘bouncer’ during the morning sermons, making sure the lay followers did not throng Guru Dev and Acharya Sri. He was one of the few ascetics who couldn’t or wouldn’t conform to the (public) demeanour of worldly detachment (vairagya).\(^1\)

\(^1\) Guru Dev himself was an exception to the mendicant’s ideal demeanour, but it may have been that his position of ultimate power provided him with room for divergence, without upsetting the order itself.
the monks and nuns had required considerable time to develop, but with a few of the extroverts, like Subritmuni, friendship was almost immediate. And – especially in the first few months of my stay – I was ever so grateful for these persons’ amiable departure from the norm. Perhaps it’s a matter of projecting backwards, but everything about Subritmuni suggested worldliness: he was a great joker and he delighted in testing my Hindi, and my knowledge of the names of the monks. Our simple conversations would always be interspersed with laughter. His large head, topped with prematurely white stubble, would shoot back to allow a boisterous and contagious laugh to burst forward, only barely restrained by his muhpatti, and his rotund belly would peer out from his robe, jolly and delighted to be entertained. He was also a performer, loving to sing a song to whoever would listen. Often, as I would be leaving the monks’ residence after seeing Muni Dulharaji, Subritmuni would wave me over to the marble veranda. Other monks would be sitting near him, usually studying or meditating, but Subritmuni always appeared too restless for such stilled activity. After testing my knowledge of the names of the accompanying monks, he would begin to sing. The first time it happened, I was surprised at his unconventional behaviour, and at a loss on how to react. Most monks are ill at ease with women or at best, reserved. And rules about the interaction between the monks and women are detailed, rigid and reproachful. Not only can a monk not be alone in a room with a woman, he must wait thirty minutes before sitting on a spot where she has been sitting – for it to cool down – lest her ‘sexual energy’ remain and tempt him; if an exchange of some item has to be made between a woman and a monk, it must be passed along the ground between them, never allowing their hands to be simultaneously on it, again lest temptation arise. A monk or nun cannot touch an infant of the opposite sex, and the ascetics are even forbidden to dwell in shelters where animals may be, because the sound or sight of copulating animals may bring forth corrupt ideas. The rules about guarding celibacy are identical for the nuns’ relations with men, although the nuns many times told me they believe that temptation is a much greater challenge for the monks than for them. The rules are laid out in detail in Acharya Bhikshu’s work Shil ki Nau Bar (The Body’s Nine Fences). It is one of the most important scriptures for the ascetics, and required learning for those seeking renunciation. The language of the scripture presupposes male asceticism and female temptation, and this presumed antagonism forms an extremely common theme in Jain story-telling.\footnote{My friend Samani Urmilla read to me from Bhikshu’s book. She summarised the main points as follows: An ascetic’s celibacy is like a field with nine thorn fences around it, and one solid wall. The fences are: 1. A celibate should live in a solitary place without any females, animals or ennuuchs; 2. A celibate should not be concerned or talk about the physical attributes of a woman. He should not notice how she walks, talks, her hands, legs, wrists, stomach, pony tail which is like a snake, her nose which is}
between the ascetics and members of the opposite sex, I was surprised by Subritmuni’s unorthodox familiarity. I found myself flustered: beguiled by sweet and smooth sounds, my mind raced to make sense of my encounter with the charming monk. Had I understood the words - presumably about the falsehood and deception of worldly pleasures - I may have been less bewitched. Nevertheless, I only began to enjoy the ‘show’ when a group of elderly women, moved to tears by lyrics I could not follow, joined me. I came to cherish Subritmuni’s unconventional ways. He seemed such an unlikely monk - very much preoccupied with the here and now - and gregarious and affable with everyone. I always had the impression that if it weren’t for the muhpatti, he’d be laughing or singing all the time. Except today. Diksa was far too momentous an event to make light of, even for Subritmuni.

Loud sobs suddenly pierced the buzz of the energetic crowd. Everyone turned around to see a group of sorrowful family members, several crying, moving quickly along the sand leading up to the assembly hall. A young woman in the centre of the group seemed to be leading the way and dictating the brisk pace. Her face was sombre, and her head, covered by her sari, was slightly lowered as she hastily moved forward. As she got closer, we could see she was wearing a fancy red sari with gold embroidery with garlands of flowers around her neck. Bracelets dangled from her wrists, and her hands, with rings on almost every finger, were beautifully decorated with mendhi (henna). To a non-Jain, she looked as though she was on her wedding day. But on closer look, one could see that her head had already been shaved, save for the few strands to be plucked out during the ceremony. Her body now served as a site, a ‘theatre’, through which the conflict between the spiritual and the worldly was enacted. Her transitory body, decorated with finery, was a symbol of worldliness, but her face displayed her ‘true self’, she was a vaibragini: cool, detached and indifferent to her bodily decoration, as well as to her anguished family. Just like the Tirthankara, in his heavenly abode and surrounded by like a flame, her pink lips, her voice sweet like a cuckoo, her walk which is like a swan, her narrow waist, her lotus-like navel, her beautiful belly etc. He should not praise a woman for these things; 3. A celibate should not sit on a seat with a woman, otherwise the sex desire will be stimulated. Like a jug of ghee, if it is near a flame, it will turn to liquid. A monk should wait 48 minutes and then clean it as some sexual ‘pudgal’ (matter) may be left from a women’s lower end; 4. A celibate should not observe the beauty of a female. Lord Mahavir said one should not even observe a painting of a woman. Like seeing the sun, one must avert one’s eyes; 5. A celibate should not stay in such a place where the wall between him and a couple is thin. He may hear sounds of the couple which will arouse him; 6. A celibate should not recall the enjoyments of food and sex that he may have had as a shravak. If he does, he may fall ill; 7. A celibate should not take delicious food daily because they will stimulate his sexual desire; 8. A celibate should not over-eat for it will lead to many diseases and increase his sexual desire; 9. A celibate should not beautify or decorate himself. If he does. he will attract intense karma and will take birth again and again. The final boundary is the self. One must have neither aversion nor attachment and then sensual objects will have no power. Objects are neither attractive or disagreeable in and of themselves, it is the
worldly delights, her mind remains detached (see Babb, 1996:31). To show emotion now would be inconceivable; it would be an enormous calamity. In order for her to have been chosen for dikṣa, all her superiors (samanis, sadhvis, munis, lay teachers etc.) must have been convinced that she fully appropriated the role of an ascetic, characterised above all else by an outlook of dispassion and withdrawal (vairagya) (see Shântâ, 1985). The young woman’s mother kept her sad eyes on the ground before her. Her sloped and anguished brows distorted her face, making her look like an old woman. She held one hand over her mouth and the other firmly on her daughter’s arm – for the last time. She would never be permitted to publicly express affection for her daughter again. The finality of the circumstance was heightened, and indeed was more fiction than fact, since parents do continue to pay visits to their daughters. Now another sobbing crowd was quickly approaching. Within just moments, the weeping quieted, and the dikṣarthis were all on stage before us.

Niyojikaji (‘leader’)\(^{105}\) caught my eye, and with just a tilt of her head, beckoned me to come sit with her. After hours of sitting at the periphery of the hall, I finally moved to take my place among the samanis, a place of privilege because our seats were, in effect, front row centre. The ceremony would be in perfect view, but all the activity of the mumukshus and householders would be lost to me. There was a tremendous buzz in the air, though the faces of the sadhvı́s and munis did not betray it. With cultivated indifference, even distractedness, they averted their eyes from the immense and excited crowd.

Sitting with the samanis, I felt like a smudge on a white canvas; a blotch of muted colours among angels in white. But I was by now a familiar presence. Urmilla Prajna, my closest friend, was two rows over from me, and was busy reviewing her Prakrit language text, a course she teaches to the mumukshus at the PSS. She is a very bright woman in her late thirties, and an excellent and patient teacher of Jainism. She told me that on one occasion several years earlier, when the samanis were spending their chaturmas in Bombay, she had the opportunity to meet with a professor of Prakrit from the University of Bombay over a period of several months. On the last day of her study before returning to Ladnun, he told her that if she was not a nun, she could have had a brilliant academic career. It was a story she told me more than once, revealing perhaps a degree of ambivalence with her ascetic life. Perhaps unwittingly, the Terapanthi order’s attention to education and support for degrees of higher education may unwittingly nourish aspirations among the samanis that extend beyond the limits of the ascetic boundaries. The Terapanthi prides itself for its educated order, but it is the samanis above all

individual’s emotions which determine such things. Thus if one can have equanimity, the outer wall, or 10th boundary, will never be violated.
other groups who receive the greatest number of years of formal education. The *samans*, the male order of semi-monks, are a tiny group in huge demand by the lay community. The Terapanthi lay communities throughout India compete among each other to have a group of monks spend *chaturmas* with them (Flügel, 1995-6). It is a boon and an honour to have an ascetic present to teach and bless the community, and this is especially true if it is a *male* ascetic. But because the monks (and nuns) travel only by foot, a community may never get this opportunity. With the creation of the *saman* order, which allows the monks to travel by any means available, lay devotees saw an opportunity. Innumerable requests are made of the four *samans*, and as a result they often spend just a week at any one destination before moving on. *Samani* are also sent all over India and abroad, but they are not as high in demand, resulting in about half of the group of 81 remaining in Ladnun year-round to study. Because of the relaxed rules for the *samans*, their daily routines are less centred on `self-maintenance' (alms collecting, toilet) than they are for the *sadhis* and *munis*, and they have considerably more time for study. Indeed, during my stay, the majority of the *samans* in Ladnun were pursuing Masters degrees, and a few were even pursuing doctorates at the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute (JVBI).

The JVBI is another brainchild of Guru Dev, founded in 1970 to promote Jain studies. The institute was built on grounds of the Jain Vishva Bharati, a regional headquarters of the Terapanthi lay community. It is open to all students free of charge, irrespective of their religious background. But its organisation clearly reveals its *raison d'être* is to serve the ascetic community. For example, classes begin late, only after morning alms collection, and break again for sermons and afternoon alms collection. And the *samans* can interrupt their study indefinitely for their travels. Interestingly, degrees remain very important ‘possessions’ for the *samans*, and they are generally intensely proud of their academic credentials. For the vast majority of these young women, a university education would have been an impossibility outside the order, and now they can boast a Masters degree after two years of study. In addition to their interest in pursuing higher degrees, most of the *samans* spend an average of 6 to 7 years at the PSS before taking *diksa*, and during that time many receive a BA degree through a correspondence course with Jaipur University. They study languages (Hindi, Sanskrit, Prakrit and English) and philosophy. The consequence of this structuring of ascetic life is that the bulk of learned ascetics of this generation are now nuns. This could have serious consequences for an order that in every other way remains resolutely male-dominated. The relationship that the ascetics have with formal education is interesting and ambivalent. Guru Dev often praised his

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105 *Niyojika* is the term used for the leader of the *samant samani* group respectively
order for their education, and the samanis are obviously proud of their achievements. Most of the samanis' female relatives outside the order marry young and have little opportunity for advanced learning. One samani told me that her main reason for becoming a nun was so that she could continue her education (see also Reynell, 1985: 248-252). Nevertheless, pride in scholarly achievements has its limits within an order that, above all else, most values knowledge derived through introspection or at the feet of the enlightened guru.

Samani Urmilla Prajna\(^\text{106}\) is one of the most gifted teachers of Prakrit at the monastery, and intends to write her own book on Prakrit grammar. Because of the constraints on monk-nun interaction, she is passing her knowledge on exclusively to other nuns and mumukshus. I watched her as she poured over an old Prakrit language textbook, shaking her head in frustration at its deficiency, seemingly oblivious to the high drama of diksa around her.

Samani Savita Prajna is another close friend. Today she looked lost in thought, perhaps penning another poem in her mind. She was a prolific writer, having filled dozens of notebooks with short stories and mournful poetry. Ascetic life could do nothing to tarnish her beauty. The bridge of her nose is high and haughty, and her cheekbones so prominent they cause her eyes to angle slightly upwards. Physical individuality is difficult for the ascetics, who wear identical uniforms and who are taught to walk, sit and eat alike. But her face, cloaked beneath the samani uniform, was anything but ordinary. As if demanding recognition of its beauty, it defied homogeneity, and mocked the official ascetic pretext to bodily neglect. She told me that she could have married well because of her looks, but that now at thirty-seven, her looks were fading. In fact she once was engaged to be married to a 'very beautiful and very rich' man, but several months before the wedding she decided she didn’t want to go through with it, and joined the PSS instead. In reality, her good looks are a form of currency in the order as well. She is frequently chosen to represent the order at conferences in Calcutta and Bombay, and she has travelled abroad in the same capacity. In a conversation with Muniji, he once explained why she was chosen over another samani to go to overseas, saying "Her appearance would give a better impression".\(^\text{107}\)

Directly behind the samanis sat the upasikas wrapped in warm shawls over their simple saris, and the mumukshus sisters in their smart tunics. I saw my cheerful mumukshu friend, Promika, sitting proudly, holding her white handkerchief before her moving lips, as she recited a blessing. In her crisp white kavatchan, she was in her element. She looked excited, but I wondered if she felt any disappointment at not being among the diksarthis today. Promika had

\(^{106}\) "Prajna" is added like a suffix to all samanis' names. It means "wisdom" or "wise"
a ways to go yet. She had not yet mastered the required skill of projecting an air of perpetual introspection, nor had she yet re-interpreted her past in terms of a narrative of disenchantment – as her candid attachment to her kavatchan patently demonstrated. Memory or experience is always sifted though a narrative; ordered through an organising principle that confers significance upon it from a vantage point of the present. Over a period of years at the PSS, the girls ‘learn to remember’ and reinterpret their past in accordance with a narrative of ascetic detachment. Motives are rephrased and funneled into disdain for worldly existence. As a publication on the PSS puts it “The inmates of the PSS have to pass through a series of experiments aimed at bringing about a radical change in their attitudes towards life” (Bhatnagar, 1985:82). Perhaps Promika’s attitude towards life remained too cheerful to be considered for this year’s diksa. At 18 years old, she would have been younger than the average diksharthi, but certainly not the youngest. This year already, one girl of 14 became a sadhvi directly, skipping not only the PSS but the samani stage altogether. There were varying views on why this happened, from the ‘official’ version that the girl was especially enlightened and had wanted to renounce since she was 5, to the very ‘unofficial’ and somewhat cynical view (held by some householders and at least one samani) that since her family are big donors, it was a way of honouring her family. But most of those I asked said that it would be impossible and even presumptuous for them to claim to know the reason, but that it “must be right” since it was Guru Dev’s own decision.

Guru Dev held his face close to the large microphone placed before his platform, and his laborious breathing could be heard throughout the entire monastery. The use of microphones by the ascetics was one of the many controversial changes Guru Dev had initiated during his time as leader of the Terapanthi. His intention – to enable the greatest number of devotees to hear sermons – was highly controversial because microphones require electricity, and therefore violence is an inherent part of their use. Although it was a concession to the importance of the lay community and to the socially significant role the ascetics play, it was distilled through a discourse of liberation-centric morality: the ascetics insist that their primary goal is the liberate their own souls, not to enlighten the masses, but that since preaching leads to the elimination of karma it is therefore beneficial to everyone. To state otherwise would implicate them in worldly life. Many times Muniji began our daily tutorial by reminding me of this. This issue of violence was resolved the same way it is with the ascetics “use” of electric

107 Of the eight attributes that an acharya is expected to possess, physical beauty is one. Jains treat the physical body as an index or sign of one’s level of spirituality. See Chapter 2.
light bulbs: since they themselves do not turn the electricity on and off – and would never be associated with its use if it were not for the householders – they incur no bad karma.

The amplified wheezing continued and we all sat in anticipation of the start of the ceremony. Over the past few years, Guru Dev’s health had deteriorated, and he was now seriously asthmatic. Sometimes, in the middle of a sermon, he would begin to lose his breath and a younger monk would rush forward with a large inhaler, holding it steady to Guru Dev’s mouth as he worked to regain his calm. Today his large dark eyes were fixed on the immense and eager crowd before him. His breathing stilled the buzz of the people until at last he summoned his voice and he began to chant the Namaskar Mantra. Without a second’s hesitation, several hundred devotees harmoniously joined in and the huge assembly hall resounded with the tuneful prayer:

\begin{quote}
Namo Arthantanam
Namo Siddhanam
Namo Ayariyanam
Namo Uvajhayanan
Namo loe savva sahunam\footnote{The ‘Namaskar Mantra’ alternatively called the ‘Namokara Mahamantra’ is recited by Jains throughout India, irrespective of sect. It gives respect to the Arthantas (ones who are worthy of respect), the Siddhas (liberated and perfected souls), the Acharyas (leaders of the Jain orders), the Upadhyays (teachers of the scriptures) and to all sadhus (mendicants).}
\end{quote}

Even before the vibrations of the soothing mantra had faded, the first speaker was making his way up the steps of the stage. It promised to be a long ceremony. The president of the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, the chancellor, the vice-chancellor (all householders, of course), and prominent community members each had their turn to praise the order, the ascetics, the ascetic ideal and the three diksarthis. It was well into the second hour before members of the ascetic community spoke, and the murmurs and fidgeting amongst the audience were evidence of its restlessness. Throughout, the diksarthis remained motionless to the side of the stage, kneeling and with their heads lowered. Niyojikaji listened, seemingly intently, to all that was being said, occasionally adding her own commentary on events for me. The prominent monks and nuns spoke of the uselessness of worldly activities and encouraged the devotees to reflect upon renunciation as the one and only true spiritual path. Finally it was the leaders of the Terapanthi order’s turn to speak: Sadhvi Kanak Prabha, the head nun in charge of over six hundred sadhus and samanis, made a short speech on the righteousness of the ascetic path. This was followed by a lengthy talk by Acharya Sri – liberally peppered with anecdotes and stories – until at last the microphone was placed before Guru Dev once again.
The audience became silent. Guru Dev wasted no time, and quickly turned to address the diksrthi, calling upon Mumukshu Jyoti to stand up. It was hard to see her face. since the hood of her sari was pulled forward, and she held her joined hands high. Her family in the audience was also asked to stand. Guru Dev spoke loudly and with intensity, but his voice was full of warmth when he told them that this young woman to his right will no longer belong to them at the close of the ceremony; she will then belong to the order. He asked them if they fully accept this. The family members stood rather sheepishly among the enormous but stilled crowd of onlookers, some smiled weakly, others looked rather upset. but one by one they agreed. The diksrthi bowed to Guru Dev before kneeling again, and the next young woman and her family were called until all three candidates had received parental permission, as is required by the order (written permission had been given earlier). At this point, the three diksrthi disappeared behind the stage (where they were joined by a few of their female relatives) and returned about 15 minutes later in their white ‘samani’ robes.
Each diksarthi was then called upon to make a brief speech stating her reasons for wanting to take diksa (each a variant of the other about their disenchantment with worldly existence), and then together they stood with heads bowed in homage, as Guru Dev recited the initiating slokas, taken from the Avasyak (Pratikraman) Sutra. The mantras call upon the candidate to give up ‘sinful, worldly activities’. Through the act of bowing each demonstrates her consent and thereby becomes an ascetic. She is believed to immediately advance from the 5th into the 6th gunasthana or ‘spiritual stage’ (There are 14 such stages of spiritual development. See appendix 1).

The atmosphere is joyous, the hushed audience is animated again. Guru Dev swings his arms about, joking among the ascetics who beam back at him. Then he addresses the three young women for a final time: still using the prefix “mumukshu” (‘one who is desirious of emancipation’). He calls on each to individually stand before him while he bestows upon them new names. Interestingly, the Terapanthi (and the Sthanakvasi) ascetics retain their householder names or a variant thereof (see Cort, 1991:664). Thus Mumukshu Jyoti became Samani Jyoti.109

Finally, the three walk across the stage, a distinct moment in the rite of passage, and the climax of the diksa. One by one they bow before the Sadhvi Promukha, presenting their bald heads. She plucks the single tuft of hair (an act called keshu locha), the last sign of worldliness to be symbolically and literally uprooted. Each young nun then bows and pays homage to all the nuns and monks before her. At last, the rite is over, and she sits down “on her own, individual, spatially separate mat amongst the ranks of the sadhvis” (Holmstrom, 1988:21). Goonasekere describes the diksa’s conclusion:

... [They] reject all that which caused their suffering: the household and everything associated with it. ... [T]hey renounce their free will, their social selves, their individualities, in total surrender to the Acharya. They surrender themselves to a superparent, a father who represents omniscience, omnibenevolence, and pure love. By this act of negation of the society in their conscious awareness they renounce the world and their selves and acquire an alternate society which they believe to be the very opposite of the household and acquire a new parent whom they believe to be superior to their social and biological parents; acquire new siblings who are believed to be superior to their social and biological siblings; and acquire selves which are believed to be superior to their pre-monastic social selves (1985:142).

Within the next few weeks, Samani Jyoti and the two other initiates will undergo a second diksa, called the ‘bari diksa’ (great initiation), at which time they will accept the
Mahavratas (great vows) of Jain monasticism: *Ahimsa* (non-violence); *Satya* (Truth); *Achchoria* (non-stealing); *Aparigraha* (non-possession); *Brahmacarya* (celibacy) (Cort, 1991b). It will be a smaller event, and will take place before an audience of ascetics alone. It does not receive a fraction of the attention that the public *diksa* does, neither from the householders, nor from *mumukshus* or ascetics. This may be because, among an audience of near-equivalents, difference is harder to strategically and rhetorically employ; here righteousness of the ascetic path cannot make use of the explicit rejection of worldliness. And in the absence of difference, the possibilities for objectification and dramatisation are gone.

Jyoti’s formal renunciation of society, its rules and values entails the acceptance of another type of society, with a different set of rules and values. And ironically, renunciation will bring with it a reduction, not increase, of autonomy. Each day, from the time she wakes until she sleeps, her life will now be structured according to ascetic discipline. Cort writes, “Following initiation, the course of the mendicant’s life is determined by the daily obligatory rites of the mendicant, and the requirements and requests of the laity with whom the mendicant interacts” (1991:654). The daily obligatory rites, called the *Avashyakas*, form the core of ascetic ritual (For a detailed account, see Dundas, 1992: 146-149; Shântâ, 1985:243-58). They are:

1. *Samayika* (equanimity)
2. *Caturvimsatistava* (praise of the 24 Tirthankaras)
3. *Vandana* (homage to the teacher)
4. *Pratikramana* (repentance of faults and negligence, performed twice daily).
5. *Kayotsarga* (abandonment of the body)
6. *Pratyakhyana* (the promise to abstain from a variety of transgressions for a fixed time)

Shântâ describes the daily rites as “les premiers pas dans la voie”, and outlines their significance for the *sadhvis,*

Leur observance régulière est déjà le signe d’un début de cheminement sur la voie droite; et pour les ascètes elle est le signe d’un engagement définitif: en effet, l’acte majeur, durant la diksa, est le vœu de sâmâyika pour la vie, vœu renouvelé deux fois par jour. Le sâmâyika est à la fois un état de vie et l’âvaiyaka primordial (1985:243).

And,

Le mot âvaśyaka signifie: nécessaire, obligatoire, indispensable, inévitable, ce à quoi on ne peut se soustraire. Il s’agit ici d’observances spirituelles qui sont une obligation pour tous les jaina parce qu’elles constituent l’actualisation, la pratique dans la vie quotidienne, des aspects essentiels de la doctrine. La première étape vers la purification étant la non-soumission aux passions, les sages ont considéré la signification d’âvaśyaka dans cette perspective: celui qui n’est pas sous la domination (vasya) des sens est a-vasya, ferme, il ne cède pas

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109 Jyoti means ‘light’ or ‘enlightenment’ and therefore is an appropriate ascetic name.
aux convoitises et impulsions, et ses actes sont āvāṣyaka, ceux de quelqu’un qui se contrôle (ibid.:244).

I watched Samani Jyoti Prajna leave with the sadhvis, and I wondered how she would adjust to her new life. Although she was well prepared, having spent many years at the PSS, and had family members already in the order, the initial transition must be difficult. The immediate and singular focus of her life over the past many years (diksa) and especially over the past few weeks, was finally realised. Now the goal of attaining the state of ‘avasya’ (detached) will becomes the logic, and determine the rhythm, of her daily life. She had made the crossing and now there was no turning back.

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CHAPTER 5 DEATH, DEMONS AND DESIRE

It was nearly 8 p.m. Young Muditmuni with his tiny physique and colossal voice moved swiftly through the rooms of the monk’s residence, calling all to prayer. Being the most recent muni initiate of just a few months, and because of his tender age of 12, he is given such special privileges. His tiny stature makes him appear even younger than his years, yet his oratory powers are exceptional. He is frequently called upon to make a speech in front of the lay community, who delight in watching and listening to this pint-size marvel. Last year, when a group of sadhvis were in Maharashtra, Muditmuni and his mother attended their lecture in the village. He was immediately impressed by the confidence of the sadhvis and by the respect they received in the community. The topic of the nuns’ lecture was ‘fearlessness’. They told the audience that fear, like all forms of human suffering (duhkha), is born of desire; that fearlessness comes from worldly detachment. He heard that only the weak are prey to fears and that those who attach no importance to the body are afraid of nothing. The nuns quoted the words of the great Lord Mahavir: “Once I had the longing to live and was afraid of death. I desired comforts and feared pain. I pined for fame and feared being criticised. I was greedy for gains and feared losses. But I don’t have cravings for life anymore, so why should I then be afraid of death? Only those who have a longing for life fear death”. The sadhvis told their audience a story from Lord Mahavir’s twelve years of ‘afflictions’ – a time during which he endured the wrath of innumerable demons, evil humans and ferocious animals, and yet he never lost his equanimity. The story impressed little Mudit greatly.

One day during his wanderings, Lord Mahavir arrived near a small village on the banks of river Vegvati. Outside the village on a small hill stood a temple surrounded by scattered heaps of bones and skeletons. Considering it to be an appropriate place for his practices, Mahavir sought permission from the villagers. They informed him that this Shulpani village was once a prosperous town. But the ferocious lance-wielding demon, Shulpani Yaksha, who dances and laughs on heaps of bones, had turned it into an Asthik-gram – the village of bones. The temple in which Mahavir sought to perform his practices was guarded by the demon. If anyone dared to stay, they never came out alive. The villagers tried to dissuade Mahavir from staying in the temple but he was determined to root out fear and sow the seeds of courage. That evening he meditated within the temple. When darkness descended the air filled with eerie sounds. Shulpani the Demon appeared in the courtyard and started making fearful trumpeting noises. He was surprised to see a human being standing fearlessly in meditation. He produced a thunderous roar that shook the thick walls of the temple, but the Lord Mahavir still did not move, nor did he show any change in his serene bearing. The demon lost his temper and began his horrifying atrocities. A mad elephant suddenly appeared and goaded Mahavir with its pointed tusks. It lifted him by its trunk and tossed him about. When this had no effect, a horrible ghost appeared and attacked Mahavir with its large venomous fangs and claws. Next appeared a black serpent that attacked with its large venomous fangs and
toxic breath. Finally it caused extreme damage in seven delicate spots of Mahavir’s body (eyes, ears, nose, head, teeth, nails and back). But Mahavir had an endless capacity to tolerate pain. Even this extreme torture failed to disturb his composure. Drained of all his demonic energy, Shulpani became apprehensive. He feared that he was facing a divine power much stronger than his own and that he was nearing his own demise. All of a sudden, Shulpani felt a divine spiritual light illuminate his inner self. Slowly his anger subsided, fear dissolved and a feeling of goodwill took over. He touched Mahavir’s feet and with repentance begged his pardon.

After the sadhis’ talk, Mudit approached them alone: he wanted to know if there were any monks in the order. The sadhis were buoyed by his interest and told him that they could see that he was one of the special few who could meet the ascetic challenge. They told him that only those who are great, strong and fearless should consider pursuing the ascetic path, and that he should not waste his life in worldliness (see Carrithers, 1983 for a discussion of the socially perceived grandeur of asceticism). Much to his mother’s shock, Mudit decided on the spot to become a monk. The sadhis spoke to his mother about the futility of trying to deter him because once a soul has been awakened, it will never slumber again. Within a matter of weeks his parents were in touch with the nuns (who were by this time several villages away) and made arrangements for their son to visit Guru Dev in Ladun. On the day of his arrival in Ladnun, Mudit dressed himself in a white kurta pyjama and sat near the monks listening to Guru Dev’s morning sermon. Just weeks earlier he had been moved by the nuns’ assertion that the ascetic path is for the strong and fearless, and Mudit took it to heart. Suddenly, at the end of Guru Dev’s talk, Mudit jumped to his feet (though he still only reached a few inches above the seated munis) and, in front of an large audience of ascetics and householders that included his own parents, he delivered a speech worthy of a Tirthankara. He had been awakened, he declared boldly and now begged Guru Dev to allow him to renounce. Guru Dev began to chuckle – perhaps remembering a similar declaration he himself made when he was just eleven years old – but didn’t respond. The audience was rapturous: greatness was in Mudit’s future. The next day Guru Dev advised that he should spend several months living among the ascetics and to then make a decision. Within four months he took muni diksa. Still something of a star phenomenon at the monastery, Mudit Muni all but swaggered in his new ascetic robes. He held his head high as he called the monks to prayer and, without even having to bend forward, his hand-held rajoharon swept the floor as he moved forward.

The sun would soon be down; there was no time to dawdle. “Matthayena Vandami”¹¹⁰ I said as I bowed deeply before Muni Dulharaji. Young Muditmuni’s voice could be heard

¹¹⁰ It translates roughly as “I bow before your greatness” and is used when bowing before munis and sadhis. When meeting a samani or saman, one says “Vandami Namansami”
trailing off in the distance. Everywhere there was immediate activity as the monks stopped what they were doing to move towards the assembly hall, and householders rushed to be on time for the final gathering of the day. As always, the call to prayer signalled the end of Muniji's and my meeting. I gathered up my notebooks and — since there was nothing I could do — tried not to notice his difficulty in standing. His badly arthritic knees make it difficult for him to move after sitting for a long time. Soon two younger monks would arrive to help him up and accompany him to the hall.

The monastery would soon be engulfed in darkness, and a calm would descend upon its inhabitants. The night was really the only time when the all-important symbolic distinction between the ascetics and the shravaks was actually spatially true: the householders would reluctantly separate themselves from the ascetics and retreat to their 'worldly' homes, leaving the ascetics alone. The ascetics would then be free of the bejewelled and bedecked devotees, free from the sweet smell of their perfumes and oils; free from their offerings, their tales of 'worldly' transgressions and their adoration. But shravaks are not the only representatives of 'the worldly', nor the only threats to the ascetics' resolve, even if they are the most tangible and common forms of temptation. When these perils of the daytime disappear with the setting of the sun, new dangers lie lurking in the shadows of the night, as the story of Lord Mahavir forewarned. The ascetics must always be vigilant.

The pratikraman prayers, broadcast by loud-speaker, would accompany me on my short walk from the monk's residence to Gautam Shalla (the samanis' residence). The broadcast allowed the samanis to sing in perfect unison with the monks, though a couple of hundred metres away. Usually they would wait in silence until they heard the monks' lead, and then join the refrain. The monastery would be filled with prayer, dominated by the beautiful and rich voice of a single monk who stood at the microphone. Only inside the sandy courtyard of the samanis' compound itself could I distinguish their voices from the male chorus. The samanis would sit on the veranda in two perfect rows of three across and ten or more deep, facing each other. Niyojikaji would sit in the middle, and would lead the group in prayer. Every night for months, I would join them at the back of the large group, chanting the melodious mantra with them. Sitting among the nuns, my eyes shut, and the a cappella rhythms

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Pratikraman is one of the most important obligatory actions incumbent upon ascetics. In brief, it is an act of repentance. The word means 'going back', and it involves the recitation of a list taken from the Pratikraman Sutra, renouncing sinful acts. It is a process of internal cleansing for any wrong action committed intentionally or unintentionally. It is performed twice daily (before sunrise and just after sunset). Paul Dundas writes, "As well as involving meditative elements, pratikramana revolves around the recitation of six passages enumerating faults, each ending with the expression miccha mi dukkadam, 'may evil which has been done by me be in vain'" (1992: 148).
resonating throughout the open courtyard, I could forget of myself as an outsider and share in the beauty of their experience. But on this night, when I entered their compound, the marble veranda that extends around the courtyard was deserted and cold; and I was met only by silence.

Where were the samanis? And why hadn’t I been told of their departure? I worried as I stood alone in the open courtyard, the sun vanishing behind the monastery’s western gate. The sounds of the monks’ prayers could be heard but, in the absence of the samanis, I had no desire to join in. I felt frustrated by the break in the routine. Every night, immediately after the prayers, there would be a buzz of activity and laughter in the dark. The samanis would call out and say, “Oh it is so dark tonight!” or “Only the stars light up the room”. Theirs was almost a chicane observance of the rule that they should never cause violence or have it caused on their behalf. It would be impossible for them to simply ask me to switch the light on, since that would directly implicate them in the violence of killing innumerable ‘fire-bodied’ beings, so they had fun within their limits. Once I, or the keeper, turned on the lights, the samanis would retire to their respective rooms to read, study or meditate. Then Urmilla and I would set ourselves up at the back of her room under the window and away from the three other samanis sharing the room, and spend the next few hours in conversation. We would talk late into the night, long after the other samanis had stretched out their cardboard pieces, and gone to sleep. To shield their eyes from the exposed light bulb, they would pull the sheets over their faces, and tuck them in under their heads. If it were not for the occasional snores, they could be mistaken for body-bags. Unfortunately, since it was also my ‘job’ to turn off the lights I had turned on, the time of my departure was always clocked, and Urmilla would occasionally be chided for keeping such late hours.

The residence was deserted, but I wasn’t eager to return to my room. The generator was down again and the power was off since morning. I decided to stay here and do some reading, where the generator almost never fails. I opened the door to Urmilla’s room, flicked on the light and was relieved to see that her tiny wooden table was loaded with books. At least this meant that she hadn’t been sent off to some village or city for a lecture tour, as I had feared. The samanis never know from one day to the next where they might be staying. If Guru Dev wanted a Terapanthi representative at an event, anywhere in India, the samanis would be sent. And indeed, in 1996, about half of the 81 samanis, at any one time, were dispersed throughout India and overseas. Although many appear to enjoy the indeterminacy and spontaneity of their

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112 Fire-bodies along with earth-, air- and water-bodies are considered to be one-sensed microscopic life forms, called migodas. See p.38
lives, saying that they “have no stress” and “don’t have to think”, most prefer to stay put.
Indeed, the majority of the samanis in Ladnun are either teaching or studying, and this provides them with some deterrent to the nomadic life. Suddenly, out of the silence, I heard the sound of footsteps coming from the stairwell at the end of the hall. I assumed it to be the night-watchman, though without his thunderous stride. But instead it was Urmilla who appeared and before I could even say my respects (i.e., do vandana) she rushed over to me and hastily said, “Tonight we cannot meet”.
Although I had anticipated this, I looked at her and waited for an explanation, but she seemed rather uncomfortable.
“What is it?” I asked, “Where is everyone?”
“The samanis are at Rishabdwar [the sadhvis’ residence]. Except me and Samani Bhavitaprajna. We are with Samani Ashaprejna – upstairs.” She was clearly bazzled.
“Is everything alright?”
She pressed her handkerchief against her face and looked around her.
“Why are you not at Rishabdwar? Are you not well?” I pressed, knowing that Urmilla’s recent bout of malaria had seriously weakened her and prevented her from participating in many regular meetings.
“No, no”, she shook her head. Clearly I was off the mark. Then, after a moment of hesitation, she whispered “Bhuts”. [malignant spirits]
The path from Gautam Shalla back to my room was dark, and the few and irregularly placed yellow light-bulbs – fixed to low fences – caused the trees to cast giant shadows. I walked quickly, stalked by my own shadow. The gritty wind was agitated, blowing in circles and causing the sand to rise. The wind grew stronger, muffling the sound of my steps and silencing the world around me. Surely this was the hour of the bhuts, I thought. Bhuts are part of everyday life in India (Kakar, 1996:57) but they are always feared. And although the ascetics typically dismiss them out of hand as unworthy of their attention, it is a feigned bravado. In reality many are deeply troubled by their existence. Though they believe that through ascetic austerities (tapas) they can defeat bhuts, and that if they remain detached nothing can harm them, they also know that bhuts take these measures as challenges, and delight in tempting the ascetics.
The demons or ‘demonic gods’ are confined mainly to the middle and lower area of the triloka or ‘three world’ cosmos. The cosmos is shaped like an egg-timer, or like a giant human standing upright (sometimes called the ‘cosmic person’). Gods reside in the upper section of the cosmos; humans, animals and plants in the middle section and infernal beings in the seven lands of the lower section” (Tattvartha Sutra, 1994:69) The demons have access to, and flit between, the middle world of human habitation and the top three hells of the lower world. The Tattvartha Sutra describes these beings as sadists who

...find pleasure in devising torments for the infernal beings. They force them to drink molten iron, embrace red-hot hammers, attack them with hatchets and knives, sprinkle boiling oil on them, fry them in pans, bake them in ovens, drown them in the hellish streams, crush them in grinders (ibid.:72).

In total there are fifteen types of demonic gods, with different predispositions and forms (e.g., some appear as deformed human beings; others as giants, or as fiery or thundering spirits113).114 They are born as demons because of a deluded world-view and predilection for wicked acts in past lives that led them to perform misguided austerities and to unwittingly expel beneficial karma (ibid.:69). These demonic gods do not know the misfortune that awaits them but take pride in their status, considering themselves the luckiest of all creatures (ibid.:72). However, in

113 Kimara, Ankaya, Agnisikha, Sughosa respectively.
his study of possession in popular Hinduism, Sudhir Kakar claims that bhuts are the spirits of those who met with an untimely death. He writes,

The bhuta-preta are said to exist in a halfway house between the human world and the world of ancestral spirits (pitri-lok). Until they have been judged, have paid their Karmic debts and are allowed into the world of ancestral spirits, the bhuta-preta continue to yearn for a human body which they can enter and contrive to make sick through their nefarious activity (1996:56).

I do not know if Jains share this view of bhuts, though in many of the stories I heard, they did arise from someone who died suddenly and prematurely. In either case, it is in moments of quietness, or in the stillness of the night, that the bhuts seize the opportunity to attack. While they usually busy themselves with tormenting the infernal beings of the first three hells, they also delight in terrifying human beings – especially ascetics, who often provoke their ire with what the bhuts consider to be their pretensions at godliness. But demons are important in monastic life and for ascetic discourse for another reason: they present the ascetics with an opportunity to prove their superior spiritual power, and thereby reaffirm the proper order of things. Indeed, the celebrity status of a few of the ascetics at the monastery developed as a direct result of their courage and strength in the face of demonic attacks. Withstanding an attack or subduing a demon affirms and authenticates their ascetic spiritual power. In a world in which the good life is associated with all that is not-worldly, these passionate worldly beings serve a powerful rhetorical end.

As I approached, I could see that my residence was still without light. Electricity would certainly not be back until tomorrow. The dog, Kalu was curled up snugly next to the entrance of the building, sleeping soundly and oblivious to the brewing sand storm. The worker-boys had already laid out their charpoys, which partially blocked the door of my room, but were nowhere to be seen. The cots were light – and even with one of the boys stretched out on one, I could easily push it aside. The boys at my residence, most in their late teens, all had decent jobs: they were primarily responsible for maintaining the guest rooms built to accommodate the steady flow of devotees. Every room but mine saw a brisk turn-over: devotees would come to make their pilgrimage, stay for a day or two and then disappear for another year. The rooms were meant to inspire piety: simple wooden beds with no mattress, a wooden desk and a “w-c” – a cement square with a wide drain, and a tap above it for all ablutions. The spartan quarters meant the boys had a relatively easy job cleaning them – far easier than the jobs most workers had at the monastery. During cricket season, they would set up a radio on the front steps of the residence and blast it so loudly that it could be heard from whichever room they were in. No

\[114\] See Kakar, 1996:56 for a description of the pantheon of spirits in popular Hinduism.
one ever complained — not their bosses, nor the devotees — because so important is the match that it simply cannot be broadcast too loudly. Cricket is the nation’s great unifier. The boys at my residence were low-caste Hindus, as were all the workers at the monastery, most coming from the neighbouring Harijan village. ‘Bapu’ the cook, though from a low-caste, was not an “untouchable”. Daily, the food he prepared would be served to the devotee-guests, and offered to the ascetics as alms. He was a shy fellow with a dark round face, bushy brows and an allusion to a moustache. He was soon to be married, and there was considerable teasing leading up to the occasion. After a day’s work, and after the excitement of the day’s cricket match, the boys would sit cross-legged on their charpoys, joking about marriage and sex in their native Rajasthani tongue.115 Bapu’s village was a day’s trip away. After marriage he planned to keep his job at the monastery where he would work for periods of 2 months at a time, before taking a few days leave, as is the custom of the married workers.

I loathed entering my room when it was dark. The sound of the creepy-crawlies carrying on midst my notebooks sent dread up my spine. My industrial-strength flashlight became my most cherished possession because with it I could restore order. With a beam of light, the bugs would disappear into the cracks and drains from which they came. It was a ritual we would go through several times a week. My mind was unsettled: I had heard so much about bhuts and their impotence before the ascetics’ tapas (spiritual power) since arriving, but I had not witnessed them myself, and I was eager to do so. The light from my flashlight danced on the wall, and the wind howled outside my room, and I tried to imagine the goings-on on the second floor of the Gautam Shalla. As I imagined Urmilla and the other samanis battling the demon, I realised that I was not baffled by the phenomenon. I felt I already had an idea of what was transpiring. My imaginings were not on terra nova; they were not without a blueprint. They played against a backdrop made familiar by innumerable tales of ascetics and demons. Demons are often central characters in Jaina storytelling, making their contemporary, ‘real life’ appearance — if not commonplace — at least, less than extraordinary. Kirin Narayan in her book Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels argues that narratives can be considered ‘cognitive instruments’ in that they are a means of making sense of the world (1989:100). She writes, “As the stories become incorporated into listeners’ visions of the world, religious belief is bound up with the course of action the morals prescribe” (1989:244). I knew that these worldly demons, no matter how tempting or terrible, could never defeat a dispassionate, detached ascetic. The actors and events may change, but the plot and the outcome do not. In fact, so similar were the

115 Oblivious to most of what they were saying, I could rely on the keeper of the residence, who delighted in teasing Bapu, for translations.
stories in my mind, that I found myself conflating stories about the ascetics that I knew with those of the Tirthankaras.

By turning off my flashlight I put pay to the shadow puppets. Most nights I would fall asleep reading, and wake up hours later slumped over my book with the light still on. I hit it off and would never know about the night-life in my room. And sure enough, this night it didn’t take long before my room became animated with the sounds of my little roommates, but I wasn’t bothered as I had enough to distract myself. Just last week Sadhiv Pannaji, the greatest demon-basher of the order, passed through Ladnun on her nomadic wanderings. Unfortunately, she was already off to a neighbouring village, and could be of no help tonight. Her whirlwind visit was of great excitement to the community. She is known to have tremendous spiritual power (tapas), and everyone – including many Hindu families – wanted to have her blessing. Her power was known because of her life-long dealings with demons, and in later years, through her ability to perform miracles. The two abilities were connected: through years of performing penances, she had acquired so much tapas that her powers were now wondrous. She had the power of clairvoyance and the power to heal. Her austerities were equally extraordinary - she seemed to be forever on some type of fast. Indeed many nuns claimed she fasted for several months at a time – sipping only boiled water!

Early in her ascetic career Sadhvi Pannaji encountered a dangerous bhut that was determined to destroy her religious life. He tormented her over a period of seven years. Her courageous encounters with the demon - and her eventual appeasement of it - are well known among the Terapanthi community, and they -- the source of her celebrated status as a tapasvini (spiritual expert). Her ordeals and triumphs are important because they reveal the paradigmatic response to bhuts (which, I argue, represent a form of worldly desire): namely that of unwavering courage and discipline. Her courage recalls that of the great ascetic heroes and presents an ideal for all ascetics.

It began during the first chaturmas when she and a small group of nuns set themselves up in a building that turned out to be the home of a demon. A number of householders warned the nuns not to stay there, but since Guru Dev assigned the place, the nuns were determined to make a go of it. Soon after they moved in, the demon became enraged and threatened their lives if they didn’t leave. The demon first appeared late at night as a woman. Sadhvi Pannaji was meditating close to midnight when she saw a woman coming upstairs towards her. She called out, “Who are you? What are you doing here now?” The woman said nothing and stood staring at Pannaji and then she simply vanished before her eyes. Pannaji knew then that it was a bhut in disguise. Her devotees urged her to leave the building, but Pannaji replied, “I don’t think of
anything beyond what my Guru says. He says I must stay here and thus I will stay”. Her stubbornness enraged the demon who then started to trouble other nuns as well. They tolerated everything, though many of the nuns were terrified and wished they could leave the building. Pannaji, as group leader, would hear none of it. The demon assumed different and terrifying forms, made blood curdling sounds and threatened them cruelly throughout the chaturmas, but Sadhvi Pannaji insisted on staying put. At the end of the rainy season, when the nuns left the building and began their wanderings, the demon stopped his harassment against all except Pannaji. He forbade her to ever return to his building, but she knew that other sadhvis would likely be there again the following year – and she told him so. One night the demon appeared before her, presented her with a handful of eggs and roared at her to break them (i.e., kill them).116 Pannaji responded, “I am a nun, I have renounced all violence – how can you ask me to do this?”. Another day he put a hen in front of her and commanded her to “Kill and eat it”. Each time she resisted, the demon would make graver threats. On other occasions, during their daily journeys by foot, the demon would appear beside her completely naked and refuse to leave her side. He would ridicule her with ribald language, promising to stop only when she obeyed him. To this she would reply, “I have faith in my Guru. I’m not afraid of you”. When he would threaten to take her life, she would say, “As long as I have life in my body, I will remain a sadhvi”. The troubles continued for years but she never gave in. Finally one day, the bhut, appearing in human form, told Pannaji that he could not live where the nuns do; that their presence in his building caused him great pain. Sadhvi Pannaji explained that she wished him no harm, but that the building had been chosen by her Guru and that is why she refused to leave. The bhut was impressed by her devotion, and asked only that the upstairs remain uninhabited for his use. Pannaji accepted his proposition, and eventually the trouble subsided. Pannaji, however, would endure hardships with bhuts throughout her ascetic career.

My own sleep that night was restless, filled with werewolves and vampires – idioms, I realised, of evil from my own culture, and which, I would later learn, have little in common with bhuts of India.117 Bhuts represent desire incarnate, and battle stories between ascetics and bhuts serve as a discourse about good and evil – in the distinctly Jain terms of spirituality and

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116 According to Jains, eggs are alive and sentient beings.
117 In the West, our notions of evil appear more absolute. The creatures that represent evil are depravity-embodied. Their essential nature is evil; goodness is their antithesis. Our view reflects an understanding of evil that co-exists with good; approaching more a Manicheanistic and Zoroastrianistic idea which, I believe, reflects the unresolved question of the origin of evil in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In Jainism, demons often repent, or are humbled before the ascetics – as in the story of Lord Mahavir and the story of Sadhvi Pannaji. Bhuts are more passionate and more deluded than we are, but they are essentially the same. They all possess souls that one day will achieve omniscience.
worldliness. The stories of the dispassionate ascetic ever-victorious over worldly desire (represented as bhut) were inexhaustible and colourful, and always followed a set pattern: the passionate demon eventually either fled or was subdued; and detachment always won the day. I imagined the heroic samanis at Gautam Shalla (the samanis' residence) confronting the bhuts, defiantly mocking their worldly ways. The raw materials for another tapasvini are in the making, I imagined. But things were to turn out differently than I had expected.

Early that morning after the sun had risen I returned to Gautam Shalla where I found Urmilla alone in the room, at her desk. She looked especially tired but was calmer than the previous night. She scrambled to find her handkerchief to cover her mouth, and then told me that she had not slept at all.

“What happened?” I asked.

Though the compound was empty, she motioned for me to close the doors behind me. I did and then sat before her. Alone in the room, she leaned forward so we were just inches apart and, in a tiny whisper, told me that the previous night, near midnight, “the bhuts ‘caught’ Samani Asha”. By ‘caught’ she meant that the bhuts had taken possession of Asha.

This was new to me: in all the demon stories I had been told, I had never heard of a possession. Urmilla assured me they were uncommon – but I learned later that they are more concealed than uncommon. They are downplayed, trivialised and deliberately omitted from popular discourse. Unlike demonic attacks, which affirm the spiritual/ worldly; good/evil ontology - possession upsets it.¹¹² Possession is a language of surrender to the avatars of worldliness and as such it undermines ascetic claims to dominance and inverts the normal balance of power.

The previous day Asha had been alone on the roof in the middle of the afternoon meditating. When other samanis went upstairs, they called out to her, but she said nothing. Finally she started making a noise “mmmmmm”, and tossing her head about. When they tried to move her she had become very heavy and 6 samanis were needed. Urmilla was beckoned and together they carried the incapacitated Asha downstairs, and placed her in a room on the second floor. The other samanis went to Rishadwār (the sadhvis’ residence) for pratikraman prayers and stayed the night. Urmilla and two other samanis remained with Asha. Later in the evening the two other samanis who had stayed behind retired to another room to sleep. They did not want to be in the same room with her at midnight – a very inauspicious time when

¹¹² Unlike demons in Buddhist Sri Lanka where, according to Kapferer, ‘demonic attack contradicts the order of the cosmos in which demons are subjugated and restrained’ (cited in Boddy, 1994), demonic attack in Jainism is expected and serves as a means to demonstrate spiritual strength.
demons abound. So Urmilla stayed alone with Asha. Sure enough, at about midnight, eerie voices came from beyond the closed doors. Samani Asha began to tremble and whimper. Suddenly, the doors swung open as if blasted with a gust of wind, and Asha began to sob. When Urmilla asked “What is it?”, Asha said that spirits were entering the room. Within moments, one entered her body. Soon Asha was transformed from a terrified samani into an aggressive bhut. Occasionally she roared, and then laughed but the voice was deep and wicked and was not her own. The fact that a body can be occupied – that the boundary of one’s body is penetrable – was not contentious to Urmilla. What was scandalous however is that the body of an ascetic should be.

Urmilla made me promise that I would not mention it to any of my householder friends, or monks. Guru Dev would not be told, if it could be avoided. She was adamant that I not see Samani Asha, claiming that she feared I too could be ‘caught’. In reality, I did not believe that this was the source of her apprehension, but I didn’t press her. Possession is not only shameful to the victim, it also presents an awkward situation for the order. Of course the news would eventually leak, as it did in a matter of weeks, but every effort to contain it was made. The householders who assisted Urmilla in attending to Asha while she was incapacitated were her family members. And it was in her family’s interest not to broadcast the event.

That afternoon the samanis returned from Rishabdwar. Many had hoped the situation would have resolved itself since their departure the day before, and were visibly upset that it had not. Asha was still on the second floor, and many of the samanis were reluctant to go there. Arrangements were made for their books and ‘mattresses’ to be temporarily shifted downstairs to the first floor rooms. Urmilla’s room now housed an additional two samanis. Since she was among the very few samanis who were not afraid to go upstairs, I saw little of her over the next few days. However, I continued to meet with her each evening for a shortened period of time, after which she would join Asha upstairs.

The situation was tense and, for many, my presence made things worse. The samanis were reluctant to talk to me about the possession – because they wanted to protect Asha, or because the situation was difficult to rationalise in terms of a worldview which held ascetic dispassion to be the greatest of all powers. Even among themselves, Asha’s possession was increasingly presented as having “something to do with” her karma from a past life. It appeared that, because of its destabilising potential, efforts to normalise possession were being made at her expense. Urmilla was beginning to speculate aloud that perhaps it was Asha’s karma: “It has happened to her before” she told me soberly. Several months earlier when the ascetic community was in a nearby town, a small group of samanis were sharing a building with the
monks during the afternoon hours. Asha, seemingly out of the blue, began screaming, crying and thrashing herself about. Urmilla was among the samanis present at the time. They were alarmed because Guru Dev was in the same building and they didn’t want him (or any of the monks) to know what was going on. She and four other samanis carried the hollering Asha out of the building, and over to the where the sadhvis were staying. Sadhvi Kanak Prabha squeezed the big toe on Asha’s left foot, and an unmercifil roar came out of her: “CHORDO” (Leave me alone!) . It was not Asha. Sadhvi Kanak Prabha asked who it was and what it wanted. It revealed itself as a Harijan bhut who was angry because Asha had defecated on his home (in the fields) earlier in the day. The nuns apologised on her behalf and convinced him it had not been intentional. He accepted this and then disappeared, leaving Asha bewildered and exhausted.

Urmilla continued to remain with Asha on the second floor. And by the start of the third day, it seemed that no one was talking about anything other than bhuts – but almost exclusively in terms of demonic attack. The topic of possession was largely avoided, and if discussed, it was trivialised. Possession in and of itself is not so astounding, and everyone could tell me cases of its occurrence within the larger lay population. It is widely assumed that householders periodically succumb to demonic attacks by way of possession because they do not have the spiritual power to resist them. It is its appearance among the ascetic community that is most troubling.

In Possession of Self

I want to argue for an interpretation of Jain possession as a process, rather than as an impasse or condition. This might enable us to see the similarities it bears with certain mechanisms in Western culture, and thwart a reflex to exoticism. Possession by a bhut to a Jain ascetic means loss of control, but more importantly, I would argue, possession allows for the externalisation of passion in a world where dispassion is an ideal. It means that the worldly passions expressed and experienced by the ascetic do not derive from her; instead they originate from an external source. Responsibility is shifted; the ‘evil’ of desire is distanced and the

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119 The samanis wished to shield Asha’s condition from the monks and especially from Guru Dev because possession is considered shameful and a sign of weakness. Guru Dev takes pride in the members of his order and would be embarrassed by Asha’s behaviour. He may even have expelled her for it, deeming her not suitable for ascetic life. Kakar describes possession as a “stigma” and claims that it is usually the weak and morally suspect who are susceptible to possession (1996:84).
worldly is made alien. Asha, perhaps due to past life experiences, may be susceptible to possession, but she is not accountable for her ‘worldly’ behaviour. Her piety is not in question.

Possession results in the diversion or shifting of agency from the self to the alien other, and at least, on this level, all cultures have mechanisms through which this is achieved. Kakar, in his examination of female possession in India, treats it as a phenomenon of the ‘hysterical personality’. “Hysteria”, he writes,

...is uniquely a neurosis that takes on the coloring of a specific historical and cultural setting. “Vapors,” fainting fits, inexplicable paralyses and convulsions in the Victorian era, the devil or a witch wrestling control of the body to use it for its own purposes in the Middle Ages, are some of the many costumes that the hysterical personality has worn in its time in the West. In fact, the hysterical personality is probably unique in aligning itself with what Krohn calls the prevailing “myth of passivity” of its culture. I am the “passive” vehicle of gods, or of the devil, of my twitchings, or my bhutas, which make me do these things, not my own desires (1996:75-7).

I would argue that in the sense of ‘sanctioning’ passivity or ‘externalising’ agency, possession is to Jains what emotion (arising from our instinctual animal nature or ‘Beast Within’) is to modern Westerners. The Western common-sense view of emotions is that they are something that happen to us; that we are overwhelmed by them. Janice Boddy writes that spirit possession “commonly refers to the hold exerted over a human being by external forces or entities more powerful than she” (1994:407). Except that where passions are reified and then internalised as instincts in contemporary Western culture, they are more likely to be reified as objects (karmic matter or bhutas) in Jainism. Of course the correlation only goes so far; but it may help to consider possession in Jainism as a social mechanism – as a symbolic form through which people perceive and experience themselves, and through which they preserve their moral status.

Emotions in Jainism result from the interaction between the soul and karma, with the soul having exclusive agency, not from the ‘instinctual body’ as we understand it in the modern West. The sramanis often explained the scourge of passions in the following way: although the soul is the original agent, a dialectic exists between it and karmic matter. According to Jain philosophy, the phenomenon of the transformation of forms called srsstvada is a fact of existence and is unchangeable. The root cause of worldly existence is the interaction of soul (jiv) and karmic matter (ajiv) within the naturally occurring “srsstvada”. Soul and karma are eternal and both are susceptible to transformation: the soul influences and transforms karma and vice versa, a phenomenon called “Vyanjana Paryaya”. Their transformation is the very cause of all ‘creation’. Karma covers the soul’s consciousness, and deludes and obstructs
its innate power. *Mohaniya* (delusory) karma is the key-stone of the whole structure in that it
gives rise to emotions – and emotions are responsible for the endurance and tenacity of karma.
In the absence of emotions, karma and soul would not “stick” together. Thus the destruction of
*mohaniya* karma paves the way for the elimination of other varieties of karma (Dundas,
1992:85). The soul is the progenitor of karmic bondage and also the enjoyer of its fruits. It is
responsible for the attraction of both good and bad karma, and karma is the root cause of the
transmigration of the soul. Thus, if Jains claim passivity before an untowardly expression of
desire, it does not mean they were ‘overcome’ by their passionate ‘animal nature’, instead it
signifies the agent is external (e.g., *bhuts/possession*). In the West, emotional outbursts are
either outside of reason, e.g., “wild” or “eruptions within the physical self” (in which case
responsibility is averted), or they are under the tutelage of ‘reason’ (in which case responsibility
cannot be deflected). In Jainism, if passion originates in an external agent – e.g., a *bhut,*
responsibility is averted. If its source is the self/soul, responsibility cannot be deflected. Samani
Asha’s unconventional behaviour is the result of demonic possession, and therefore she cannot
be held responsible for it. But not all violations of protocol are as quietly tolerated, simply
because not all violations can be absolved. The following is an example from my field-notes:

Tonight Muniji [Muni Dulharaji] and I were talking about disobedient ascetics, and he told me of a *sadhvi* who was expelled not long ago. She was in her mid-thirties and was known to have a short temper. She was often reprimanded by her superiors, and was warned that she needed to control herself or that she would be expelled. Her anger would express itself in small ways – she would snap at fellow *sadhvis,* or refuse to do her chores. One night, when her family was visiting the monastery, she became enraged and ripped off her sari and *muhipatt*.
She put on ‘householders’ clothes and her family took her home. Some weeks later, she returned to the monastery and begged Guru Dev to allow her back into the order. She apologised and said that she had made a terrible error; she wanted to lead a spiritual life as a *sadhvi* again. Guru Dev said that he would allow her back in, but on one condition: if she returns, she must take *santara* (fasting unto death). She has not [yet] been able to accept this, evincing her weakness and non-preparedness for spiritual life.

Responsibility for her unorthodox behaviour was all her own, and her disagreeable,
passionate personality reflected a spiritually immature soul. *Santara* is the pre-eminent
expression of ascetic strength, in that it is the supreme renunciation of worldly existence. Settar
(1989) writes that Jains “commend” death and advocate “positive compulsions for ending life”
(1989:xxv). He writes, “Those who invited death, without violating the code of conduct and
without ever thinking of giving up the valiant fight in the middle, became models for the
Sangha as well as the society” (ibid.,xxvi). Because the troublesome *sadhvi* had demonstrated
her unsuitability for ascetic life in such an aggressive manner, nothing less than *santara* could
now vindicate her. Had her behaviour been the result of an external force (*bhuti*), her spiritual purity would not have been in question.\(^{120}\)

Of course the ascetics hope never to be in such an emotional quagmire to begin with, as it would reveal a lack of individual spiritual fortitude and undermine the general ascetic claim of purity and distinctiveness. Ascetics represent an elite, a tiny fraction of all the worldly souls from the heavens, hells and middle world who are actually on the right path to emancipation. They are surrounded by souls more enmeshed in worldly existence than they – souls of the gods, infernal beings, other humans, animal, insects and plants. The ascetic exceeds all of them. Some beings are aware but incapable of pursuing the spiritual life whereas others are completely submerged in ignorance. Most lay Jains would fall into the former category – that is, cognisant of the right path, but not strong enough to pursue it themselves in this life. Most of the remainder of worldly existence would be lumped into the second category, viz. that of ignorance. In other words, to the Jain ascetic, the world around her is primarily filled with deluded souls; those with “perverted beliefs” (*mithyadrsti*) and they are at the lowest level of spiritual advancement (the 1st *gunasthana*). The ascetic, by virtue of her initiation, is said to have reached the 6th *gunasthana* – “self restraint with remissness” (*pramatt samyat*) or the 7th *gunasthana* “self restraint without remissness” (*apramatt samyat*). The demons, as polar extremes, are among the most deluded of all beings: they are powerful as a result of austerities they performed in past lives, but they are misguided and relish tormenting others. Demons therefore do not represent an *extraordinary* state of being. They are the worldly counterparts to the spiritual ascetics, and in this sense they are very ‘ordinary’. Their distinctiveness from humans is more quantitative than qualitative. They are *severely* burdened with worldly delusion and passion, whereas the rest of worldly beings are somewhat less so (e.g., most plants and animals are heavily burdened; most human beings are moderately so, and Jain ascetics are only minimally impeded).\(^{121}\) (see Babb, 1996). But ascetics are not inherently pure; they can only establish their spiritual maturity through their ethical, ascetic behaviour. As argued in Chapter 3, ascetics strive to be – and are seen as – creators of the distinction between the *laukik* (worldly) and the *lokottar* (transcendent); as embodiments of spirituality. Possession, therefore, is very distressing – not because it denotes the ‘occupancy’ of an individual by another spiritual being, which is accepted as possible – but, I suggest, because it threatens to blur the distinction

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120 It has been pointed out to me (O’Connell, pers. comm., n.d.) that Guru Dev’s dictum could be interpreted as a rhetorically shrewd way of making sure an unstable, unsuitable person stays out of the order. This may be the case, but it was not the view proferred by Muniji or the sarnalis with whom I asked about it. They believed that the sadhvi would surely soon return and take *santara*.

121 Ascetics commonly claim to have ‘light’ karma. The karmic load of demons would be very dense.
between the spiritual and the worldly; to collapse the boundary demarcation between ascetics and shravaks. And this distinction is at the heart of Jain ontology.

During the period when Asha was 'indisposed', the samanis were determined to convince me that possession was exceptional, that in fact celestial beings typically seek to honour, not harm ascetics. And besides, they would claim, even in the case of the most dreadful of demonic attacks, the ascetics are almost always capable of withstanding them. The majority of the samanis had either heard the odious and terrifying sounds of bhuts, or seen their effects, but only a handful had had direct contact with the beings. But whatever form their encounters took, the bhuts were always subdued through the samanis' tapas (austerities).

The samanis took pleasure in enumerating the seemingly endless cases of ascetic victories. To my initial astonishment, in several of the cases, the ascetics' victories came at the price of their lives. It appeared that death was not particularly significant within the overall theme of mastery. Control and the conquering of passions resulted in triumph; it resulted in the clear demarcation between the laukik and the lokottar. Death was but the means to this glorious end.

**Triumph Through Death: The Case of Kirin**

The demonic attack of mumukshu Kirin is probably the most celebrated case in the order's recent history. The events leading to her death occurred over a decade ago (1987), and have already become part of Terapanthi folklore, with at least two books in circulation documenting her trials and ultimate victory. Not long after she became a mumukshu, Kirin began to be tormented by a bhut who claimed to be her lover from a past life. The troubles were initially minor, but increased in their occurrence and seriousness as time went on.

I had already known that Urmilla had become a close friend to Kirin during her troubles, supporting her throughout her ordeal with the bhut. Urmilla's fearlessness, though presented as a common ascetic trait, is in fact exceptional in the order. Most of the mumukshus and samanis were terrified to be near Kirin, as they were now with Asha, leaving Urmilla again to assume the burden of care. And because of her courage, she has had more indirect experience with bhuts than any other samani in the order. On the third evening of Asha's possession, I was able to meet with Urmilla after the pratikraman prayers for a couple of hours. While we talked, a householder kept watch over Asha. I wanted to know more about Kirin, and Urmilla was

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122 I will discuss the relationship ascetics have with divine beings in Part 3 of the dissertation: “Being Of the World”
happy to tell of a tale more meritorious than the present one. She laughed at the thought of herself as a bhut-basher, though she was not surprised to find herself in this role. "I have never been afraid," she said, leaning against the back wall of her room exhausted, her eyes betraying a smile beneath her muhpatti.

"Like Lord Mahavir himself!?" I teased.

"No! Even when I was a householder, as a child, I was very bold. My mother always said I was a bad child" she laughed. "You would not believe it was me." She described how she delighted in worldly things as a young girl, dressing up in fashionable clothes and wearing dark charcoal eyeliner. She sported both a nose ring and ear rings and didn't care what her mother and aunts thought. "I was so bold" she repeated. I found it interesting that she saw her courage in the face of demons not to be a product of the ascetic, detached worldview -but stemming from her 'boldness', her confident, if not cocky, [worldly] personality. "I have never been afraid of bhuts and so they don't trouble me. The samanis and mumukshus were so terrified of Kirin's bhut, but I was not."

She recalled some of the events leading up to Kirin’s death:

One night the samanis were in a room doing pratikramin, and Kirin was alone in this room doing samayik [a 48 minute period of absolute non-violence]. Suddenly, just moments after we had finished our prayers, we heard a terrible scream coming from the room. We knew it was probably the bhut. The other samanis were too terrified to move so I went. When I opened the doors I could see there was a fire in the middle of the room. Kirin was screaming. Soon the fire went away. When I went over to Kirin she was trembling. She told me that her head hurt, and when I looked behind the hood of her sari, her choti (pony tail) had been torn out and there was much blood. Days later, when Kirin was chanting mantras, the hair fell from out of the air and onto her lap. The bhut claimed that in her past life she had (unintentionally) killed him when she threw a stone and hit him on the head. Though he still loved her, he also wanted revenge. He planned to kill her so that they would be together again.

Urmilla remained close to Kirin after that until the very end. Most of the other mumukshus and samanis were afraid to be alone with Kirin, or in the presence of her terrifying bhut, but Urmilla was not. She explained how she would accompany Kirin outside the residence at night so she could speak with the bhut;

I could not see nor hear the bhut, but I could understand what they were talking about by what Kirin was saying to him. He loved her and wanted to be with her, and so he wanted her to die - but not as a religious person because then they could not be together. If she had a good rebirth, they would not be together. I held onto Kirin as she stared up at him. Sometimes she would pull her body closer to me, away from him, because he wanted to touch her. He always wanted to touch her, but she never allowed him.

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123 Urmilla indicated it was the room in which we were now sitting.
Over the next couple of months Kirin suffered terribly at the hands of the bhut. A number of other fires were started; objects were thrown at her, blotches of blood appeared on her mumukshu saris, and sometimes he would strangle her, leaving marks on her neck. Kirin found peace only in her sadhana (spiritual practices). It was only through her ascetic practices that she could dis-empower him. Urmilla explained,

Early on, whenever she was in meditation, the bhut could not harm her. Her sadhana caused him pain. Her tapas [ heat ] caused him to feel as though he was being burnt alive. He would beg her to stop hurting him, reminding her how much she loved him in their past lives. But she knew that her ascetic life was the right one, and continued to do her tapas. But between sadhanas was dangerous for her – that was the time the bhut increased his attacks.

In the last year, Kirin became very anxious to be allowed to take diksa ( to become a sadhvi). She was afraid the bhut would soon kill her, and that if she died a mumukshu, she might be forever entangled with him. Sadhvihood would sever connections to worldly existence and would elevate her spiritually. By renouncing her ‘householder’ status, she would be rejecting worldly existence for ever, and would enter an area of purity where the bhut would be unable to harm her. While she believed that the bhut might still be capable of physically harming her as a nun, he could not affect her next birth. But Guru Dev was not in Ladnun during this time, and she knew she would have to take her request to him in Delhi. Most of the mumukshus, samanis, and sadhis, including Sadhvi Kanak Prabha, cautiously supported her request, but they did not share her sense of urgency. She should wait until Maryada Mahotsva. 124 A few years earlier, a similar request had been made by a mumukshu who was caught up in a celestial battle between demonic gods who were tormenting her and benevolent gods who were assisting her. Her dead father communicated to her via a celestial being that she would soon die, and that she should not die a ‘householder’, but as a sadhvi. Guru Dev did not believe that she would soon die because she was very young and seemingly healthy. But sure enough, on the day and at the exact time she predicted, she died. The entire community was shocked and everyone deeply regretted neglecting her appeal. When Kirin made her request, it was not as readily dismissed. Weeks passed, and the attacks increased. One night after a bad episode in which rocks were hurled at her from nowhere, cutting her badly, Kirin decided that the only way she could defeat the bhut would be through sanitara. Urmilla explained;

She could not wait to become a sadhvi, he was going to kill her. When she stopped sadhana, even to sleep, he would attack. She knew she must continue

124 “Festival of Restraint” It is a yearly festival where as many Terapanthi ascetics (and householders) as possible congregate to take stock of the past year and plan for the next. See Flügel, 1995-6.
sadhana always, so she decided to fast. When she would fast, he could not hurt her. She started to fast for 10 days – and then to do sanāra.

Once she began her fast, the bhut was unable to torment her. She knew that if she were to stop the fast and resume her normal life, he would never leave her until he killed her. Since a mumukṣhu cannot even wash her clothes without explicit approval from her superiors, let alone embark on sanāra. her superiors must have tacitly approved of her decision. After two weeks on her fast, she was taken to meet Guru Dev for his consent. The story goes that he was very severe with her at first, challenging her decision. But by the end of their meeting, he gave her his blessing and she returned to Ladnun knowing she would continue her fast until death.

Urmilla recalls that the weeks passed quietly and slowly. Kirin grew weak, and was unable to speak because her mouth became filled with sores. But the bhut was gone, and she was at peace. Sadhvīji made a request to Guru Dev to allow Kirin to take diksa in his absence, and he agreed. After 45 days without food and only the smallest quantity of water, Kirin was initiated as a sadhvi in a ceremony from her bed, surrounded by monks and nuns. Four days later she died. The streets of Ladnun were filled with cheering crowds of householders as the procession carrying her body moved slowly towards the cremation grounds. The body sat in a
open chariot. her mupattu tied to the post behind her head to keep her upright. Her legs were folded, and she looked to be in meditation. Kirin's death represented the victory of asceticism over worldliness; of dispassion over passion; of good over evil. According to Kendall Folkert, santara or sallkhana is an "ideally passionless death" (1987:266), which "ensures that one will not void one's spiritual progress by clinging to material existence at the end of one's lifetime"(ibid.). Through santara, Kirin died a dispassionate death, in total control of her emotions and thereby immune and impervious to demonic attack. Kirin and asceticism had won, and it was an occasion for celebration.

Samani Asha's possession continued. She remained secluded in the same room on the second floor of the Gautam Shalla. She ate infrequently and was unable to perform the pratikraman prayers. So Urmilla said them on her behalf. Most of the samanis were terrified and stayed away. Urmilla, together with a few courageous sadhvis, tried to rid Asha of the bhut on their own. They used the familiar methods of chanting special mantras.\textsuperscript{125} sticking a leather

\textsuperscript{125} One mantra that is considered especially effective to exorcise or deter a bhut is "Om A Bhi Ra Shu Ko", taken from the names of "tapasmunis" (monks of great spiritual power) at the time of the 4th
shoe in her mouth, and of pinching the large toe of her left foot. That such methods and others like them are well known—and are even outlined in detail in the ascetic order’s guidebook, the *Amrit Kalash*—suggests the non-extraordinary nature of possession. But nothing worked. After a period of silence, Asha would still suddenly burst into a tremendous rage, and then a moment later, sob uncontrollably. On the third night the bhut spoke. He told Urmilla and the two householders who were present that he was attracted to Asha because of her beauty. He said he was happy ‘occupying’ her and that he would never leave. At last the nuns admitted they wereoverpowered, and decided they would have to make arrangements to have a *sayana* (ghost doctor or exorcist) come to their assistance.

As with Kirin (among many others), the bhut desires Asha for her *womanliness*. He wants to possess her because he is physically attracted to her—not, so much, because her spiritual practice vexes him. Contrary to official ascetic view on demons, it is not her asceticism but her worldliness (her sexuality) that prompted him to action. Within the walls of the desert monastery in Ladnun, the bhuts that tease and torment the ascetics are, I suggest, metaphors of desire. They are undoubtedly other things to other peoples of different communities (see Kakar, 1996), but in the ascetic world, where desire is the main obstacle to liberation, *bhuts* are embodied desire—and flagrantly so. In the famous stories of the *Tirthankaras*, the *bhuts* represent anger, jealousy and greed. But among the nuns of the Terapanthi, they often represent sexual desire. Indeed, a common theme running through most accounts of demonic attacks and possession of the nuns is desire. Unlike Lord Mahavir’s demonic encounters, these *bhuts* often get personal with the nuns, hoping to establish intimacy.

The *mumukshus*, *samonis* and *sadhvis* had no difficulty telling me about instances of demonic attack, whereas the monks were far more tight-lipped about admitting its occurrence within their male order. I could never get more than a foggy response from the nuns about whether or not they knew of any cases of possession among the monks. Only one nun told me she was certain a *muni* had once, years ago, been ‘caught’. The monks themselves resolutely denied it. While the monks all firmly believe in the existence of the *bhuts*, and accept that braving a demonic attack reveals spiritual power (e.g., Lord Mahavir’s afflictions are a well-known case in point), they claim that attacks and possession are more common among nuns.

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Acharya: Jaiacharya. Their names are Ami Chandji (A); Bhimraj ji (Bhi); Ramsukhaji (Ra); Shiraji (Shi); Kodaraji (Ko)

126 *Amrit Kalash* is a three-volume Terapanthi compilation of essential scriptures, stories, sutras and blessings. See p.71, book #1 for mantras to exorcise demons.

127 Kakar describes malignant spirits “*ātripta*”—ghosts of “unsatisfied desires” (1996:56). He claims that they are spirits of individuals who did not fulfill their life’s potential and therefore seek to possess another in order to do so.
They put a decidedly gendered spin on the phenomenon of possession: possession symbolises a loss of control, and women’s emotional natures cause them to be more unstable. Demons, as beings of passion, prey on fear and desire. And because women are more emotional and more fearful than men, the monks assert, they are more vulnerable to demonic possession. Just as their emotional nature made them better devotees, it makes them easier to ‘control’. Reynell’s research on Jain female sexuality is pertinent here. She writes,

The Jains regard this issue of [sexual] control as imperative, not only because of the feared repercussions if a woman follows the wrong course of action, but also because women are seen as emotionally vulnerable in the first place. It is believed that their greater depth of emotional feeling increases their liability of being led astray by male admirers declaring their “love” (1985:180).

Women’s perceived emotional nature is considered a source of danger to them (and society), whether in the household or ascetic life. The nuns do not dispute their natures as being more emotional than the monks, and they accept that they are more subject to demonic attack and possession.

At least as far as bhuts are expressions of sexual desire, their penchant for women may be understandable within the context of ascetic life. Female desire is far more circumscribed than male sexual desire and, bhuts can and do openly express desire that nuns could not even admit to feeling. Conquering sexual desire is not considered an obstacle for sadhvis, as it is for munis, because female desire (among ascetics) is considered to be non-existent (see p.93). It is repudiated and disavowed. Monks openly talk about the difficulties of renouncing sexual desire, including even Guru Dev himself. If a monk’s resolve is weakened, or he feels temptation, he can acknowledge it and perform austerities to weaken his desire. I suggest that a nun will have to channel such desires elsewhere, disguise them to make them acceptable. In many cultures, women regard themselves more as objects than as subjects of desire – and this is especially so in a male dominant, ascetic culture. And routes that would normally be available to lay women to express desire (e.g., marriage) are not available to sadhvis. Demonic attack, therefore, in addition to allowing nuns a legitimate experience of being a ‘subject’ of desire, affirms them as traditional ‘objects’ of desire.

Desire is differently interpreted and experienced among nuns and monks. For monks, to experience desire (however unfortunate it may be to them) presents an opportunity to measure

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128 Both nuns and monks claim that nuns, more often than not, are the objects of demonic attack. (See Kakar’s discussion of female possession, (1996:76)). I accept their statements as tentatively true, since during my time at the monastery I did not learn of any attacks against munis. However, given the secrecy surrounding Asha’s difficulties, it is unlikely that I would have ever learned of a monk’s possession.
an advance spiritually; for nuns it represents worldliness, attachment, and depravity. It is not
that nuns project their own desires onto the demonic realm, they experience desire as alien. As
Catherine Lutz argues, making a basic anthropological insight;

Culturally provided knowledge systems constitute the structures of existence in
a fundamental way; they determine how people experience themselves and
each other...[C]ultural knowledge is not merely a tool used by the thinking
person, it is rather both the form and substance of consciousness. This
characteristic makes it invisible, in large part, to its bearer (1985:65).

Nuns, it would appear, experience desire as alien and frightening, in a way monks do
not. Where monks might interpret/experience sexual desire as the self’s arousal by a passive
threat (e.g., another human being), nuns might interpret/experience it as an active, external one
(i.e. bhuts). These experiences would be entirely fitting with cultural understandings of men
and women’s ‘natures’.

The local sayana finally arrived on the fourth night of Asha’s possession. He was said
to be very powerful, and adept in tantra. Immediately he understood what type of demon he
was dealing with, and knew exactly which mantras to use to exorcise the demon. The sayana
spoke with the bhut, demanding him to leave Asha. The bhut answered that he found her so
beautiful, he would never leave her. He also demanded all sorts of sweets “kilos and kilos”, but
no one brought him any.129 But the sayana was stronger than the bhut, and within a few hours,
he had driven him away and Asha was released. She was deeply distraught after learning what
had happened to her, and did not participate in the usual ascetic practices for a number of days.
But she was not punished. Her behavior had been decidedly contrary to the ascetic ideal, and
yet it was condoned because she could simply not be blamed. Accountability lay elsewhere.

In a world where emotions are banished, demons are familiar fellows. I suggest that
bhuts are metaphors of the ‘worldly’ in general, and of passions/desire in particular. They
provide an example of the antithesis to the ascetic life, and embody worldliness in all its
debauchery and immorality – and in an unambiguous manner.

Demons possess souls, as do all beings, and will endure innumerable incarnations until
they one day achieve emancipation. We see that in Jainism, therefore, demons are considerably
different from the embodiments of evil we in the West understand by that name. Our
understanding of demons is far more essential and absolute; centring on a ‘type’ or ‘nature’.
Whereas in Jainism it represents a degree. In Jainism, human beings and demons are
functionally, but not essentially, opposed. They form part of the same continuum, albeit at polar

129 Bhuts are notorious for their ‘sweet tooths’. Indeed, an individual’s senseless craving for sweets may
signal the presence of a demon.
extremes. Like animals and plants, demons and humans are all part of the same drama. And since Jain moral identity is defined negatively vis-à-vis external worldliness, bhuts — as worldly counterparts to the other-worldly ascetic — are central players in the demarcation between good and evil; between the lokottar and laukik. Indeed, if withstanding the passive worldly temptation of ‘householders’ is what constitutes an ascetic, enduring the extraordinary ‘active’ worldly threat of demons establishes greatness.

Bhuts are a micro-discourse on Jain ontology. The battle of the ascetic against the bhut is essentially the conflict between the worldly and the transcendent writ small. It is the cosmic battle fought on the individual battlefield between discipline and desire.
PART 3:
BEING OF THE WORLD
CHAPTER 6  THE WORLDLY LIFE OF RENUNCIANTS

From the guest house roof, I was in a privileged position to see the monastery turn from sober to near frenzy as everyone rushed for cover from the impending storm. A monk was in near-trot as he made his way past the guest house, balancing a stack of full pairas in the swaying jholi. Two samanis, dressed in their kavatchan, strode vigorously, keeping their heads down to evade the whipping sand. The householders, less bound by protocol, were in full gait. The peacocks were already in the trees, looking rather precarious as they stood motionless on the branches, determined not to lose their balance. The camels feigned indifference. They were in no rush as their riders herded them under a large tree. The jaded creatures folded their legs and eased their immense bodies to the ground, allowing the harried riders, who were construction workers at a nearby site, to dismount and dash off.

The sky was so black it looked as if it were filled with soot, and the trees swayed violently as the winds picked up. I carried my clothes downstairs just in time. I joined others on the open veranda of the guest house and together we watched the gale raging just feet away. The storm instantly became a shared event and washed away reserve as easily as it did sand. Everyone spoke spontaneously and warmly, but soon we were engulfed in a whorl of hot sand and had to flee back to our rooms. I could see nothing in the pitch darkness of my room, but could hear sand thrashing into my small washroom through a chink in the wall. Within moments the sounds of the generator spurted and the lights and fan struggled to life. In the flickering light I could see a blanket of wet sand covering my floor!

From the very start, I had noticed small amounts of the desert sand, along with insects of every variety, freely entering my abode through a hole in the wall. The hole was no bigger than a shoe box – perhaps the first efforts to make a window. I had asked the superintendent Mr. Gupta for help in blocking it, but nothing was done. In the winter months, I had used a piece of cardboard to block out the cool air, but now the strong gusts of hot sand were now enough to collapse my make-shift barricade. After each incident, I would ask Mr Gupta for help.

“Oh, yes, yes. Dreadful. I will have Bapu fix it,” he would say so earnestly that, for the first two months, I believed him every time. But nothing ever happened. I taped newspaper sheets to the cement walls, but they were child’s play before the mildest gusts. Again, this morning, I called Mr Gupta in to see the mess. “Dreadful,” he said shaking his head. Then he bellowed for Bapu, who came shuffling, in the same way all the servants did – bent forward

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130 The ideas for this chapter were formed during my visits to Delhi in long and delightful discussion with Professor A.N. Pandeya.
slightly, arms hanging limply by his side, and with a deliberately indifferent look on his face. Like every other time, Bapu was shown the problem, instructed and sent off.

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I was irritated as I headed over to Gautam Shalla. The samanis were already occupied with their regular chores and appeared to have weathered the storm effortlessly. A sweeper woman was busily whisking sand into tidy dunes in the open courtyard and another was swashing a wet mop over the marble terrace. The samanis never could wash the floors themselves, for it required raw (‘live’) water and a disinfectant, which would result in the death of innumerable beings. The sweeper women were from the Harijan village on the outskirts of Ladnun and, I was told, were not concerned with the rules of ahimsa. Appalled, the samanis would tell me that they even ate meat and drank alcohol.131 When I entered Urmilla’s room, she was not there. She and several others had been called to Rishabdwat for a meeting with Sadhvi Kanak Prabha. But Samani Shanta sat quietly near the window, reading. She looked up as I approached. “You do not look well today”, she said flatly, interrupting my words of obeisance to her. I bowed and then sat crossed-legged on the floor in front of her. I knew I must have looked like a chimney sweep. My hair was filled with sand and, since I had been unable to bathe after the storm, my clothes were dingy and dirty brown. She, like all the ascetics, radiated cleanliness. It astonished me how they managed it. To “bathe”, they were allowed only a damp cloth (with ajiv or ‘dead’ water), and many of them insisted on using only a dry cloth for their faces and arms.132

“I am fine,” I said, but almost immediately began to recount the story of my disagreeable room. At first I was hesitant with my words – trying to downplay my frustration somewhat. I feared she might resent being drawn into so trivial and worldly a problem. But she

131 A number of the Harijan villagers discounted this when I went to meet with them. They claimed that although some among them ate meat and drank liquor, others were strict vegetarians. They said that by labelling them all as meat eaters was just an excuse by the ascetics to justify never going to their homes for bhiksha.

132 During his leadership, Guru Dev Tulsi initiated changes to allow the ascetics to maintain a certain standard of hygiene and the appearance of cleanliness. For example – and not without controversy – he allowed them to wash their clothes weekly (of course, using ‘ajiv’ water). He argued that if they were interacting with householders, and if they wanted to give a good impression to all about the ascetic life, they ought to appear clean. Prior to this arrangement, ascetics were not allowed to wash their clothes at all.
asked many questions and had stories of her own to tell. In the end she advised me, “Tell Muniji tonight when you meet with him”.

“Muniji?!” I was surprised. “He instructs me in dharma, why should he want to hear of my domestic problems?” She closed her eyes and shook her head – as if in annoyance with my naiveté. “He will want to know” was all she said.

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Muniji was sitting at his usual place on the open terrace of the monks residence, leaning against one of the pillars with his eyes closed; a light bulb dangling from the wall above him. As I approached I resolved to tell him about my room immediately. It would be easier that way than trying to find a way to raise the mundane subject in the midst of a talk about karma or ahimsa. After paying him homage, he asked how I was keeping, providing me with my opportunity:

“I am fine except for some problems with my room. I am not sure who to speak to about it – ”

“What problems?” he asked seriously, as if such matters were entirely within his concern, and sounding like a school principal.

“Sand is coming into my room through a hole in the wall. There are several inches of sand and mud on the floor. And now the drain is completely blocked . . .”.

“You have told Mr. Gupta?” he asked. His knowledge of the superintendent’s name surprised me, for it seemed to reflect a familiarity with the mundane and the worldly. I had expected him to say something about the evils of attachment to place or to body.

“Yes, many times. I suppose he is busy” I said trying to be magnanimous before the holy man. But Muniji shook his head in irritation and said, “I will speak with him”.

The remainder of our talk centred on the weather. He explained how terrible the sand storms in Rajasthan can be – how no one dares venture outdoors during a bad one. He said that even from a chink in a wall, a room can be swamped with sand. But sand was more manageable than water; he recounted terrible tales of floods in the south. I told him about Canadian winters, which made him feel that sand was better than snow. Then the sounds of a young monk calling all to prayer broke into our discussion - forty minutes had passed and we hadn’t got around to talking about dharma. There was a feeling of strain as I joined my hands to pay respect, and lowered my head. Then the young monk appeared. Muniji held onto the youth’s arm as he struggled to his feet. Just before turning to walk away, he said curtly, “Tomorrow, bring your questions”.

The next morning I returned from breakfast to find my room in perfect condition: the opening was boarded up with wood, the floor swept clean. I was flabbergasted. I turned on the faucet and watched the water flow freely down the wide drain. Divine intervention!

Later that day when I saw Shanta entering the library with another samani, I caught up with her to tell her the good news. After recounting the story, she said with a wan smile, “Now you see how things work here.” I was taken aback by what appeared to be her cynicism. Raising my joined palms in thanks and in farewell, I watched her and the other samani disappear into the small, poorly lit building, and I wondered what she had meant, and whether or not I misunderstood her.

For six months I had tried in vain to resolve my mundane problem through the avenues and mechanisms of the laukik (social) realm. Yet it was only by tapping into the powers of the lokottar (transcendent) that the problem was resolved. The social power of the religious elite and, concomitantly, the influence of lay elites in religious matters is as well established as it is inevitable (Babb, 1996:52, Cort, 1991, Flügel, 1995-6, Folkert, 1993:167-186). The interdependence of society and religion is a conspicuous feature of the Terapanthi community despite the order’s uncompromising insistence on the doctrinal separation of the two realms (Flügel, 1995-6). Indeed, the order’s insistence on the rigid demarcation of religion and society may paradoxically exacerbate interdependence, as Flügel suggests:

[The new doctrine of Bhiksu has effectively not been able to overcome the fundamental problem of routinisation as described by Weber (1985: 142-8). It merely generated a new set of practical paradoxes. Generally, the increased degree of differentiation of religion and society produced both a greater immediacy and a greater indirectness of the links between the dharmasangh and the laity (1995-6:127).]

Muniji is a respected senior monk with the reputation of being a very learned scholar. His intellectual accomplishments and seniority have earned him considerable reverence from the more junior ascetics, and from the lay community generally. All are eager to receive his wisdom, and consequently he has to regulate his time assiduously. To have him intervene on my behalf meant instant success, and it also meant an elevation in my own status among the guesthouse workers. It is a paradox of monastic life that the more successful one is as a

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133 Flügel (BEI 1995-6) provides an excellent historical analysis of this process.
134 For example, since Terapanthi ascetics cannot stay in purpose-built residences they rely on the homes of their lay followers for accommodation, giving the laity more influence (Flügel 135). And because the Terapanthi abolished the role of the yati, (a resident ascetic, or one who owns property), there exists no intermediary between the shravaks and ascetics. Rather, it is the acharya who has total responsibility for all aspects of lay-ascetic interaction and lay socio-religious events.
135 Indeed, to not have had the ascetics—even lowly mumukṣus – intervene earlier was evidence of my peripheral status. This lesson in cross-boundary power was brought home to me even more forcefully just days later. During one large afternoon ceremony, Guru Dev called on me to stand up. He said that he had
renunciant, the more surely one is pulled into worldly concerns. The higher one’s position in the ascetic organisation, the more time one spends with shravaks. Guru Dev, Acharyasri, Yuvacharya, Sadhvi Pramukha and all senior or charismatic ascetics have very little time for their own spiritual practices. Indeed, they must learn to practice their sadhana in public.\(^{136}\)

Put baldly, the ascetics must be concerned with the daily lives of the householders because they are the lifeblood of the order (Folkert, 1993:167-177). But social forces conspire to shift the focus of ascetic life away from detachment and aloneness towards public management. With each ‘success’ for the order, that is, with each new ascetic initiate, the order is brought a step closer to “society” from which it tries to stand opposed. The larger the order, the more dependent it is on the laity. Interaction with shravaks is neither random nor incidental, as it was with the great ascetic heroes, but rather is has become highly managed (see Reynell, 1985:218). Only a few hours of each day remain ‘off limits’ to householders. At all other times, the ascetics find themselves surrounded by householders and drawn into their worldly problems – just as Muniji was to mine. Furthermore, the more charismatic an ascetic the larger his following. And the more time he spends with shravaks means less time for his own sadhana.

Even though the socio-economic foundation of ascetic organisation rests in the socially circulated, validated and accepted ethical formulation of reciprocity, the ideology of world renunciation remains legitimate only to the extent that outright reciprocity is denied (see Chapter 3). There seems to be an unspoken agreement between householders and ascetics to valorise the ideological over the material, and to not examine the material basis of their shared existence. The reality of interdependence leads a shadowy, ‘behind-the-scenes’ existence. so that moksa marg (liberation path) and laukik marg (worldly path) remain fundamentally separate and distinct.

Kenneth Oldfield depicts ascetics and householders in this idealised manner – like billiard-balls that come together briefly, perhaps beneficially, only to return to their essentially separate existences. He writes,

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The lives of the laity caught up in business, journalism, medicine and education, all occupations which involve them deeply in the pragmatic decision-making which is part of living in the world, contrasts sharply with the lives of the monks and nuns who wholeheartedly pursue the path of
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been observing me since my arrival six months earlier, and was now convinced that I was a Jain sadhvi in my past incarnation. The audience was delighted and from that day on, there was neither a monk nor nun who wouldn’t smile when our paths crossed, nor a householder who didn’t invite me to eat at her home.\(^{136}\) In conversation with me, many ascetics attributed incredible powers of concentration to their gurus: “Between questions from householders, Acharyasri is deep in meditative thought”... “Though he is concerned with everyone, he remains detached from everything”...
purification that leads to moksa (release). This contrast represents a tension that lies at the very heart of the religion, a heart which . . . is concerned with resolving the conflict between the path of dharma followed by the laity and the path of moksa followed by the ascetics. The meeting place of the two paths is the stanak (building) or the temple where ascetics and laity encounter each other. The meeting is a tirtha, a crossing over point between the commercial world of the Jain businessman and the sacred world of the monks and nuns pursuing their path of purification. . . . Jains are preoccupied with the idea of achieving release from the evils of this world and the meetings with the ascetics for the laity appear symbolically to represent that quest, for in the meetings the boundaries and conflicts between the path of dharma and moksa are dissolved and the laity can glimpse into the world of purity and peace (1982:95-96).

Oldfield’s opinion is well founded, but he is confining his discussion to that of the Jain ideal, and in this his portrayal is incomplete. The shravak and ascetic represent the opposed ‘worldly orientation’ (laukik pravrtti) and spiritual orientation (lokottar pravrtti) metaphorically. Nevertheless, no matter how stubbornly the laukik-lokottar polarity is affirmed, and no matter how significant the ideological realm in shaping interpretations and informing actions, day-to-day practices undermine it, exposing the intertwined nature of lay and ascetic life.

Power in the monastic order translates into power in lay society, and ascetics are ‘utilised’ for both spiritual and material gain. Charismatic ascetics may initially be in demand to give blessings or advice, but with time they are sought after because their popularity itself makes them important “brokers” in the community. They become “spiritual” conduits, legitimating individuals, families and businesses (Flügel, 1995-6). Local political leaders, for example, have found it in their interest to publicly endorse Guru Dev’s Anuvrat movement, for this in turn translates into popular support. Business leaders make enormous donations to the order – not only because of the good spiritual merit that will result from it – but from the very worldly benefits as well, in terms of reputation, alliances and so on. And conversely, the monastic order has extended itself deeply into lay life to make use of lay resources in order to secure support for its own religious projects. Flügel writes,

[T]ime enduring structures have emerged amongst Jains through the development of permanent links between ascetic groups and certain lay elites, who support religious networks and pilgrimages not only for religious purposes but also as means of both status acquisition and political and economic integration (1995-6:120).

Flügel’s essay on the social organisation of the Terapanth takes issue with ‘culturalist’ approaches to the study of South Asian religions. He argues that the studies share “the Neo-Kantian view of history as a manifestation of cultural ideals” (ibid.:118). Instead he advocates an approach which
allows us to understand the integration of a society as the perpetually contested renewal of a compromise between two series of imperatives: the internal conditions of the social integration of the lifeworld, and the external conditions of its functional integration vis-à-vis an only partially controllable environment. If values and functions don’t match, then a compromise holds only as long as the actual functions of social orientations remain latent (ibid.:119).

I would argue that in Jainism, where values and functions compete (i.e., between the laukik/lokottar), a ‘compromise’ exists precisely because the ‘actual functions of social orientations’ are deliberately kept latent. Although Flügel’s critique is important, and he applies it skilfully to the analysis of the Terapanth order, an approach which does not give cultural ideals a place of prominence is inadequate to explain the tradition’s significance for its followers. Clearly, to the Jains, their religious beliefs are not “rationalisations of the socio-psychological processes involved” (ibid.:169). Rather, socio-economic, political and psychological processes are of secondary importance; they are products of samsar’s obfuscations. In spite of the appearance of the interdependence of the laukik and lokottar in day to day life, Jains believe they are ontologically distinct. Thus, the community’s motivations to keep latent these mechanisms of reciprocity are rooted in an attempt to uphold their conceptions of reality.

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When the ‘infrastructure’ of reciprocity is glimpsed (or perhaps, acknowledged) as it is on certain occasions, the fragile boundary between the lokottar and the laukik is threatened with dissolution. On several occasions, under Acharya Tulsi’s (Guru Dev) leadership, the Terapanthi order became entangled in a controversy over such ‘boundary maintenance’. Acharya Tulsi embarked on a number of ‘modernisations’, all of which were controversial precisely because they were perceived by some as blurring the distinctions between the lokottar and laukik. On Tulsi’s reforms Flügel states,

Compared to Bhiksu’s vision of a purely ascetic Jainism, the Terāpanth of today has considerably changed, particularly through a series of controversial innovations that were introduced by ācārya Tulsi in the first decades after Indian independence (1949-1981). In order to secure the growing influence of the Terāpanth under the changed social conditions, Tulsi gradually reverted back to a traditional Jain system by forming closer bonds with the laity and promoting programs of religious and moral education for the society as a whole. He showed great ingenuity in the construction of an all-inclusive corporative sectarian organisation by creating a new network of ‘socio-religious’ institutions for the laity, to carry the Anuvrat (small vow. 1949),
These changes were met by intense criticism on the part of many Terapanthi householders and some ascetics. Satish Kumar, for example, in an autobiographical account of his years as a Terapanthi monk, writes,

During the eight years I had been a monk I was always with my guru (Tulasi). He treated me as his son and I treated him as my father. People thought that I was being groomed as his successor. But I was beginning to feel overpowered by him. His answers no longer satisfied me. *Ever since his decision to modernise the order, I felt he was travelling in two boats at the same time denouncing the world and also seeking its recognition* (cited in Oldfield, 1982:88. Italics added).

Dissent over Tulsi’s modernisations culminated in the defection of a group of *sadhvis* and *munis* in 1981. The breakaway group became the most recent Jain ascetic order, calling themselves the “New” or “Naya” Terapanthi. I quote at length from Oldfield who was in Rajasthan in 1982 and followed the controversy:

To develop the *Anuvrat* movement on a national scale, trust funds were established under Acharya Tulasi’s control and Jain businessmen in particular contributed generously to them. It is Tulasi’s use of these trusts and his involvement in the administration and finance of the movement, rather than in the rigours of the ascetic life, that much of the new schism has developed . . .

According to press reports, the schism had been simmering for about five years, but only became public knowledge in October 1981 when a number of monks and nuns submitted their “muh-patras” (letters of resignation). Matters reached a head when Tulasi nominated his “yubacharya” (his successor) at a public function in 1977. Apparently in 1972 Tulasi had agreed that he would nominate Muni Rupchand as his yubacharya but at a public function for the formal naming in 1977 Tulasi nominated Muni Nathmal, a monk closely involved with Anuvrata and a biographer of Acharya Bhiksu. Muni Rupchand and his supporters have complained of favouritism and claim that the reason for the sudden switch rests in Rupchand’s refusal to pay court to a rich business friend of Tulasi in Calcutta. A supporter of the “Nav” Terapanth (New Terapanth – the name given to the breakaway group) claims that “The rich sravakas (laymen) have a stake in getting a pliable yubacharya because he can ensure influential contracts for them . . .

The main thrust of criticism against Acharya Tulasi is that he has brought the Terapanth sect into disrepute by making it a meeting ground for businessmen and politicians and has flouted the basic Terapanthi principles by living a less than austere life, enjoying pomp and show. Tulasi himself refuses to enter into answering his critics with people outside the order but in a signed interview published in a Jaipur daily he claimed that all the funds he had collected had been for the benefit of humanity and he urged his detractors to “move with the times” . . .
In his letter of resignation, Rupchand’s co-leader in the breakaway group, Muni Chandmal, wrote, “my soul does not any longer endorse the utterance of such benedictions to you every morning as ‘My Lord you are the essence of the organisation. I have the highest respect for you.’ My heart trembles to utter such non-truths (1982: 86-87).

Oldfield adds,

During January of this year [1982] my informants were receiving letters from both sections of the schism explaining their position and seeking their support. Most of my informants were impatient with the dispute, claiming that it represented a clash of personalities which reflected a decline in the quality of the ascetic order, who on entering the ranks renounce the world of ego. Muni Chandmal, speaking for the rebels, said in January: “We have resolved not to let politics and business enter our precincts. We don’t want a dictator around us so we have decided not to have an acharya-for-life” (ibid.:88).

Oldfield claims that much of the criticisms of the breakaway appear to have been substantiated by news reports, but he nevertheless sees the controversy within a wider historical context. He writes,

The strength of Jainism that has already been noted, of a harshly ascetic monastic order being supported by and having its roots in a wealthy commercial-class laity contains also the incipient danger of constant dissension and division, particularly when the ascetics attempt, as Tulasi has, to reinterpret the ancient rigid tradition in response to the needs of a new generation. In his attempt to present Jainism to a wider audience and make it more relevant to the needs of India today, as he sees it, Tulasi has found himself, inevitably, compromising with the world of big business and politics, a world which some of his laity and his mendicants consider he renounced when becoming a monk. Yet schisms of this nature can be interpreted as reflecting the liveliness and healthiness of the tradition and can be seen as pointing to the fact that the faith continues to be a vital force in Indian society today (ibid.:91).

The Importance of Obedience

Not surprisingly, according to the ascetics of the Terapanthi order, the schism did not stem from the order’s involvement in worldly affairs, but from the maan (egoism) of a few disobedient members. Every time I raised the subject, I was told the same thing: Muni Rupchand was jealous of Acharyasri Mahaprajna’s nomination for Yuvacharya; that he was very egotistical and felt he ought to be successor. Unable to bear the decision, he said all sorts of bad things about Guru Dev and turned others against the order. Eventually he and his followers left.

For example, a couple of weeks after my room had been ‘miraculously’ repaired, Samanis Urmilla, Shanta and I sat talking outdoors in the sandy courtyard of the Gautam Shalla.
It was an especially mild afternoon and they had just finished the weekly chore of washing their groups' saris. They both sat crossed-legged on top of semi-dry saris which, tightly-folded and piled several high, looked like a square white cushion. With the weight of their own bodies, they 'ironed' the saris — and did a marvellous job of it too. I had just come back from a few days in Delhi where I had visited the Naya Terapanthi order. I had met with the head nun and found her to be very open and friendly. She inquired about what was happening in Ladnun, and about my work. Urmilla and Shanta listened with interest, and then told me that that 'head nun' was Sadhvi Pramukha's sister. She had left with Munis Rupchand and Chandmal, and encouraged other sadhvis to leave with her.

"Guru Dev did not wish for them to go," Urmilla said, "but because of their maan (egoism), they were blinded". Shanta sat quietly mending her kavatchan, saying very little.

"Without discipline," Urmilla continued, "we would be nothing. Who are we to challenge our leaders?" After a long pause, and some advice to Shanta on her patchwork, Urmilla soberly added, "I have experienced Guru Dev's hard and soft eyes. We all have. He is strict with us because he cares about us. We must learn discipline, otherwise how can we succeed?"

I asked her why she had felt his "hard eyes" and she explained that a few years back when Guru Dev was spending his chaturmas in Jaipur, she had disobeyed him. The congregation was gathered for the pravachan (sermon) but Guru Dev was sick with a sore throat and was having difficulty speaking. After just a few moments into his lecture, he called upon a samani to sing a song. Then, at its close, he called upon Urmilla to say something to the congregation:

He called me to stand up and speak before him, before the whole order and audience. I had nothing planned and I was startled. I could think of nothing, my mind was blank with fear... So, I kept my eyes down and asked the samani beside me to stand. At first she said "No! You must go" - but I could not. It happened quickly, but the time passed slowly. Everyone's eyes were on me. I could not move. I could not even look up at Guru Dev. Finally the samani beside me stood to speak. I have no memory of what she said. I felt so terrible. I could not lift my head.

She explained how after the sermon, all the samanis and sadhvis scolded her for her disobedience, which made her feel even more wretched. Later that same day, when she and the other samanis met with Sadhvi Pramukha, she was publicly reprimanded. The head nun used her error as an important lesson in obedience. She said that it was a matter of discipline and therefore very significant to both ascetics and householders. During that week and the one that followed, when she joined the samanis in doing vandana to Guru Dev, he ignored her. He gave all the others his blessing — by looking directly at them or raising his hand towards them in
acknowledgement – but he entirely disregarded Urmilla. She said it was one of the most difficult periods in her life. Finally one day he called for her, and told her he had some important work for her to do. She was grateful that he had included her in his fold once again. She told him that she was sorry for her disobedience, and in the end, he gave her his blessing. She said,

It would not have mattered what I would have said that day when he called me – even something very short. I should not have gone against Guru Dev. It is a matter of discipline. Guru Dev always says that if the bricks of a building are not strong, it will disintegrate; we must not neglect the small things. It is never the great vows that are broken – only the small rules and regulations. So we must be alert!

Another samani came out of a room to collect the ‘pressed’ saris. Shanta and Urmilla rocked forward on their knees, and she pulled the saris from beneath their bottoms. When Urmilla left to fetch another bundle of saris for ‘pressing’, I stayed back with Shanta for a few moments longer, watching her finish her mending job. Finally she too got up to leave, and as she did, she said in a very soft voice, “Can you come and visit me tonight?”

“Of course,” I said. “I will come after prayers”.

***

Shanta struck me as a deeply reserved person, someone who preferred to listen than to actively participate in conversations. Her smile was bashful and – even when wearing the muhpatti – she would only laugh with her hand covering her mouth. That evening, I followed her into her room after the Arhat Vandana had been recited, a time when all the samanis return to their room for study or meditation. It was one of the few quiet times of the day, when they could catch up on their work or studies. And if there was no work to be done or no meetings being called, they could sit and talk with other samanis, meditate or read. The samanis that shared Shanta’s room were at a meeting with Niyojikaji, so we sat alone in her tiny windowless chamber. Along the back wall were metal cabinets that resembled high-school lockers. But instead of posters of movie stars on the inside of the doors were posters of Acharya Bhikshu, Guru Dev and the other Terapanthi leaders. She pulled open one of the doors and took out a book from a large pile, and handed it to me. It was an English language textbook on contemporary ethics. It had chapters on euthanasia, abortion, freedom of speech, among others.

“Would you like to read it?” she asked.

“Sure,” I said “Have you read it?”

“No. I don’t understand it. Do you have other books that might be easier?”
“On this subject?”
“— Yes” she said equivocally
“Not here in Ladnun. I could send you something from home.”
“I cannot answer you if you write to me” she said quickly, and then looked away from me. Our conversation appeared artificial and she seemed very nervous. After what felt like a long silence, she said, “What Urmilla explained to you today — about discipline — it is true. It is everything.”
I nodded, recalling Urmilla’s words. “It is not what I had thought” she continued. “Discipline is necessary in an order, but here it is mostly about discipline and order.”
I still just kept looking at her, trying to make sense of what she was saying. Her critical words contrasted sharply with my image of her as a docile and devoted disciple. It took me some time before I abandoned my framework. Our exchange two weeks earlier (after Munji had my room repaired) came back to my mind. Maybe her words: “Now you see how things work here” were meant to be cynical after all, I thought. She continued, “Most of what we do has nothing to do with spirituality. It is about order, about living together”.
“Are you not happy in the order?” My artless question was too direct and unambiguous, and she flinched.
“I do not know . . . I wish I could live as a samnyasi in the forest.” She smiled timidly. Her words astonished me. I did not feel as though I knew her well enough to hear them. I realised the enormity of what she was saying. I also realised that, as an outsider, I was probably one of the very few people to whom she could talk like this. Her body was trembling – not from fear I believe, but from the portentousness of what she was saying.
We sat staring: my eyes fixed on her, and her eyes glued to the book she had taken out of the locker. Then — seemingly out of the night sky — a family appeared at the open door. They were hunched forward in deference waiting to be invited in. Their hands, in supplication, covered their mouths. The smallest among them, a boy of no more than three, stood by his mother with his hands joined and held high. On his mother’s cue, he charged in and stood in front of Shanta. His palms together, he swirled his tiny arms in three circles, and then fell to his knees and ceremoniously lowered his head to the ground. He kept it there long after Shanta raised her hand in blessing and invited them in. The boy’s father then scooped him up and praised his efforts. Delighted with himself, he began to perform the routine all over again. Hands

137 The ascetics cannot correspond with householders in writing unless it is absolutely urgent. It is seen as a frivolous exercise and potentially harmful (himsa) if such writings are misunderstood or misused.
held high...three swirls...but this time, his mother sternly grabbed hold of his little hands and put a stop to it. Shanta handed me the book on ethics, and with a look of apology she said, “Can you come tomorrow night?”

I nodded as I bowed to her before the householders, and then left. I returned to my room that night feeling especially anxious. I felt desperate for Shanta, but didn’t know how I could possibly help her.

***

Shanta was grappling with what is surely the single greatest paradox of monastic life, viz., the more one tries to step outside of society, the more one is in it. As G.S. Ghurye writes in the introduction of his book on Indian ascetics,

Monastic life leads to the endeavour of creating social organisation peculiarly fitted for the ascetic life. Thus asceticism leading in its growth to monastic life creates the paradoxical phenomenon of social organisation for those who not only negatived but also renounced social connections and individual wants (1953:1995:1).

The ascetic rhetoric of aloneness and detachment is a discoursce; an ideal framework through which life’s events are interpreted, and even to a large extent, experienced. But there is a huge distance between the ideal and the real. The ascetics’ schedule allows for very little free time and – even within those rare unregulated moments – it is seldom spent alone. Their days are not spent isolated in meditation, study and penance – as those of the ascetic heroes were – but, rather in group activities such as alms collecting, prayers and chores. Their days are minutely regulated from sunrise to sunset, so that even ‘free time’ is supervised. After observing Terapanthi monastic life, Holmstrom states;

So much of the training for the sadhvis and many of the rules or conventions of their everyday life are concerned paradoxically with communal living, with co-operation and sisterhood between sadhvis. It is then a society contained within, and delimited against, the ‘social’” (1988:36).
Communal living requires ‘social’ rules of co-operation, but it also breeds the ‘social’ vices of competition and ambition. Most ascetics are deeply immersed in these ‘social’ dimensions of monastic life – in the day-to-day rules and regulations for communal living and in ambitious efforts to stand out as individuals in a rigidly hierarchical order. These social factors dominate ascetic life every bit as much as they do lay life.

Although Shanta was surely not alone in her disillusionment with ascetic life, for many, it is the very social nature of the order that attracts them. In fact, there is little doubt that most would not have pursued asceticism if, in fact, it entailed a life of isolation. Paul Dundas writes,

> One thing seems certain. Nobody today becomes a Jain ascetic to enter a state of contemplative solitude, for the lives of monks and nuns seldom offer an opportunity for sustained privacy (1992:132-133).

In the Terapanthi hierarchical structure, everyone’s role is clearly delineated and upward mobility is encouraged. Discipline and obedience to one’s superior are absolutely essential to the smooth functioning of the order, and yet ironically, it reintroduces those rules and regulations for communal living that the renunciant is said to renounce. Dundas writes,

> ‘Discipline is the root of religious practice’ (DVS 9.2.2.). From a relatively ancient period, the Jains produced collections of rules which were designed not just to instruct the ascetic how to carry out the obligations entailed in his vows but also to regulate inter-monastic relationships, delineate acceptable forms of connection with lay supporters, and enable senior monks to impose penances for misdemeanours (1992:153).

Renunciation therefore, involves the negation of society “out there” and a concomitant recreation of society from ‘A to Z’ behind monastery walls.

**The Terapanthi Hierarchy**

All monastic life, based as it is on the guru-shishya (teacher-disciple) relationship, is inherently hierarchical. But the Terapanthi is unique among all Jain sects in its degree of centralisation. Nalini Balbir describes the organisation of the order.

> Les Tp (Terapanthins) forment une organisation “de type à la fois centralisée et socialiste”, “alliance de dictature et de socialisme démocratique” selon les propres termes des documents officiels. Un pontife se trouve à la tête de l’ensemble moines - nonnes, contrairement aux injonctions les plus répandues des textes canoniques où l’on ne voit pas qu’il soit question d’une direction centrale. Il préside aux actes religieux essentiels : lui seul a pouvoir d’ordonner des disciples, de les exclure, de désigner son successeur.
The monastic order is organised hierarchically under the absolute leadership of the acharya who “fulfils both spiritual and administrative, legislative and judicative functions within the order” (Flügel, 1995-6:130). The yuvacharya (successor) is next in the chain of command and serves as an important assistant in all religious and administrative matters. Beneath him is the mahasraman (leader of monks and generally assumed to be future yuvacharya). The leader of the nuns, the mahasramani (or Sadhvi Pramukha) is the formal equivalent of the mahasraman, but in practice her role is considerably different. She has greater autonomy than the mahasraman because her

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<td>Mahasraman</td>
<td>Sadhvi Pramukha (Mahasramani)</td>
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TERAPANTHI HIERARCHY SOURCE Flügel, 1995-6

contact with the male hierarchy is limited. She presides over the sadhvis in an area separate from the acharya and yuvacharya and so, among the sadhvis, her position is supreme and akin to that of the acharya's. But within the Terapanthi dharmaasangh in general, her role is considered to be subordinate even to that of the mahasraman. Whereas she has reached her pinnacle, he will
likely assume the acaryaship in the future. Beneath the position of the mahasraman and mahasramani are the singharpatis,\textsuperscript{138} senior ascetics in charge of small groups of ascetics (singhars). Flügel writes,

\begin{quote}
The sadhus and sadvis are at the moment [1991] divided into 126 singhars (Skt. samghata – gathering), which are small itinerant groups of 3-5 ascetics, each led by a senior called a singhpati or agrani (chief) (1995-6:130-1)\textsuperscript{139}.
\end{quote}

Beneath the singharpatis and their junior sadhvis and sadhus are the leaders of the samanis and samans called Niyojika and Niyojak, respectively. In 1996, there were 81 samanis and just 4 samans (most male aspirants become sadhus directly, without this intermediary stage). Given the large number of samanis, leaders are assigned for each room when at the monastery in Ladnun and, when travelling, for each group. Beneath the samanis are the mumukshus and upasikas who are formally outside the ascetic hierarchy because they have not yet taken diksa. In practice, however, they are treated as low-status novices in the hierarchy. The leader of the mumukshu sisters is called the Nirdeshika or Sanyojika, and in 1996 she was responsible for 53 sisters. The male equivalent is the Nirdeshik or Sanyojik, who in 1996 was responsible for just 3 mumukshu brothers. Beneath them are the Yojikas who are essentially ‘room leaders’ responsible for 3-5 sisters (the mumukshu brothers were too few in number to require Yojaks). Finally, there are the first year female and male novices called upasikas and upasiks, respectively. Among the 16 upasikas in 1996, one was designated leader (there were no upasiks). To be given a leadership position is an honour, but it is always temporary\textsuperscript{140}. Each year at the Maryada Mahotsav (festival of restraint), new leaders are designated (the mumukshu and upasika leadership cycle is less structured, and can occur at any time). Flügel writes that one of “the main organisational tasks of the MM [maryada mahotsav] [is] the rotating of the ascetics among the singhars…” (ibid.:134). A leadership role entails monitoring one’s subordinates and reporting to one’s superiors, as well as being responsible for the well-being of those in one’s charge. During the eight months of their vihar (ritualised wandering), the singharpatis and samani saman group leaders are required to keep diaries of their group’s activities, that they then submit to the acharya at the Maryada Mahotsav. Flügel writes,

\begin{quote}
The agrani’s keep diaries (kul vā irā vivaran) in which they write the names of the villages they visited, how many days they stayed, how much cloth (vasir) and medicine (ausadhi) they received, and from whom, special achievements of each ascetic (tapasyā, svā dhyāya), religious programmes (preksa dhyān),
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{138} Also called agranis.

\textsuperscript{139} According to Flügel, the Terapanthi order had 149 munis and 554 sadhvis in 1991, organised into the 126 singhars (1995-6:130).

\textsuperscript{140} The positions of mahasamani, mahasaman, yuvacharya and acharya are semi-permanent, changing only with promotion, demotion or death.
pacifications of quarrels (vigrah saman), the number and type of vow administered, and the services given and received from other ascetic groups (bhakti). These diaries have to be scrutinised every year during MM by the Ācārya, who then evaluates the conduct of each ascetic (śā ranā vā ranā), and distributes rewards (so called kalyā nak points) and punishments (prā yasctit) accordingly (ibid.: 138).

One of the most important functions of the ‘diaries’ is to oversee the methods the ascetics are using to inspire the shravakṣ and to keep track of potential anuvrata (those who have taken anuvrat vows) and renunciants. For example, when a sadhvi inspires a young person to consider joining the order, she records it. This information will be used to maintain contact between the ascetic aspirant and the order, and eventually to facilitate contact with the acharya. The sadhvi’s efforts will later be publicaly acknowledged and honoured.

Group leaders are essential to the working of the Terapanthi order with its absolute centralisation of power in the acharya. All groups - even if composed of just two - will have a leader, resulting in the establishment of a very intricate and hierarchical network of superiors and subordinates. Balbir describes this “micro-structure”;

Le pontife règle également, en début d’année, la vie des religieux, en désignant l’agran, “le chef” chargé de diriger, pour les affaires courantes, les petites groupes plus ou moins autonomes de trois à cinq membres... C’est cette micro-structure qui forme la base de la vie quotidienne où les plus religieuses les plus agées sont prises en charge par un group de treize, nommé et renouvelé chaque année (1983:43)

The policy of consolidating all power in the hands of one Acharya makes the Terapanthi unique among Jain orders, and obtains legitimisation through its 238 year old constitution, the Maryada Patra. The Maryada Patra is a fixed code of ascetic practice written by Acharya Bhikshu, to which all ascetics must pledge allegiance each morning through the recitation of the lekh pait.¹⁴² Paul Dundas writes,

¹⁴¹ A cursory examination of some of these methods reveals the centrality of discipline to Terapanthi spirituality. The following is a common method - a game called “Roj Ki Kamai” (daily earnings). In front of a large audience, the ascetic will explain the game and encourage all to join in. Each shravak must close her/his eyes and pick a number. Each number corresponds to a type of renunciation that they must observe for one full day. Among those who successfully complete their day of renunciation, there is a ‘lottery’ to choose the winner, who then gets a prize (e.g., some Terapanthi literature). Examples of ‘renunciations’ are: take no food or water after sunset; don’t watch any TV or see any movies; give food to ascetics. If none are present, close eyes before meal and say “I want to give this to the ascetics”; be celibate for one day and night; don’t gamble; limit quantity of food, don’t drink living water (katcha pani); don’t eat green vegetables, don’t walk on grass, don’t sleep on soft bed etc.

¹⁴² The following is the samanis samans’ lekh pait or likhat, containing the basic rules of the order (it is nearly identical to that of the sadhvis and munis), and is recited daily:

"1. I have faith in Lord Mahavira and in his tradition, in Acharya Bhikshu and all those that followed until the present Guru Dev Tulsi and Acharya Mahaprejna. I accept their discipline. I believe Guru Dev, you are the whole and soul of our organisation. I have supreme faith in you."
The Terapanth *maryada* [constitution] is to a large extent unsurprising in its strict delineation of regulations governing begging, dress, possessions, and the permitted relationships between monks and nuns and the laity . . . What is distinctly new, however, is its insistence on the total centrality of the acarya, the assumption by him of all monastic offices and the total subordination of all Terapanth ascetics to him. It is the acarya alone who is responsible for the administration of discipline, for the appointment of his successor, for the giving of initiation . . . and it is the same figure who every year instructs each ascetic about his mendicant itinerary and the location of his place of rain retreat. Through this total concentration of power in the hands of the acarya, Bhikshu hoped to prevent the tendencies towards fission and the emergence of rival ascetic lineages which he saw as leading to the corruption of the Jain community and the impeding of a correct understanding of Mahavira's teachings (1992: 222).

Flügel explains how discipline is maintained in Terapanthi monastic life through a multi-faceted system of ritualised rules,

In order to guarantee the continuous implementation of these [Bhikshu's] rules, he [Jayacarya, 1804 –1881] set up a system of three interconnected rituals: the *likhat*, the *hājari*, and the *maryādā mahotsav*, each being based on the compulsory performance of an oath of acceptance of certain rules peculiar to the Terā panth monastic organisation. The *lekh patr or likhat* (formular) contains the thirteen essential rules of the order and has to be individually recited and signed first thing every morning. The *hājari* (presence) is a ceremony of group purification cum teaching (*ganvisuddhi-karan*). It was first organised by Jayācārya in 1853 as a fortnightly assembly of all the ascetics of the rāj (and each *singhār*) for the recitation, explanation and acceptance of the *likhat* and other rules, as well as for public examinations of novices. Nowadays the *hājari* is only performed at special occasions, and the *maryādā patr* – the new compilation of Bhiksus's and Jayācārya's rules made by Tulsi – is read out in the presence of a large audience. In this way the general public is made familiar with the *maryādā* and can monitor the conduct of the ascetics independently. Afterwards the sādhus and sādhvis, all standing in a row according to the seniority of initiation (*diksā paryāya*), recite the *lekh patr* and accept it one after the other . . . However, the most important ceremony of the Terā panth is the annual *maryādā mahotsav* (=}

2. I will not break your discipline;
3. I will not break the discipline of my Niyojikaji,
4. I practice the rules of *saman* training as my own witness,
5. I will be very humble towards the whole ascetic order;
6. I will be very humble to my elders and affectionate to my juniors;
7. I will treat all equally within the *saman* order;
8. I follow your indication about where I will travel (and all else);
9. I will not initiate any member into the *saman* order according to my own will;
10. I will not say negative things about my fellows;
11. If I have some problem or complaint, I will speak directly to the individual or to an authorised person;
12. If there is a disagreement, I will accept you opinion as truth, or the decision of the person you support;
13. I will accept your choice of successor without question;

I accept this letter faithfully, not by any influence, nor compulsion. I accept it by my own reasoning mind {They then state the day, month and year using the Indian calendar}'". At an earlier period, the ascetics signed the a copy of the *patra* each morning to demonstrate allegiance. Today the pledge is verbal.
MM) (festival of restraint). Like the hājari, it was originally (1864) a ritual for the ascetics only, but has developed into a meeting of the whole fourfold assembly, which takes place for three or more days in January/February, and often attracts up to 50,000 pilgrims. The festival celebrates the date of the recording of Bhiksu's last likhat, the constitution of the sect, through the recitation of the original text (samuhik marylā dā) and the performance of an oath of allegiance to the 'dharma, gan, ācārya, and the maryā dā' by the ascetics' (1995-6, 132-3).

Hajari, which translates as “presence”, denotes the public, social nature of affirmation.

When the ritual is performed, the Acharya (or singharpait) reads out a series of statements and questions (on the left), to which the ascetics respond in unison (on the right). There are slightly different versions and lengths of hajaris. The following is a condensed form:

1. Don't say a single bad word. "tyag hai"143
2. Don't say words which create doubt about the order. "tyag hai"
3. Don’t do practices that counter those of the order. "tyag hai"
4. Don't take any other ascetic with you if you leave the order. "tyag hai"
5. Don’t form factions or groups. "tyag hai"
6. Don't break the order’s regulations. "tyag hai"
7. Don't break with the order of the acharya. "tyag hai"
8. Do you do your swadhi144 four times daily? "upiyog sahit kie"145
9. Do you say “avarshi nishii"146 when travelling? "upiyog sahit kie"
10. Are you giving respect to seniors at proper time daily? "upiyog sahit kie"
11. Are you sleeping at proper time? "upiyog sahit kie"
12. Do you speak with lay women or nuns [men(monks) "upiyog sahit kie"
13. Are you reciting the likhat147 daily "upiyog sahit kie"
14. Have you taken alochanda148? "upiyog sahit kie"
15. Are you following the rules carefully? "upiyog sahit kie"
16. Are you observing the samitis and guptis149 carefully? "upiyog sahit kie"
17. Have you observed the rules and regulations of the organisation carefully? "upiyog sahit kie"

The Terapanthi ascetics are immensely proud of the discipline that centralisation brings, and commonly dismiss other orders thus “One acharya for every four monks”. A publication on the Terapanth states,

The Terapanth order is known as a well-knit and harmonious organisation among the Jains. It owes its success to the code of conduct for the monks and nuns of this Dharm Sangh as enunciated in the Maryada Patra written by Acharya Bhkshu himself. The main features of this historical document are

143 "tyag hai" = "it is renounced"
144 swadhi = memorisation of scriptures
145 "Upiyog sahit kie" = "we do so carefully, though lapses may exist"
146 Ascetics must say “avarshi avarshi” when going outside, which means “I am going with purpose”.
147 likh-pat (maryada patra), the letter of rules recited daily.
148 = critical self-examination, following the recitation of the pratikramana (confession)
149 There are 5 samitis or ‘codes of conduct’, viz. one must be careful when walking, speaking, taking alms, handing objects and in excreatory functions. There are 3 guptis or ‘restraints’, viz., one must curb the activities of the mind, body and speech.
that Terapanth Dharm Sangh will have one Acharya and that all its monks and nuns will have invariably to submit to the discipline enjoined on them by him. They will move about under his authority and the place where they have chaturmas will be decided by him alone. The mandatory powers bestowed upon the Acharya by this document sound autocratic but they are not so, for these monks and nuns enjoy full freedom of discussion within the order (Bhatnagar, 1985 preface).

Although the ascetic ideal is one of the single “I” located outside of “society”, in day-to-day monastic life, the ascetic is defined through her position within the order, vis-à-vis other ascetics and by a myriad of roles and statuses. Her rank is determined by when she took initiation (diksa paryaya) and by what she has contributed to the order, as judged by the authority. Concerning the first and most basic form of rank, the most recent initiate is obliged to pay homage to all those her senior – in terms of years initiated. So, for instance, a mother is obliged to pay homage to her daughter if the latter initiated first. The daily ritual of Guru Vandana (homage to teachers/superiors), which occurs after the sunset pratikraman prayers, dramatises this form of “initiation hierarchy”. Goonasekere writes,

In this ritual, monastic seniority is observed and emphasised. Every junior ascetic must worship every senior ascetic in the monastic dwelling. This is irrespective of an ascetic’s chronological age. I have watched sixty year old juniors worshipping eighteen year old seniors. Here the gerontocratic authority of the lay society is negated and replaced by an alternative authority system based on seniority by initiation. . . . Guru Vandana re-establishes daily the authority of the monastic hierarchy and removes maan [egoism] from the minds of junior ascetics (1986:170).

Guru Vandana reminds each ascetic where she stands in the order of initiation, but I would argue that it does little to remove maan. The real authority of the monastic hierarchy is not based on diksa paryaya. Instead, as mentioned above, the prestigious, administrative and leadership roles are assigned. One may be very senior in terms of initiation, but low in status, and vice versa. Guru Dev, for example, had to pay homage to monks ‘senior’ (in initiation) to him. The real power is in ascribed statuses, delegated by the more senior ascetics to those who have ‘earned’ them by contributing to the order in some way (through translation of important scriptures, writings on important ascetics, heroic fasts, selfless work for other ascetics, etc.). Honours and titles have nothing to do with diksa paryaya and, in fact, lead to competition and feelings of maan among the ascetics – feelings that the Guru Vandana ritual can do little to alter.
Most ascetics uphold the official view that the Terapanthi’s hierarchical structure disciplines and helps to destroy egotistical tendencies. A Terapanthi text book states,

The spirit behind the Maryada Patra is to enable a sadhak to annihilate his or her ego that obstructs spiritual progress (Bhatnagar, 1985: preface)

Even so, all ascetics that I spoke with readily admitted that maan or ego remains a problem in monastic life. The behaviour is commonly explained away by saying that it is difficult to completely eradicate maan. Goonasekere concurs,

Field investigations indicated that Maan (pride/egoism) is a constant problem in the lives of renouncers as well as in the functioning of the monastic system. . . Senior and important ascetics who are close to the Acharya and who are involved with monastic administration stated that Maan caused much of the internal conflicts of the monastic system. Ascetics who fail to control their Maan often disobey the Acharya and contradict him. They forget why they renounced the world. . . According to these administrative ascetics, such egoistic ascetics cause monastic schisms. Muni Mahendra Kumar, a senior, highly educated and erudite, intellectual monk, said “Egoism, Maan, is the basic problem of these monks and nuns who break away from the group and form their own groups. Instead of disciplining themselves they want to discipline others, become heads of schools., Acharyas, and be important. What else is that except Maan?” (1984: 169).

It is not altogether surprising that the senior ascetics with leadership and administrative positions may interpret internal conflict as an expression of ‘egoism’. Goonasekere also adds,

Jaina monastic law, as stated in the Uttardhyayana Sutra, Dasavaikalika Sutra, Brhat Kalpa Bhashya and Vyavahara Sutra, demands that the renouncers get rid of their pride and egoism lest monasticism and its spiritual benefits become impossible. Every time an ascetic feels Maan he/she is advised to confess to the appropriate senior ascetic and atone for his/her emotional misconduct (1984:169).

But it may be the competitive, hierarchical order and the very existence of ‘seniors’ that gives rise to egotistical feelings in the first place. Ego, discord and pride are considered among the greatest threats to spiritual advancement, and yet, ironically, monastic life is a fertile ground for their development. Maan is not simply a stubborn ‘worldly’ weakness to be tamed and disciplined through ascetic discipline: monastic life itself nurtures it.

The order has a variety of ways to separate out the extraordinary from the ordinary: it rewards them with titles, administrative positions, leadership roles, etc. As a consequence,
monastic life is highly competitive. The ascetics compete among each other in a variety of ways: in fasting, knowledge of scriptures, austerities, distances travelled during vihar ("padyatra miles"), the number of conversions they inspired to take ascetic path, etc. (Flügel, 1995-6:138). The Terapanthi also makes use of a "currency" or merit/debit (kalyanak/gatha) point system which operates on a 'reward and punishment' basis and which is competitive in nature. Each year, the sadhvis and munis are required to contribute something of practical benefit to the order. These are gender based tasks: the sadhvis are responsible for making all the patras, rajoharan and muhpattis for the order. A fixed number of new bowls, brooms and mouth-shields are set every year depending on the state of the current year's stock. Monks are required to transcribe a fixed set of scriptures. Each of these chores is "worth" something in the point or 'gatha' system so, for instance, if a particular nun must make 20 rajoharan, this may represent 100 points or gatha 'owed' to her guru. If she does something considered exceptional or meritorious by the leaders, Guru Dev may give her kalyanak (say, 20 points) with which she can use against her task burden, if she so wishes. She then would only have 80 points worth of rajoharan to make, or 16 brooms. Or she may use her 'credited' points in any way she wishes. Muniji gave me an example: if the disposal of the chamber pot at sunrise is an unpleasant chore, an ascetic can trade in points to be exempt from it. She may "pay" another sadhvi 5 points to do the job. Even if she never makes use of the points she has earned, she is honoured publicly by gaining them. On special occasions, Guru Dev was known to give all the ascetics additional kalyanak when he was generally pleased with them. Of course, the system works the other way too -- an ascetic can be punished by gaining 'debit points'. Whatever the function, the point system is inherently social, hierarchical and competitive. The kalyanak gatha system is but one of a myriad number of mechanisms through which the ascetics try to distinguish themselves as special; as individuals. Whether in performing captivating lectures, scholarly works or artistic endeavours, each ascetic strives to earn the affection of the guru -- and with it the respect of the order and veneration of the householder. Others turn their own bodies into projects, and through penance, demonstrate their worth. Fasting, in particular, is the 'easiest' or at least, the most popular, method to demonstrate commitment and fidelity -- especially among the sadhvis, who for so long were all but excluded from scholarly and administrative pursuits.

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150 See appendix # 3 - for a description of how a rather inconsequential event revealed to me the degree to which hierarchically structured monastic life can foster competition, jealousy and maan -- rather than annihilate them.

151 They are also responsible for mending all the robes -- both of the munis and other sadhvis, though this is not typically understood as part of their annual obligations; it is done on a 'needs be' basis.
Dr. A.N. Pandeya is a Hindu pundit and lay advisor to the ascetic leaders of the Terapanthi. He lives in Delhi, but is often called to Ladnun for special meetings and has had the ear of Guru Dev and Acharyasri for decades. Because of this, many of the monks and nuns believe he has been privy to information about them. They try to meet with him to find out where they 'stand' in the hierarchy. He told me that most of the ascetics are obsessed with trying to know their position within the order and with what the elite really thinks of them. If ascetic equanimity is damaged by the existence of maan, the fault lies not in the 'vestiges of worldly' pride, but rather, in the very nature of monastic life itself (see Cort, 1991:665 for a discussion of the ascetic hierarchy).

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When I met with Shanta the following evening, two other samanis were in the room. They appeared to be busy memorising something, and paid no attention to us.

“Did you read the book?” she asked.

“I haven’t even looked at it yet. Do you want to know what it is about?”

“No. I just want to read something English. Maybe you can read it to me. My pronunciation is very bad.”

“We can read it together, starting tomorrow”.

“Actually I have no interest in English. But Guru Dev wants us to learn it,” she said. I recalled that early on in my stay, Guru Dev announced to his congregation that he was assigning me the ‘job’ of English teacher to the nuns. I remembered feeling troubled with that task, since I was eager to minimise my use of English and learn Hindi.

“English is the most important language today to change the world, “ Shanta continued, “Everywhere people speak English. To spread the Anuvrat movement, even in south India, we need English.”

“This doesn’t interest you?”

“No. I am only interested in Jain scriptures – in Sanskrit and Prakrit. First I must do my own sadhana. And learn about myself before I can change other people. All knowledge and all power is within me; within all of us. Books and such things are just information, not real knowledge – they don’t make us happy.”

Soon the two samanis went to their meeting with Niyojikaji and we were left alone. Shanta stood up and looked out into the dark courtyard before closing the door. “Tonight I hope no people will come,” she said and then paused before adding, “We must welcome
householders, they do so much for us. But it is difficult, we have so little time for our own sadhana. This is why I cannot become a sadhvi”.

“For can’t you?” I asked, misunderstanding her to mean she was— for some reason— barred from moving up.

“I don’t want to. It is difficult.” She said, clarifying, “So much time is spent on small things— panchami, gochari, yatra...”

“But what is so different from your life?” I asked

“Oh, it is very different! Sadhvis spend so much time with householders, they are almost in the world!” she said with a touch of disdain. “Householders come to them with their problems— sometimes very terrible problems, and the sadhvis become involved. They are never alone.”

For samanis, interaction with householders is certainly less intense. Because they are only partial renunciants, they have less prestige and (it is assumed) less power than those in the sadhvi and muni orders. As a result, their time is less in demand.

“Don’t most samanis want to become sadhvis?” I asked, echoing the official view on the ascetic hierarchy (viz., that since ascetics yearn only for moksa, they strive to lead a life of total and absolute renunciation of all things worldly). She hesitated before answering, as if considering the matter herself.

“It depends what they want. To get closer to Guru Dev and Acharyasri, yes. For their sadhana, it is better here. You see”, she said looking around her room, “I have time to study and practice my sadhana. Our gochari rounds do not take so long— we can collect all our foods from one home if we need. They spend so much time collecting. They travel all year, except chaturmas, and have only a few scriptures to read. It is very difficult. When they stay in one place, they are with householders all the time. Even panchami takes them a long time!”

Full ascetics— sadhvis and munis, must perform their panchami in places completely devoid of water, grass or insects. They must first sweep the ground to make sure nothing alive is present, and when they are finished, they must cover their excreta with sand. And a sadhvi must always have another sadhvi accompany her, wherever she goes. Thus, it can be a time-consuming procedure several times a day. As ‘semi’ ascetics, the samanis are allowed to use

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152 Panchami = the term used by the ascetics for their excretory functions which, like all other things, are rule-bound. For samanis it is called “kayiki”, Yatra or Vihar = pilgrimage/travelling

153 See appendix # 6 for a description of the sadhvis’ daily routine.

154 In his dissertation, Goonasekere writes that, given the restriction on going outside after sunset, “Ideally, it is better to finish Panchami before sunset” (1986: 148) But of course, this ideal is rarely met by each ascetic each day, so the ascetics use cans or buckets and dispose of the waste in the appropriate place and manner at sunrise.
flush toilets, even though the use of water entails violence. For Shanta, panchami represented just one of the many drudgeries of sadhvi life.

"If you don’t want to be a sadhvi, what will you do?" I asked Shanta.

"Sometimes I think of leaving here. It would be very difficult. I don’t know".

"Are there people to help you if you want to leave?"

"Help me... How?"

"I don’t know – what do you want to do? Work... Marry?"

"No. I cannot work. I don’t want to marry – it would be impossible. I don’t want to be in worldly life. I want to devote myself to my sadhana"

"Do you want to stay a nun?"

"I want to study and practice sadhana. I don’t want to be in the world at all. If I can stay a samani, it will be okay. Our life has many restraints\textsuperscript{155}. Maybe I cannot find a better one."

"Can you request to remain as a samani?" I asked. The expression on her face was doubtful.

"I don’t know – "she began. The door swung open –

"Come now. Niyojikaji is calling you," a samani said to me.

I looked over at Shanta. She had lowered her head and was studying the palms of her hands. It felt terrible to walk away from her at this moment. To have trusted me enough to reveal her troubles took confidence. I felt the least I owed her in return was to be a good listener. I wanted to ask the samani to tell Niyojikaji that I’d be there shortly – that I was having an important discussion with Shanta... But clearly that would have been outrageous; and would not have been appreciated by anyone. To understand and respect the Terapanthi Jains was to honour their structure of authority. I bowed to Shanta and closed the door behind me.\textsuperscript{156}

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In the Jain ascetic tradition, the highest ideal is the singular “I” – one who doesn’t engage in any ‘culture’ (agriculture or other) to survive. In the search for the authentic “I”, the ascetic acts as a reproach to all social classification and ordering; only the self is truth (A.N. Pandeya, pers. comm., 1996). Others are eliminated in the ascetic epistemology because all things

\textsuperscript{155} See appendix #2 for examples of some of these “restraints”.

\textsuperscript{156} Shanta and I would meet and talk on several more occasions. By the time I was departing, she claimed that she would stay and make the best of her life in the order. Although she wasn’t sure how it would be received, or if there might be negative repercussions, she was considering making a formal request to be allowed to remain a samani indefinitely, and therefore to avoid becoming a sadhvi.
worth knowing are derived through introspection. The ascetic search, therefore, is a romantic pursuit (see Kakar, 1981) for the authentic self; it asserts that truth can only be found if one goes deep inside the self and withdraws from others. A more common way of realising the self, in most cultures, is through active social involvement, because integration and interacting are the most fundamental resources of the human self. The ascetic way is the total rejection of this path. But, I argue, in its actual structure, it parallels and duplicates the process on a highly controlled and focused pattern (see Cort, 1991:664). Indeed, much of ascetic life centres on classification and ordering within its own boundaries, as well as a preoccupation with defining and maintaining boundaries. Mary Douglas suggests why the singular “I” is a precarious position to maintain:

Timid or gregarious, we accept more [social] pressure than we exert. . . . Somewhere mid-way between strong bond and no classification provided by society, the individual is free to make up his own rules and to classify the universe as he pleases. The only requirement is to accept the personal pressures of his fellows. In this range the religious sects are founded whose only rule is ‘love ye one another’, but . . . this [position] is inherently unstable. Sooner or later some hard lines and boundaries are drawn, starting with the line between saints and sinners. . . . The thought of zero point, of perfect freedom in love, exerts an extraordinary seductive power. Caught by the dilemma of how to exist in community without rules, people resort to the paradox of legislating for rulelessness (1974:219-221).

Rules, regulations, discipline and obedience form an integral part of Terapanthi spirituality and, for the majority of the ascetics, they represent the foundation of the moksa marg. In order to discipline the self and subdue maan, they argue, group living is necessary. “It is easy for a forest dweller to think he has subdued his maan,” a samani once explained, “but how does he know for sure he has succeeded unless it is tested? Maan is only tested in a group”.

My fieldwork would suggest that the workings of day-to-day monastic life are testimony to the fact that the rejection of society is not totally possible nor desirable; one cannot simply drop out of orbit. The Terapanthi ascetics are fond of quoting Acharya Bhikshu’s motto: Grrnam men rahui, akela nirvavo – “Living in a group, I feel my aloneness”. Through it, what once appeared paradoxical, becomes reasonable.

In monastic life, the goal of detachment becomes secondary to the efforts to keep the laukik at bay. The constructed “untouchability” of worldly life requires vigilance, administration and rigour. And, with time, it grows increasingly complex to ensure that no gaps remain. The ontological isolation of the soul does not find expression in the social isolation of the individual as it once did (Dundas, 1992:131), but in an environment closer to totalitarianism than to
solitude. And the search for the authentic “I” occurs within a rule-bound, hierarchically structured “society”. The separation of the laukik / lokottar, however, continues to dominate ascetic discourse no matter how inseparable the two are.

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"You draw, I’ll colour" Samani Mallipregya\textsuperscript{157} commanded, lowering her handkerchief to reveal a big smile. Though she had been jovial over the past couple of weeks, I still found her smile and mood unexpected. Ordinarily she appeared so dour and distracted that I didn’t quite know what to make of her transformation. I wondered if her recent and more frequent use of a handkerchief, in place of the \textit{muhpatti}, was a deliberate effort to reveal her good humour to everyone. Unlike the \textit{sadhvis} and \textit{munis}, the \textit{samantis} and \textit{samans} do not have to wear the \textit{muhpatti} at all times. They alternate between it and a handheld handkerchief to cover their mouths – such as the householders do when speaking with the ascetics. Indeed, one of the big observable differences between \textit{samantis} and householders is in the formers’ deftness with the handkerchief. For them, the practice of covering their mouths when speaking appears as natural as breathing itself – a small skill they master over the years at the PSS.\textsuperscript{158} The householders, in contrast, often forget themselves when their speech becomes animated and do away with the handkerchief altogether – waving it about until they realise with embarrassment, and cover up again.

Samani Malli and I were making colourful posters for Guru Dev’s birthday celebration which was less than two weeks away. Everyone was in high gear for the occasion, but lots remained to be done. Posters had to be drawn, poems and devotional songs had to be composed. Mallipregya and I had several more drawings and cut-outs to make – mostly variations of Guru Dev nestled amongst colourfully drawn flowers. The task was simple enough as we had dozens of colour photos of Guru Dev to choose from – from poster to wallet size.

We sat close together, our folded legs slightly overlapping, and got to work on our collages. A few \textit{samantis} were stretched out for a nap – covered from head to toe in old \textit{saris} that substituted for sheets. We, like most of the \textit{samantis}, were taking advantage of the afternoon lull in activities and were busy preparing for the celebrations. The cold marble floor upon which we sat was strewn with the art materials - coloured pencils, markers, cardboard sheets, a bottle of glue and, of course, posters of Guru Dev. I was ‘commissioned’ to do a drawing of Guru Dev surrounded by adoring devotees – a group that included gods, humans

\textsuperscript{157} I write “pregya” instead of “prajna” to follow Samani Mallipregya’s own use. See p. 180.

\textsuperscript{158} The \textit{samantis} (male semi-monk order) are less adept at perfectly timing the covering of their mouths. Their occasional awkwardness stems from their inexperience. All were initiated as \textit{samantis} after a short period of training (usually a few months) and unlike the \textit{samantis} do not attend long-term training school where they can learn all the minutiae of being an ascetic.
and animals of every sort. Malli was cutting out a beautiful latticed paper design that we would use to decorate the sides of the drawing. She sang softly as she created, and then laid down the scissors to show me her design. It was lovely. I continued to draw when she said, "You are also very fortunate." She then took hold of my left hand, looking intently at my palm. Earlier that morning when we met for meditation, she explained to me that her luck had recently changed for the better.

"Why do you think so?" I asked.

"Because Guru Dev and Acharyasri are pleased with you" she said inspecting my hand. Then, looking up at me she declared.

"You have so many lines!" I said nothing and continued to draw. It was not the first time Malli had tried to decode my hand lines for a hidden truth, but as a novice she was as yet unable. The supernatural and the mystical interested her immensely. Indeed, earlier that morning we spent so much time talking about numerology that it got too late for our meditation lesson.

Several months earlier Malli had volunteered to teach me Preksha Dhyan (Jain meditation). We would meet each morning on the roof of Gautam Shalla before sunrise, and sit
there in the cool pre-dawn desert air. Malli would talk me through a meditation, forcing me to concentrate on her words as a way to reign in my straying undisciplined thoughts. Then we would sit motionless, focused on our breathing until the sun rose to warm our bodies. Together we would end by repeating “Om shanti” (‘peace’) several times. It was a perfect time: the day was just beginning and the air was still fresh; we were in our meditative cocoon overlooking the monastery. And very often in this sheltered state, Malli would talk about her tireless quest for shakti (spiritual power). She interpreted her life as a narrative of ever-increasing strength; emphasising the ‘augmentation’ of power, rather than the reduction of karma – the standard Jain ascetic idiom. She would often say, “Each of us is a god. We must realise this.” She was engaged in meditation, devotion, austerities (tapas), astrology, palmistry, and most recently – numerology, all to harness shakti. That morning, when we met on the roof for our lesson, she appeared so full of cheer that I asked her, “Malli, what is making you so happy these days?” Though it was not yet light, I saw a smile come across her face; then with quiet confidence she lowered herself onto her meditation mat. She sat in a lotus position, and pulled her feet up so they touched her belly, making her legs look like a pretzel. She began to breathe deeply and slowly, inhaling . . . exhaling . . . inhaling . . . until, looking absolutely calm, she slipped her muhpatti over her mouth and said,

“Yes. Things are better for me now.” I waited and soon she added, “Things were not easy for me. Physically I am not strong”. She took my hand to touch the thinness of her calves, “Often I get sick. Once I nearly died”.

My face must have shown surprise, for she continued. “Yes, my family was called and everyone thought that I was going to die. I couldn’t eat. I only slept . . . and besides that – with other samanis, it was not easy for me”.

I strained to see her face clearly but it was still quite dark. “My numbers were not good” she said, beginning her tale of numerology. “Like all the samanis, I spelt my name ‘p - r - a - j - n’-a’159 I did not know it gave me a very ashubh (inauspicious) number. If I spell it ‘p - r - e - g - y - a’ it gives me a number one – a very shubh (auspicious) number.”160

“And? What difference does it make?” I asked.

“This number has shakti. Everything is better now. Before I was living under an inauspicious number – and things were very difficult. Big things like when I became sick but also many little things were hard for me . . . . [she paused] . . . the other samanis would accuse me of writing in their notepads, and ripping pages out of their books. It was difficult. Now this

159 All samanis end their names with the suffix “prajna” meaning “wisdom”, e.g., Samani Shardaprajna.
160 Her numerology was based on the transliterated alphabetic spelling of her name from Hindi.
does not happen. Now everything is good. I am very lucky . . and Acharyasri encourages me in my work."

"When did you change your name?" I asked.

"September 10th, my birthday. Everything has been easy since."

I wondered if she wasn’t being rather hasty in her celebrations, as this was only a little over a month ago. But the period did coincide with what I thought was her transformation. "Does Guru Dev know?" I asked.

"Yes, and Acharyasri. They allowed me to change it," she said, her eyes showing delight. She went on to illustrate how much her life had changed for the better: Guru Dev and Acharyashri had since praised her work and had allowed her to pursue intensive studies of Preksha Dhyān, for example. And her relationship with the samanis improved. Malli’s interest in connecting with an ‘external’ power, though far removed from ascetic discourse, is a common one within the order.

All ascetics, like householders, acknowledge the existence of supernatural powers. The world is filled with devas and bhuts – mystical powers, the auspicious and inauspicious – and shakti to be harnessed by those with ‘know-how’. Like householders, who depend on the "magico-cosmic" (Roland, 1977) to arrange their practical affairs such as marriage, education, health, etc., the ascetics rely on it for their own purposes. Some examples of this are that no sadhvi or muni is without a special calendar that indicates auspicious and inauspicious days of the year. And after chaurmās, they consult it very earnestly to decide which day to set out on their travels. Also, daily, the sadhvis pay homage to a “Muslim deva” that they believe inhabits their dwelling with them. A small shrine on the first floor of their residence (Rishabdwar) is dedicated to him, and although they insist that the ascetic path is one of “aloneness”, they acknowledge the deva’s power and mollify his temper by showing respect. (E.g., When leaving and returning to the building, they acknowledge him with a blessing. There are many stories of the deva becoming agitated if he is not properly propitiated). And in private, many ascetics recite special mantras and make clandestine yantras to harness the powers around them. But Jainism teaches that one’s destiny is determined by one’s moral actions alone – not celestial bodies or mystical powers. Therefore the conventional representation of Jainism does not include these ‘magico-cosmic’ dimensions because they appear to conflict with its public ideology of “aloneness” and “detachment”. This is an area where Jain and non-Jain representations have collided with the tradition’s hegemonic discourse to exclude phenomenological Jainism – the realm of subjectivity and experience. Efforts are made by both Jains themselves and Jain observers to reign in and mould the mystical, devotional and divine
(what I call the "magico-devotional") according to the dictates of the ascetic ideal. However, for most Jains - lay and ascetic - public ideology and private belief are not in conflict; both are 'correct' in some manner. And, as we shall see below, the two are rarely juxtaposed.

By the time Malli and I were finished talking, the sun was already high in the sky and it was time to be going on. Our talk would have to wait till the afternoon when we met again to work on posters for Guru Dev's birthday.

Holding my left hand as I tried to draw with my right, Malli said with authority, "You have a very auspicious guru line".

Turning from my drawing, I asked, "What is a 'guru line'?"

"You have good fortune in finding a guru. It is true. You have come all the way here because of Guru Dev!"

Maybe it was true, I thought. I smiled at her. "Let's get this finished," I said turning back to the drawing.

She picked up the pair of scissors and began to sing softly again until she had cut out another delicate design. "Is he your guru?"

I hesitated before answering, "Yes, I suppose he is. All of Jainism is my guru"

"When you return home, you can keep his photo in your house. You will not feel so far away".

I looked at my carry-bag in which that morning I had put a few of my own treasured photos. I had taken family photos from my room to show Mrs Gupta, my wonderful Hindi teacher with whom I met every afternoon. She was an elderly Hindu woman who lived in Ladnun, only with the greatest reluctance. She and her husband, a retired librarian, came here in 1995 because he was invited to run the small library at the monastery. She had no interest in Jainism, considering it to be an minor offshoot of Hinduism. But she believed that Guru Dev and a few of the senior ascetics were spiritually very powerful, so occasionally she would go to see them to receive their darshan. Meeting with her for a couple of hours each day was like entering another culture where an entirely different dialect predominated; we would talk about family life, romance, marriage, children and delicious foods – all the things formally tabooed for the ascetics. Most days my Hindi lesson would be combined with a cooking lesson: we would cut the 'live' vegetables and wash them with 'live' water before cooking and eating them together. It was all very 'himsa' and very worldly. Many times she asked questions about my family, and today I remembered to bring some snaps. I hadn't any intention of showing them to the nuns, but at this moment with Malli, something made me think it would be a good idea.

"Would you like to see the family photos I keep with me in India?" I asked.
Although she didn’t say a word, her eyes appeared to follow my hand with interest. I passed her the few snaps. “Ohhhh” she sang as she flicked through them. Then quickly she jumped to her feet. “I will show Niyojikaji”

“Must you?” I said with some exasperation, knowing that they would then likely circulate the order.

“Yes” was all she said and turned to leave the room. Her steps were small but fast, and I could hear the sound of her tightly wrapped cotton sari swishing all the way to Niyojikaji’s room next door. I continued my drawing, but it didn’t take long before I was summoned into Niyojikaji’s room.

“Mitri, why do you keep these photos with you?”

“So that I feel they are not very far away” I answered, still standing, carrying my drawing.

“Purisa! Tumnev tumam mittam, kim bahiya mittam icchasi?” (Man! You are your own friend, why search for one without?) She spoke the words slowly, in rhythmic Prakrit. This is so common a verse it almost qualifies as being a Jain manifesto. It is part of the Arhat Vandana mantra the ascetics say twice daily, and it had been recited to me many, many times before.

I lay my drawing on the ground before me, knelt down and whispered “Vandami namung samani” to pay homage as was expected.

Niyojikaji continued, “You know that we renounce our families when we take diksa. In Jainism, we teach that we are born alone and die alone. You only take your karmic bondage with you”.

Samani Chaitanya, who was sitting with Niyojikaji, was surprised that I should want family photos with me at all. “I thought that Westerners are not close with their families!” she said. Westerners perceived lack of attachment to family is considered to be of an entirely different matter to that of ascetic detachment. Western ‘detachment’, I was told, stems from selfishness, disrespect of family values and is ego-oriented. For an ascetic, detachment comes from self-sacrifice and from a desire to emancipate the soul.

“The greatest of all threats is attachment,” Niyojikaji continued. “It binds you to this world. Without attachment, there would be no violence. It is the root of all problems, the source of our samsara.”

Niyojikaji sat with her back against the wall of the room, her mini wooden desk in front of her crossed legs. Posters of Guru Dev and Acharyashri, of all sizes, lined the walls, and
decorated the covers of the books on her desk. The walls of my own small room at the guest house were similarly inundated with posters and photos of Guru Dev. Acharayshri, Mahasaman and Mahashramani, and the few family photos that I had brought with me from home were engulfed by them. They even looked odd sitting on the shelf next to the saintly ascetics: the unabashed and generous smiles on their faces appeared incongruous and maybe even a little indecorous next to the *muhpattied* gurus. I was always being given some sort of devotional icon from the ascetics who, in turn, had received them from householders — a calendar, a note pad, wallet-sized snaps, cassettes of mantras, stickers, and even pens — all bearing images of the gurus. Most were of the gentle face of Guru Dev, often with his right hand raised as in a benediction. As I sat and listened to Niyojikaji, her talk of the ‘sins of attachment’ and ‘aloneness’ seemed to clash with the avalanche of devotional materials on display.

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**EXAMPLES OF DEVOTIONAL ITEMS**  
WALLET SIZE PHOTOS, PENS BEARING IMAGES OF GURUS AND A CASSETTE OF GURU’S RECORDINGS

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161 Mitri meaning “friendship” was the Hindi name that *Mahasramani* or the “head nun”, Sadhvi KanakPrabha had given me. The nuns used it interchangeably with my English name, which they pronounced “Annee”.

162 “We have so many!” the ascetics would say, showing me piles of posters of their gurus. Unlike with alms, they can and do pass these devotional items along to householders. Technically, they have not ‘received’ them from the householders, they never ‘begged’ for them, nor was it a sacrifice for a householder to give them. Many lay devotees, on short visit to Ladinun, buy dozens of posters and pens and simply leave a few extra in the ascetics’ residences. From these, I was often offered to take what I wanted.
Looking up at the images surrounding us and then at the one I was drawing, I asked, "What about these?" Niyojikaji followed my eyes up to the images of Guru Dev and then returned to look at me without saying a word. I continued, "You have photos of Guru Dev close to you, and I keep photos of those I love close to me".

She appeared stunned by the comparison. She lay my photos down on her desk and shook her head. She had been using a cotton handkerchief as a mukhar, but now put on the proper one. She secured the elastic bands behind her ears. With assurance she said, They are not the same thing. You depend on these people. You need them, you are very attached, but we are not. We are devoted to our guru because he shows us how to lead a spiritual life. He is our teacher, and that is why we are devoted to him. We learn from him. But we are independent and not attached, as you are.

The Terapanthi Jains do not practice idol worship. In addition to the violence inherent in their construction, they argue that since the great emancipated heroes, the Jinas, do not interfere in worldly existence, there is no point in worshipping statues of them. But photos of the living gurus abound (see Babb, 1996). Sanami Chaitanyakrajna added,

He is our god, and we are his devotees. He is everything to us. He knows everything about us, and cares about us more than our own parents! Whatever he says, we do. We have no worries. He always knows what is best. So of course we feel very happy to have his picture near us.

Mallipregya, forever focused on spiritual power, said,

You are attached to your photos. As a shravak, this is normal. But the photos are nothing. These photos [she pointed to those of Guru Dev on the walls] have so much shakti. You can feel his shakti from the photos. Many times –

Niyojikaji interrupted forcefully,

. . . He is our inspiration. He makes us exert ourselves. By having him there, he is always in our mind. We are always alert, and never forget why we have chosen this path.

I nodded in acquiescence; clearly my few photos were no match for those of Guru Dev. But it was obvious that the samanis' positions on devotional images were not identical – and in fact, could be seen as competing interpretations. Niyojikaji’s statement tried to contain the other samanis' interpretations, just as the public ideology of ascetic life quells or reigns in

163 The Terapanthis and the Sthanakvasis are opposed to image making and idol-worship. Their rejection can be traced to a man by the name of Lonka, who lived in Gujarat in the 15th century, and whose anti-image stand was based on the violence inherent in creating them. It has been suggested that his rejection of image worship may have stemmed from the influence of Islam. (Dundas, 1992:213).
beliefs and practices about gods, devotion and the supernatural. By emphasising the guru’s ‘inspirational’ role, she interpreted devotion – which might otherwise be seen as an effort to connect with someone/something outside oneself – in terms of ascetic self-help. By contrast, Chaitanya spoke of Guru Dev’s protective, even divine, role and the devotee’s passiveness before him, whereas Malli’s interpretation was furthest from the official ascetic narrative in its acceptance of the propitiation of miracles as an important part of ascetic life. Chaitanya and Malli’s understandings spoke of the experiential level, and provided insight into what constitutes a meaningful life for the majority of ascetics. Despite the rhetoric of the hegemonic discourse, most ascetics do not feel as though they are treading a lonely path in isolation, but instead, one filled with potential friends and foes.

The ways in which the ‘magico-devotional’ is ‘reigned in’ is interesting and reveals the co-existence of competing ideologies within monastic life. Firstly, the ‘magico-devotional’ is conspicuous by its absence in the Jain ascetic literature, which stresses the aloneness of the ascetic path, mirroring the ontological aloneness of the soul. But within monastic life, efforts to connect with someone/something greater that the self is commonplace. According to the ‘public ideology’ of asceticism, the ‘magico-devotional’ – a profoundly other-oriented set of discourses - is translated into a discourse of self-realisation. This is the view espoused by the most learned ascetics of the order (e.g., Niyojikaji) who recognise a contradiction in proclamations of independence and dependence; detachment and attachment; the lokottar (transcendent) and the laukik (worldly). But for the majority of nuns and monks, nivrtti-marg (the ascetic path) and the ‘magico-devotional’ do not need reconciling or translating, they are already compatible. Indeed, the two are inseparable.

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Discussion of devotion and divinity in the context of Jain asceticism is rare (see Babb, 1993; 1996 for a notable exception). Little in the ascetic literature suggests its relevance, and Jains themselves when presenting their tradition in ideal terms, downplay its significance or omit it altogether. Muniji provided me with the standard position when he explained,

If one wants to attain moksa, then he must exert himself. He receives no help from anyone. Neither society nor god can help. Only individual effort alone, not divine efforts, can lead to liberation (fieldnotes, 13/02/96).

The image of a lone mendicant wandering through the Indian forests looms large in the ascetic imagination, leaving little room for divine intervention or anything resembling outside
assistance. Jain asceticism is characterised by its own brand of rugged individualism. Its dominant metaphors are those of separation, detachment, and disconnection; of isolation, aloneness and independence. (See, for example, the poem "The Utopia" (appendix # 4) which catalogues the characteristics of the 'ideal monk', and, in so doing, provides a good illustration of the conventional representation of Jain asceticism). The discourse of Jain asceticism is of self-realisation and total aloneness, relegating all other dimensions to the periphery. The ascetic rhetoric exhorts,

Ponder thus: I am alone. Nobody was mine in the past, nor will ever be in the future. It is because of my karmas that I delude myself and consider others as mine. The truth is that I was alone in the past and will ever be all alone [annotation to 4.3.32, Acaranga Sutra] (Holmstrom,1988:36)

But this is the realm of the ideal. The public ideology of asceticism is a fixed, logical, a-historical and archetypal portrait. It delineates the "formal grammar" of ascetic life and is distinct from the dynamic, 'discursive' fabric of monastic life where divinity, devotion and – in general – efforts to "connect" rather than "disconnect" govern day to day life. The daily lives of the ascetics are consumed by efforts to connect with something greater than themselves; to not be alone – neither in the order, nor in the universe. It is a mistake to assume that because Jains have no conception of a creator god they have no belief in divinity or a divine power. As Paul Dundas writes,

While Jainism is, as we have seen, atheist in the limited sense of rejection of both the existence of a creator god and the possibility of the intervention of such a being in human affairs, it nonetheless must be regarded as a theist religion in the more profound sense that it accepts the existence of a divine principle, the paramatman, often in fact referred to as 'god' (e.g. ParPr 114-16), existing in potential state within all beings (1992:94).

Similarly, Kendall Folkert writes that in Jainism, "There is no deity; Jains do, however, venerate the Tirthankaras and some saints, and a temple cultus exists around these figures, who are not seen as intervening in any way in the lives of the devotee" (1993:24).

I suggest that the effort to extend beyond the immediate self and connect with divinity and the 'magico-devotional' is a central part of Jain ascetic life, though it is sometimes masqueraded as something else, more along the lines of self-realisation. The actual practice of daily life is made to fit the ideal of asceticism so that all experiences become subsumed within its grasp, even discordant and competing ones. Practices of devotion and the mystical are not treated (in the public ideology) as efforts to connect with something greater than the self, but rather as utilitarian tools of spiritual self-help.
In studies of Hindu renunciation, by way of contrast, the role of divinity is considered as central. Divine power must be tapped into in order for asceticism to be complete. In her study on Karnataka Hindu asceticism, Lise Vail claims that renunciation is, not or is hardly possible without the assistance of that greater power. The reason why renunciation as a whole is so important in defining the Karnataka swami is precisely to create conditions which allow for the influx and nourishing of a divine presence (1987:396).

Connecting with divine power is fundamental because it offers a powerful buffer and protection against slipping back into an old lifestyle and samsaric ways of thinking. For this reason, a renouncer is generally not supposed to become a guru until that power or presence has been revealed within him (ibid.:395).

For the Jain ascetic, connecting with divine power is merely more circuitous: miracles and boons are supposed to be by-products of a religious path, not its aim, and the experience of divinity is sought from within the self, not from without.

The ascetics who are most revered, idolised by all and sought after for blessings – are those believed to possess shakti (Babb, 1996; Flügel, 1995-6). Other than Guru Dev and Acharyasri, there are a number of senior ascetics who have gained prominence in the order and attract a large lay following. When I would ask lay devotees why they followed one particular ascetic rather than another, they would invariably cite ‘their maharaja’s’ shakti. It may be that the ascetic is believed to intuitively understand the problems the devotee is suffering, or possesses clairvoyance, or is able to bestow boons on the followers. However, these more mystical elements have been eclipsed due to the tendency of both Jains and Jain-observers to focus singularly on the fact of renunciation – the necessity of renunciation and the austerities – over the mysterious and devotional elements of religious practice and experience. Indeed, the efforts of Jains to present their religious path as a battle with oneself (i.e., one’s karma) and of total self-reliance is one of the factors that distinguishes them as Jain ascetics. In describing and delineating what constitutes Jain asceticism, the ascetics, laity and scholars conspire to focus on this aspect alone, that of nivritti-marg, the path of ‘turning-away-from-the-world’. But efforts to connect with, and experience divinity, form as much a part of ascetic life as do the relentless efforts to burn away karma through tapas (austerities). Help is solicited, and the mysteries of the aiman are sought in myriad ways. This is the realm of bhakti – of attachment, devotion.

164 The “gifts” that Jain ascetics bestow upon their followers are explicitly unintentional, otherwise they might be seen to be a form of exchange for alms, shelter etc., and implicate them in worldly life. See Ch.3.
divinity, shakti, and emotion. And through it we learn that the ascetic path is much more wondrous, and quite often less austere, than is normally perceived.

Nivrtti-marg is the cultivated and conventional representation of Jainism, and has more to do with ideals striven for than the reality of everyday life. It represents the ‘formal grammar’ and is an ideal – the structure and the most public and visible aspect of ascetic life. But it is bhakti and the other means of connecting with other individuals, the guru, deities, supernatural power (as opposed to the rhetoric of disconnecting) that make up the practice of daily life and constitute the strength and spirit of the order.

Nivrtti-Marg: The Public Face Of Jainism

It is by its austere ascetic path that Jainism has been defined by both Jain and non-Jain observers – albeit for different reasons. Other dimensions of its religious life have appeared trivial in comparison to its ethic of renunciation, resulting in a distorted view of a tradition in which ascetics represent less than ten thousand individuals out of a population of approximately three million (Folkert, 1987:256). The reasons for this are varied. Firstly, Jains themselves overwhelmingly valorise the nivrtti-marg. Laidlaw writes,

The defining figures in Jainism are... not those hedonistic deities, but the ascetic renouncers. It is renouncers, both living and dead, who are the central objects of religious veneration...(1996:3).

Similarly, Babb states,

This is the fundamental matter: Jains worship ascetics and this is the most important single fact about Jain ritual culture (1996:23).

Jains frequently assert that they are “alone in this world” by which they mean that they can rely on nothing but their own self-disciple to progress them along their spiritual path. Laidlaw cites lay Jains (from Jaipur) as saying

As Jains we know we are alone in this world. Only by our own actions can we gain help. Only by cleansing our own souls (1996:26).

And,

Jainism is the most difficult religion. In fact it is impossible. We get no help from any gods, or from anyone. We just have to cleanse our souls. Other religions are easy, but they are not very ambitious. In all other religions when you are in difficulty you can pray to God for help, and maybe God comes down to help. But Jainism is not a religion of coming down. In Jainism it is we who

165 See appendix # 5 for examples of the nivrtti-marg.
must go up. We have only to help ourselves. In Jainism we are supposed to become God. That is the only thing. (ibid.:27)

The Jain individualistic attitude stems from an ontology preoccupied with the state of the soul’s bondage. For example, a primer for children asks the questions “Who are you?” and then answers, “I am a pure soul presently in the form of a human body”, followed by the question: “Where did you come from and where shall you go?” and the answer: “I have come from one of the four gatis (destinies)¹⁶⁶ and will go in one of them until moksa” (Jineshkumar 1990:17). Laidlaw writes that the Jain conception of the human predicament calls forth the image of each soul locked into its own unique fate, which is fixed by its previous actions, labouring for release through ascetic practice. Asserting or accepting that everything depends upon karma is to take a particular stance with respect to oneself, with respect also to exemplars such as the Jinas: the stance of the individual striver (shramana:shraman) and ascetic (tapasi tapasvi)] (1996:30)

The community’s “public face” hinges on its asceticism. Its uncompromising insistence on the ascetic path as the only truly religious one sets it apart from the larger Hindu community with its acceptance of more varied avenues. Jain self-identity, and the sense of their uniqueness within the larger Hindu world, is rooted in the centrality of this ascetic ideal. The problem, however, stems from an over-reliance on the community’s public presentation of itself; on the public ideology of lay and ascetic Jains themselves. By emphasising that which distinguishes Jains means that those elements which they share in common with the larger Hindu world are overlooked – and yet, it may be these elements that are highly treasured by lay and ascetic Jains in their day-to-day religious lives.

Non-Jains have also been quick to stress Jainism’s ascetic orientation. Dundas writes that Hindu commentators have often emphasised the austere path in order to ridicule it (1992:1). The classical Hindu stereotype of Jainism is as “a religion practised by filthy and naked ascetics requiring pointless torture of the body, such as regular pulling out of the hair, and involving as part of its doctrine the subversion of basic Hindu values” (ibid.:1). He states, As represented in many recent accounts, this view would see Jainism as unified in nearly all respects, essentially both ahistorical and eccentric, with its belief and practice revolving around extreme forms of ascetic behaviour, dietary restrictions and a near-pathological preoccupation with the minutiae of a doctrine of non-violence. This misconceived approach has been compounded by many contemporary Jain writers who, in an attempt to boost their religion’s intellectual credibility, have often seemed principally concerned with

¹⁶⁶ The four main birth destinies (gati) are deva (god), manusya (humans), naraki (hell beings) and triyamca (animals and plants). They are represented as four spokes in the symbolic wheel of life, the svastika, (Jaini,1990 108).
presenting Jainism in purely metaphysical terms as little more than a
gradualistic spiritual path . . . (ibid:2).

Early western writers were also singularly interested in Jainism’s asceticism and
presented a rather negative view of the tradition, emphasising its external practices and its
“morbid” philosophy (ibid.:6). Dundas writes that the tendency to stereotype the Jain tradition
has persisted into this century;

I do not refer to western jibes and misunderstandings for their own sake but
wish rather to suggest that their legacy is still very much in place today, with
Jainism as a rule being interpreted as either colourless and austere or with
reference to a few ‘exotic’ customs such as the wearing of the mouth shield
(muha patti) to avoid violence to minute organisms living in the air . . .(ibid.:8).

According to contemporary scholars, the problem lies in the absence of studies on the lay Jain
community. For example, Dundas writes,

The largely textual orientation of nineteenth century and subsequent western
scholarship has also been responsible for the creation of a distorted perspective
on Jain society and history . . . Unfortunately, the Jain lay community has never
been adequately studied and the history of Jainism, inevitably based on
literature emanating almost exclusively from the ascetic environment, has been
presented solely in terms of the preoccupations of the ascetic community, with
the laity emerging only intermittently and in largely idealised fashion (ibid.:8-9).

And,

. . . there can be no doubt that lay people have throughout Jain history always
constituted by far the more substantial proportion of the community, and the
ascetic vocation, whatever its prestige and vital role in the construction and
promulgation of Jain culture, has been adopted by only a few (ibid.:9).

Although greater attention to lay Jains would undoubtedly help counter the ascetic bias
prevalent in the presentation of the tradition, I believe that attention to the ascetic community –
and not simply the ascetic literature – would have a similar effect. The problem has been the
over reliance on text instead of on individuals. The ascetic literature details the ‘grammar’ of
ascetic life – the rules, regulations, taboos and violations. It tells us nothing about motivation or
the actual experience of asceticism. Indeed, attention to the lay community would uncover the
same ascetic bias. The tendency to valorise and even publicise the “ascetic-ness” of their lives
is as commonplace among the laity as it is with the ascetics (Babb, 1996:22-63). The discourse
of nivrtti-marg, the ‘thorny path of asceticism’. is emphasised because it is so central to Jain
identity. It distinguishes Jains from non-Jains and the laukik from the lokottar. Laidlaw
provides an example of a householder’s dilemma of wanting to reveal some of the tradition’s
“magico-devotional” dimensions, but needing to uphold its public ‘ascetic’ face. He writes,
Torn between wanting to impress me with the Guru Dev's power to grant favours, and the injunction to pursue karmik self-help through ascetic practice, she does not look for a causal explanation of miracles that will reconcile them logically with karma, but cites instead her own ethical imperfection and attachment as the reason she should want supernatural help (1996:75).

Our understanding of asceticism is largely derived from the rules and regulations that make up monastic discipline, and less on asceticism as lived practice. As such, the picture that we have of ascetic life is that of a pristine, even theoretical ideal. The archetypal ascetic life is presented as one of solitary pilgrimage, withdrawal, renunciation, detachment and penance. Each of these are dimensions of the nivrtti-marg and it is through such a framework that Jain asceticism is most typically interpreted. Because Jainism envisions liberation as a revelatory process— a peeling away of karmic layers until the perfect soul is unveiled—the path to liberation is depicted as a process of undoing and negation, not creation. Patrick Olivelle explains,

Renunciation is a negative state, consisting of the abandonment of what characterises life-in-society. Therefore one is a renouncer not because one performs certain distinctive actions or conforms to certain characteristic habits and customs, but because one does not perform actions and does not conform to customs that characterise life-in-society (1975:35).

The nivrtti-marg presupposes a complete break with lay existence. Dundas claims that the choice to enter ascetic life is a “radical reorientation of behaviour” (1992:132) and,

It is the adoption of the five mahavratas, the ‘Great Vows’, and their integration into what must after ascetic initiation become a totally realigned way of life which is the central defining characteristic of the monk and the nun, governing their external, observable behaviour and providing a system of internal, spiritual control (1992:135).

The radically oriented new life of the ascetics is structured in order to observe ahimsa in all aspects of daily practice (see Jaini, 1990:242). But beneath the rules, restraints and penances; and beyond the public ideology and conventional representation of asceticism, exists the bhakti spirit of the order—the underbelly that animates and maintains the nivrtti marg of ascetic life, and enables it to exist. Bhakti typically refers to the path of devotion, attachment, and divinity and, although generally not associated with Jain asceticism, forms an integral part of it. This is the world of devotion, of gods and demons, miracles and the supernatural, and it is the lifeblood of the ascetic order as much as it is of householders’ lives. Here, those distinctions which the official discourse seeks to maintain as separate—between ascetics and householders, and between ‘the transcendental’ and ‘the worldly’, even between Jains and Hindus—tend to blur. This is not clandestine, “underground” Jainism—it is phenomenological Jainism instead.
of discursive Jainism. And though at times difficult to reconcile philosophically, the two co-exist effortlessly and, in fact, are inseparable in practice. This is the murky dimension of Jainism, but is also one of the most compelling and beautiful dimensions of monastic life. And just as the imposition of a codified grammar tides up the spoken tongue, so too does an official framework become a grid through which monastic life is filtered. As Holmstrom notes,

The Great Vows on monasticism order conduct and are invoked through conduct . . . [they] are invoked, conscious, scriptural, literally formulated rules which are referred to as such in action, and which action is in part consciously trying to map onto (Holmstrom, 1988:31. Latter italics added).

Efforts are made to 'map' the mystical and the devotional onto ascetic values; a nivrtti-marg interpretation is imposed upon them. But for the majority of the ascetics, the different discourses do not conflict. Detachment is achieved through attachment to Guru; independence and aloneness of the self is achieved through total dependence on Guru. The way of turning-away-from-the-world (nivrtti-marg) is achieved through immersion in bhakti.

Nivrtti-Marg Via Bhakti Marg

Days passed and now the countdown was on; just one week remained before Guru Dev's birthday and there was still much to do. I arrived at the Gauiam Shalla early to visit Urmilla prior to settling down to work, for I hadn't seen her in days. She was on our 'art team' – put together to make posters for the birthday celebrations – but had been ill again and was unable to participate. She had been recovering from another bout of malaria when she came down with a bad head cold, and was still not well enough to return to her own room. I had brought with me a cold remedy from Canada that I wanted her to try. When I entered the room, she was laying on her side, covered by a white sheet. At first I thought she was asleep, because she didn't move when I approached, but I could see that her eyes were open, listlessly staring ahead.

"Vandami namung samani" I said quietly as I knelt before her and asked, "How are you feeling?" She looked up and gestured for me to sit in front of her. Another samani in the room came over to offer her water, but she gestured her away. I presented the cold remedy and told her I thought she should try it. It needed to be mixed with boiling water, so the other samani left with a patra (alms bowl) to 'beg' a small quantity from a nearby house. Urmilla was apathetic and I wasn't sure she would take the remedy, but when the samani returned with the water, and I mixed the powder into it, she obliged me by sipping slowly. Her throat was sore and it hurt to swallow. She appeared lost in thought as I watched her sip the remedy.
Suddenly four *samanis* rushed in, creating a stir. They knelt before Urmilla, quickly bowed and then told her the good news: Guru Dev had asked about her! She pulled herself up until she sat cross-legged and stared at them, wanting to hear more. But there was no more to tell, only to repeat: at the end of the morning *provochan* (sermon), Guru Dev asked the *samanis* how she was. When told she was feeling better, he appeared pleased. Energised by the news, Urmilla sat beaming on her cardboard mattress, her hands flusterling about trying to find her *muhpatti*.

Looking at her, I recalled a conversation I had with Sadhvi Visrut Vipaji ("Sadhviji") earlier in the week. I was at Rishabdwär in the middle of a hot afternoon when the town had quietened down. I sat with Sadhvi and spoke quietly so as not to wake Sadhvi Vandana – the most recent and youngest *sadhvi* at just fourteen years old – who slept beside us. Vandana had gone from being an "*upasika*" directly to being a *sadhvi*, skipping all the intermediary stages and years. Beads of sweat covered her forehead as she slept. She looked suffocatingly hot with the top of her *sari* pulled over her head and the *muhpatti* snug around her small face. Sadhvi began to shake her gently to wake her. Still asleep, Vandana moved away until Sadhvi took hold of both her shoulders and shook her until she opened her eyes. Sadhvi began to tease her about being lazy, but she seemed in no mood to joke. Her body was swaying slightly, struggling to collect itself, but her eyelids kept on closing. Intuitively knowing how to snap her out of her slumber, Sadhvi said, "Tell Mitri what happened this morning." A tiny smile appeared on Vandana’s face, and she shook her head bashfully. Sadhvi continued to tease her, nudging her gently. Vandana covered her face with her hands in embarrassment and rested her elbows on her miniature wooden desk. Clearly she was not going to talk. Sadhvi, her eyes scrunched up from smiling, extended her arm around Vandana’s shoulder and said,

"She is our youngest. She is very special to all of us”. Vandana looked away. “Today Guru Dev spoke to her directly. Didn’t he Vandana?” She began to smile again. “Today Guru Dev asked her to tell him how she is liking her new life. And he told all of us to take very good care of her”. 

Now fully awake, Vandana sprang to her feet, shy but clearly enjoying Sadhvi’s retelling, and walked over to the *muuki* 167 outside the room. I watched as she took the small brass cup from top of the *muuki*, removed the stone lid, and scooped up some cool water. With her left hand she lowered her *muhpatti* and let the water pour effortlessly into her mouth. Sadhvi, also watching the new waif-like *sadhvi*, said smiling,

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167 A round earthenware container for water, slightly tapered at the top. The clay cools the water, making it cool and fresh even in scorching heat.
“If Guru Dev says something special to us, individually, we are so happy. Even if he just asks how we are, we tell everyone. Everyone is anxious to get the grace of the Guru.”

“And how does one do that?” I asked.

Still smiling, she turned her face towards me. “Through bhakti. We surrender to our guru, and he takes care of us.”

***

Bhakti marg is the “way of attachment”. It is characterised by dependence, surrender and emotional catharsis, and therefore is often seen as the antithesis of the ascetic path of detachment, independence and restraint. Chronologically, the path of “turning away from the world” preceded that of bhakti marg, as a socially legitimate and established spiritual path, by several centuries. Jhingran contends that bhakti developed as a movement in contradistinction
to Vedic religio-culture among the sants\textsuperscript{168} of Karnataka, in the last two centuries before the common era, before spreading to Maharashtra and then north where it dominated Hindu religious life and thought until the 16\textsuperscript{th} century (1989:147). Throughout, it flourished alongside the two other main traditions in the Indian religio-culture; viz. the ritualistic, polytheistic and world-and-life-affirming tradition of the Vedas and Dharmastra, and the soul-centric and world-and-life-negating tradition of the philosophies of spiritual liberation (ibid.:147).

Bhakti marg is typically regarded as a parallel but distinct path from that of asceticism, for a variety of reasons. Sudhir Kakar emphasises the uniqueness of the ascetic path,

...[T]he yogic vision offers a romantic quest. The new journey is a search and the seeker, if he withstands the perils of the road, will be rewarded by an exaltation beyond normal human experience. .(1981:29).

But he adds that these practices are

the province of a small religious élite, the ‘talented’ few who devote their entire lives to the realisation of moksa through systematic unswerving introspection (ibid.).

Kakar goes on to delineate other, more traditionally sanctioned ‘paths’ which the majority of Indians have followed to lead them toward the ideal state of liberation, namely, the way of bhakti (intense devotion) and the way of karmayoga or selfless work. We find the ascetic and devotional path treated as distinct, and even conflicting. Schomer, in her book on devotional traditions in India, distinguishes them by their methods of attaining moksa. She writes,

From ritual observance and the performance of prescribed duties, or alternately, ascetic withdrawal in search of speculative knowledge of the divine, the heart of religion became the cultivation of a loving relationship between the individual and a personally conceived supreme god (1987:2).

Others note that the paths present different conceptions of the ultimate state of liberation. The bhakti concept of moksa stems from its unique perception of the relation between the individual soul and the ‘Ultimate Self’. It can even be seen as an opposite interpretation from that of the nivritti marg. Jhingran writes that in bhakti marg,

Moksa is neither the realization by the soul of its total aloofness and transcendence (karvanya), nor its complete merger into Brahman; rather, it is the realization by the soul of its essential ‘creatureliness’ or dependence on the Lord. This concept of absolute dependence in ‘creatureliness’ of the soul (karvanya) emphasizes the volitional nature of the soul. Liberation is therefore conceived not as a mere cognitive experience (jnana), as in the philosophies of

\textsuperscript{168} Sants are popular ‘poet-saints’ of the devotional tradition. Sant is derived from the Sanskrit sat (‘truth’ or ‘reality’), meaning “one who knows the truth” (Schomer, 1987)
liberation, but as freedom from all passions and sin, as also knowing, loving and serving (or attaining) God (1989:151).

Contrast this with the nivrtti-marg conception of moksa;

[Its] concept of liberation is derived from their concept of the self which is an ultimate, transcendent reality and which, like the monads of Leibniz, is self-sufficient and alone or unrelated to the world and other selves. The self’s involvement in the transmigratory existence is considered its bondage, and its liberation consists in getting rid of this false involvement and realising its original and pure nature or aloneness (ibid.:118)

Perhaps the most significant difference lies in the way the ascetic and devotional paths envision the role that human effort should play in spiritual life. Jhingran writes,

As against the self-reliance in the way of knowledge, the theistic tradition insists on man’s incapacity to emancipate himself on his own and the need of God’s grace. To quote Narada, ‘And also because God dislikes the reliance on one’s own unaided effort and likes the complete feeling of misery due to the consciousness of one’s helplessness in independently working out one’s salvation, bhakti is greater’ (ibid.:152).

Contrast this with the archetypal image of the Jain ascetic,

The Jain monk is portrayed in the earliest texts as being fully responsible for his destiny and in control of his life, and his isolation and independence, which mirror the state of the soul as conceived by Jainism, are conveyed in stark terms (Dundas,1992:37).

These distinct convictions give rise to rather different religious dispositions. The bhakti marg asserts that

...the ideal religious attitude is conceived as that of total surrender (prapatti) which is understood as a profound religious feeling of one’s helplessness and total dependence (karpanya) on the Lord (Jhingran,1987:152).

Whereas that of nivrtti marg maintains,

When the monk realises that he is alone, that he has no connection with anyone and that no one has any connection with him, in the same way he should realise that his self is also alone ([Acarangasutra] cited in Dundas, 1992:37).

It is easy to see why bhakti marg and nivrtti marg have been depicted as contrary. On the face of it, they do appear to be distinct and even opposing paths. But at their most basic levels, both are about connecting with a divine power – tapping into it, experiencing it and benefiting from it. In Hindu bhakti, dissolution in an external god leads to self-realisation. In Terapanthi monastic life, intermediaries are sought to help and guide, and the guru plays a
nearly equivalent role to that of a god. Devotion and surrender to the guru is the first step to self-realisation.

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Despite the protests from the samanis in the room, Urmilla now insisted that she felt well enough to do some work for Guru Dev's birthday. Just as with Vandana, I could now witness the effect of Guru Dev's special attention on her. Moments before she was languishing from the heat and her illness, and was now instantly rejuvenated by words of kindness from her guru.

“You’re feeling better already? Was it Guru Dev’s words?” I asked.

“He cares about us. More than our family! He inspires us to work hard” she replied.

Malli and the other samanis who had delivered the good news went to fetch the art supplies and drawings. Soon Urmilla was busy cutting, pasting and colouring posters.

“What did you feel the first time you met Guru Dev?” one of the newly initiated samanis asked me. This was a question I had grown very accustomed to answering, so without hesitation I said,

“He has such kind eyes. He spoke such kind words to me that I felt calm”

“You must tell him so,” she said

“No. I'm sure he knows how I feel,” I answered

“It is true. He knows everything about us.” Malli responded.

“Yes! His eyes. Everyone says his eyes. They are very powerful,” said another, who then began to recount a recent incident:

“There is a very good family in Jaipur who are devotees of Guru Dev. They have a big house, and burglars entered it to rob it. When they got in, they gathered up lots of expensive jewellery, but one of them saw a picture of Guru Dev hanging on the wall and it disturbed him. He tried to ignore it and continue to take the jewellery from the drawers, but he felt Guru Dev’s eyes on him and was unable. He got angry with the family and wanted to know who the picture was. He couldn’t steal a thing!”

“It was the picture that had the power?” I asked.

“Yes surely!” Urmilla added matter-of-factly, “Many times such things happened. Not just his photos, also his name. When the sadhus were in Haridwar they were staying in a small room. There were holes in the wooden door... a very thin door. Late at night...

Furthermore, both are critical of the violence and externality of Vedic ritualism and emphasise inner attitudes rather than external conformation. They share a rejection of external rituals, place an emphasis on self-realisation and renunciation of worldly desires (see Jhingran, 1989:147-168).
while they were meditating, a group of drunken men came banging on the door. They yelled for the sadhus to let them in. They could do terrible things. The sadhus were terrified. They began to tremble. Then Sadhvi Venita said they must chant Guru Dev’s name. So they began chanting his name over and over together. The men were bashing the door with their bodies, but they could not break it open!"

Soon the circle of samanis were each recounting their own miracles associated with Guru Dev as well as with Acharya Bhikshu. It became a chorus of wondrous testimonials. But miracles (camatkar), like devotion, are on shaky ground within the ascetic discourse. For example, in a discussion of the supernatural, Laidlaw quotes a nun who, after explaining the powers of yantras, insists that ascetics “don’t believe in miracles (camatkar), only karma”. He then goes on to write,

The problems Jains have with miracles is not whether or not they are possible in causal and mechanical terms. The problem is that they are not allowed. They are, in Moore’s terms ‘real really: the way that common knowledge, common sense, and common experience all suggest that things must be. But they are not ‘really real’, they do not figure in the understanding of the way things are which informs ascetic renunciation. From the latter point of view they should be renounced, along with other worldly things, even if all one does is acknowledge and assert this, without necessarily giving them up in practice. The interdiction does the necessary work, even if you don’t always follow it (1996:79).

According to the authoritative Tatvarthasutra, methods to inhibit or ‘burn away’ karma have been specified in order to exclude practices and rituals such as religious pilgrimage, sacred ablation, deluded ordination, offering one’s head to the deity as a gift, worship of gods and demi-gods and so on. Such practices and rituals are inspired by attachment, hatred and delusion which attract rather than inhibit karma (TS, 1994:219. Italics added)

All forms of ‘extending oneself’ or ‘connecting’ are either denied by the official ascetic discourse or transformed according to its ideal. For example, the learned Muni Mahendra explains miracles according to a combination of individual efforts and modern psychology. He said.

Someone who has a strong faith in some ideal, or in some divinity, then, by praying to this person, the power is actually his own soul developing. Nothing else. He develops extra-sensory power. Scientifically, our deep concentration will increase our own vital energy, which is otherwise dormant. For example, the recitation of mantras – the repetition increases our mental power (fieldnotes 10/96).

But, as we saw in the case of devotion, monastic life is not a coherent monolithic system, but is a site for competing discourses (see Holmstrom, 1988:4). One day, for instance.
Mahasraman heard a group of *samanis* reciting a simple prayer common to both Hindus and Jains:

"I pray to God for the pureness of the moon, the brightness of the sun, the sincerity of the ocean."

Mahasraman told the *samanis* that it was wrong for a Jain ascetic to say a prayer entreating of a god. Jains, he reminded them, do not believe in miracles, only in karma and self-exertion. But when one of the *samanis* asked Acharyasri Mahaprajna his opinion, he told them that they could continue to recite it. He said it was fine as a technique to "subdue the ego". We see that even among the most senior ascetics of the order, consensus is not necessary present. For Acharyasri, the prayer's acceptability depended upon the motive underlying it. By interpreting efforts to 'connect' with something greater than the self in terms of tools of self-realisation, the magico-devotional can be rationalised and contained. Therefore, even though deities "continue to play a very prominent part in religious life", as Laidlaw writes, "they occupy a rather hazy domain in Jain culture" (1996:72).

We must bear in mind, however, these rationalisations are occurring only on the discursive level -- that is, in the public ideology of Jain asceticism, and amongst its literati. Miracles and efforts to connect with divinity, like devotional practices, are seen to conflict with the ascetic rhetoric of aloneness and detachment on the discursive level only. Within the monastery, 'competing' ideologies co-exist and even thrive, as the talk of the *samanis* below makes clear. Samani Chaitanya said,

"Four of us [samanis] were in a car going to a camp to give a talk. The road was so narrow and we were going so fast when a big truck appeared. There was no room for both. And the truck was coming so fast. We thought we would surely die, so we started chanting 'Om Bhikshu, om Bhikshu, om Bhikshu...over and over, with our eyes closed...om Bhikshu, om Bhikshu...and when we opened our eyes we were on the other side. The truck was gone."

"What had happened?" I asked, "What did the driver say happened?"

Her eyes were wide in the retelling, "The driver said he thought we would all die. He heard us saying 'Om Bhikshu' and then the car was lifted over the truck and put down safely."  

"Acharya Bhikshu caused this to happen?" I asked.

"Yes" she answered, but then quickly qualified by saying, "Not Acharya Bhikshu, but the devas who honour him. Bhikanji is in the 5th heaven, he does not interfere with us; he is not concerned at all with worldly matters. But the devas who want to honour him, they help."

"Such things happen all the time. Ask anyone, they will tell you," Urmilla said. "We
pray to Lord Mahavira, or Acharya Bhikshu because it purifies us to do so; and if we
die chanting their names, we will have a good rebirth. Our minds will be focused on
spirituality at the moment of death - this is very important. We do not ask for help, but
the devas help us because we are Bhikshu’s devotees and they also honour him; they
bow down to him”

The newly initiated samani added, “The devas honour Guru Dev by moving the clouds
to shield him from the hot sun. When he walks - even in the bright day light - he is
always in shade.”

“Was it the devas who helped the family in Jaipur from the robbers?” I asked.
“We do not know. It may be. Or maybe it is Guru Dev’s aura. Mahasaman says Guru
Dev’s aura is very powerful” she answered.

Savita said that Guru Dev’s “aura” helps them in all sorts of ways. She said that once
when she was in Bombay she had to give a talk and felt very nervous and didn’t know what she
would say to the huge audience. As she sat on the stage before being called to speak, she
chanted Guru Dev’s name and then felt calm. When she was called to speak, she spoke without
fear.

“Yes, it is not always the devas”. Urmilla added. “Sometimes Bhikshu can appear – it
is according to him. He appeared before Muni Mahendra’s father and told him to take
santara”.79 When Muniji’s father asked him how can he be sure what he sees is real,
Bhikshu said, ‘Only do as I say if two sadhvis come to your home for alms tomorrow’.
The sadhvis were not supposed to be in the town; they made a special trip because they
knew he was sick. So they went to his house. And he then took santara”.

Malli leafed through the posters of the floor and said, “Everything about Guru Dev is
auspicious. His words, his image, his name. Householders even collect the sand from where his
feet have been – and there are many miracles from it”.

Looking at the photos, trying to decide how best to make a collage, the samanis began
to comment on Guru Dev’s features - his ears, his sloped shoulders, his head shape. “You can
know by these things that he is very special person” one said.

“Guru Dev has certain marks on his body that very few people have. And his ears are
long like the Tirthtankaras. Everything about him is special” Malli confirmed.

“Yes” added another, “the way his shoulders go down, his arms, the shape of his
forehead are different . . . and show his greatness”. Soon the talk quieted down. Malli began to
sing softly and we spent the rest of the morning drawing, cutting and pasting. In the end we had
completely finished two posters, and had only one more to make before Guru Dev’s birthday.
Asceticism As Devotion:

Devotion permeates ascetic life. It motivates Jains of all ages to 'renounce the world' and join monastic life; it motivates parents to 'give their children away'; it motivates tapas and even santara. The discourse of devotion that underpins ascetic practices suggests that a desire to belong to or connect with someone or something greater than the self is central to the monastic life. Devotion makes the more austere aspects of ascetic life comprehensible and desirable by making them immediate and personal. Although the ultimate purpose of the ascetic life is to wear away karma and prepare the soul for emancipation, devotion makes these transcendental and abstruse goals concrete, coherent and even joyous.

Bhakti structures the lives of the devotees. They learn to see their spiritual progress as a result of their guru's grace and benevolence as much as, if not more than, their own efforts. And perhaps even more importantly, the ascetics embark on ascetic practices as devotional practices. For example, when I asked a group of mumukshu sisters how they were capable of regular eight day fasts, one said "If I feel hunger. I think about Guru Dev and it becomes so easy for me. I know that he is happy when we make spiritual progress." And from one who had extended her fast to fifteen days, "He inspires me when I feel weak. When he told everyone how strong I am, I felt I could continue for one year!"

The elderly Sadhvi Pannaji – the most celebrated 'faster' in the order – openly describes her life as a dedication to her guru. In a book written about her, entitled Tapasvini, she is reported as attributing all her strength and courage to Guru Dev. The book was written and published by a local layperson; it details her heroic austerities and the supernatural powers she gained as a result of them. It demonstrates that the narrative of her life has been informed as much by the discourse of prapatti (surrender) as that of nivrtti (detachment). To separate the

170 Sanyara or sallekhana refers to the Jain ritual fast until death.
171 Families often talk of 'donating' a child to the order out of deep devotion, and Guru Dev himself asked householders to demonstrate their commitment by giving a child. However, at least since the term of Guru Dev, entry into the order is entirely voluntary – and often hard fought for. The vast majority of new initiates are young and have not been married. In previous times ( e.g. under the leadership of all the preceding Acharyas before Acharya Tulsi, who became acharya in 1936, a large number of nuns were widows, or forced into the order because the family could not marry them, for financial or other reasons) (Goonasekere, 1986). Although this reason for renunciation still exists, today it is rare. The vast majority have to battle (and often fast) to gain the permission from their parents who, though honored by their daughter's choice, do not want to be separated from them. In 1996, none of the 81 samants and 36 mumukshus had ever been married.
motivations underlying her fasting would be meaningless. Clearly she did not distinguish between devotion and the wearing away of karma – the two were inseparable to her.

In the day-to-day life at the monastery, devotion underpins, inspires and invigorates ascetic practices. In the nuns’ more private moments, when they are not giving lectures on Jain dharma to the householders or counselling them on their worldly troubles, “nivṛtti” recedes into the background of their talk, and “bhakti” – the basis of their asceticism – emerges forcefully. Their talk becomes peppered with devotional idioms:

- “We do everything for him, and he knows what is best for us”.
- “As a samani I may only have five minutes notice to get prepared to go to south India for a lecture. If Guru Dev decides it, we know it is for our best interest”.
- “Whenever one of us is away from our gurus, we find it very difficult. Here we have peace...we always want to be near him” a samani said looking in the direction of Guru Dev’s residence.
- “We have no existence without our guru”.
- “When he looks our way, or says something directly to us, we feel –” she shuts her eyes and smiles, and doesn’t finish her sentence. “We feel inspired”, another finishes her sentence, “We feel we can do anything”.

Just as Urmilla was motivated to continue working despite a serious illness, ascetics typically embark on tapas (most quintessentially, fasting) for the approval they will receive and for the karma it will burn. Because nothing occurs without prior consent in monastic life, private austerities are always public performances. This makes the distinction between a desire for spiritual advancement and a desire for public approval difficult to tease apart. For example, when a mumukshu decides to embark on a fast, she must first get approval from her superior. All will know about it, encourage her, praise her to others and fuss over her at its termination. Her individual austerities gain group approval. And exceptional individual efforts are rewarded in a public ceremony, often with the designation of a special title – reflecting the importance of group acknowledgement. For example, Guru Dev gave Acharyasri (formerly Muni Nathmal) the title “Mahaprajna” meaning “great knowledge” for his extraordinary literary works on Terapanthi Jainism. And Sadhvi Pannaji was given the title “Tapasvini” in recognition of her heroic austerities (i.e. fasts).

Dundas cites a survey conducted on the motivations for renunciation among Svetambar nuns. He writes:

...[the study] produced an interesting mixture of spiritual and social reasons for rejection of the world and subsequent initiation. Out of answers garnered from one hundred nuns interviewed about why they had chosen to reject the world, twenty-one expressed themselves as having been attracted to this attitude for personal reasons, fourteen were impressed by the general ambiance of the ascetic community, nineteen were spiritually drawn to a prominent
female teacher, nineteen were spiritually drawn to a particular nun, seventeen were orphans who regarded ascetic life as preferable to that with relatives, and five were attracted by the outward appearance of ascetic life, such as the initiation ceremony itself. With regard to reasons for initiation, fifty-nine nuns stated themselves to have been spiritually motivated, eleven sought increase of knowledge to gain a specifically religious end, ten wanted to be of service to the community, three to escape from marriage and seventeen to find some sort of refuge, presumably because they were widows (1992:132).

The survey, however, bifurcates motivation in a way the average ascetic does not. Within the order, desire to belong to the group, or attraction to a charismatic leader is not treated as 'social' motivation, stemming from worldliness. Instead, it too is seen as evidence of a spiritual purity. Indeed any expression of interest in monastic life – however worldly the motivation – is seen as inchoate, burgeoning spirituality in need of direction and nurture. Attration to any aspect of the order is interpreted as embryonic devotion to the ascetic ideal, which in turn is seen to represent worldly detachment. And disdain for any aspect of worldly life is seen as outright evidence of worldly detachment – even if the disdain was very narrowly focused. The PSS is a school through which the young women’s motivations all come to be interpreted via a discourse of nirvrtti marg. As we saw in Chapter 4, Mumukshu Promika’s motivation to join the order was her attraction to the uniform – a white hooded tunic or kavatchan. But this was treated as a sign; an expression of vestigial spirituality, and her subsequent happiness at the PSS confirmed it. Another example of motivation, this time stemming from disdain, is that of Mumukshu Kamala. When we first talked about her motivation for joining the PSS she was still an ‘upasika’, and had been at the order only several months. She said,

I saw my aunt have a baby. I was too young to see this, and there was so much blood, and she was in so much pain. Then she died. I was terrified, but the baby was fine and very lovely. But I knew that I never wanted to have a baby, so I would never get married. I told my mother this. And then one day when my mother went to the nuns, I went with her. The mumukshu sisters were also there – and they looked so proper and lovely together. I knew I wanted to be part of that (fieldnotes 01/96).

By the end of my stay in Ladnun, Kamala had progressed to the stage of ‘mumukshu’. When we talked again about her motivations, they had already become more ‘other-worldly’ sophisticated,

Seeing my aunt give birth, I saw struck by the uselessness of worldly life. It is just birth, death, rebirth. Everyone does this, over and over again. There is nothing special in this. It is a terrible cycle that never ends and causes so much pain. I wanted to end this cycle. I wanted to end the cycle of samsara and do
something special with my life. When I saw Guru Dev and all the sadhvis and mumukshus, I knew immediately that I wanted to be part of the order (11/96).

For most of the young women entering the PSS, it is difficult to tease out the difference between being attracted to the charismatic order and wanting to renounce worldly life (see Goonasekere, 1986). To many, their attraction to the guru, a particular nun, the clothes, the order, the discipline etc. signifies a ‘this-worldly’ disdain. Devotion and asceticism form two sides of the same coin.

Goonasekere’s dissertation explored the psychological motivations for renunciation among Terapanthi Jains. He writes,

Many young renouncers declared that they became motivated to join ascetic orders because they were inspired by ‘Gurus and Guruvans’. Some ascetics of both sexes have a strong appeal to young people. Whenever these ascetics visited their home towns these young women had gone pay them respect and to listen to their sermons. They had discovered a certain magic in the presence of these ascetics and became enchanted by it. As one nun said:

‘When the Acharya visited our town I went to see him with my parents. When I saw the Acharya something happened to me. It was if I got an electric shock. There was a light radiating from his face. We listened to his Pravachan. Everything he said made sense to me. I realised that the Acharya knew everything about the world, about the truths, about me. He was talking to me. I immediately decided to follow him’ (1986:96-97)

We will recall that Muni Dulharaji tells a similar story. He explained that he was once a “worldly man”, and enjoyed all sorts of worldly pleasures. He never thought about renouncing – the idea was ludicrous to him. When he was a young man he married. Several months after, as is common among Jain newlyweds, he and his wife made the trip from Maharashtra to Rajasthan to receive the Acharya’s blessing. He said that something very strange happened to him that evening, while he sat and listened to the guru’s speech. Out of the blue, he was struck by the righteousness of the ascetic path. He wanted to renounce the world at that moment. He felt torn. He was now a husband and soon to be a father. So how could be renounce? He decided he must honour his obligations, but he explained to his wife his desire to renounce, and they both decided to lead religious, celibate lives from that day on. A year later, he and his wife returned to see their guru again with their child. On that occasion, his wife became suddenly ill, and died while on their visit. He then decided to become a monk.172

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172 Goonasekere also met with Muniji (Muni Dulharji) when he visited Ladnun. However the account he tells of Muniji’s life is somewhat different – i.e., he writes that Muni Dulharaj’s desire for renunciation was as a consequence of the death of his wife (1986:114). While this version may strike us as more likely, Muniji was very careful to emphasise to me that his spiritual awakening occurred when his wife was alive, shortly after marriage.
Many ascetics, like Muniji, emphasised their mystical transformation in the presence of Guru Dev. Confronted by his spiritual might, they experienced the power of asceticism firsthand and were deeply attracted by it. Many hope that they too can develop shakti through tapas. Goonasekere describes a young mumukshu sister who decided to join the PSS because “she thought she would be able to better her next birth while achieving various supernatural powers such as clairvoyance if she practised asceticism and purified her soul” (1986:99). When she and her family visited the Acharya to inform him of her intentions:

She felt that there was Shanthi (peace) near him. She was convinced that he had Karuna (compassion) for her. There was something about the Acharya which filled her heart with religious devotion. Something radiated from his face. Something emanated from him and entered her intensifying her piety and devotion to him. Her conviction became stronger (ibid.).

The ascetics inspire devotion not simply because they represent an ideal, but because of the power they possess (Babb, 1996). Devotion benefits the devotee by providing her with knowledge, peace and, importantly, shakti. Whereas the householder hopes to receive some of the guru’s power through his blessings, the ascetic in addition hopes to generate her own power through tapas. Austerities, most quintessentially fasting, are a source of creativity and of unassailable power. Through the ‘heat’ that they generate, they not only burn away karma but also produce tremendous power and creativity (Holmstrom, 1988:28-30; Reynell, 1985:149-151). Householders and ascetics are equally interested in both. Sadhvi ‘Tapasvini’ Pannaji derives her title from her heroic and famous fasts. But what fascinates householders most about her are the powers of clairvoyance and healing that she has acquired as a result of her fasting. Wherever she travels, she is flocked to by individuals who want her blessing. They come because they are sick, or are troubled by bhuts (demons), or simply want a blessing of good fortune.

Goonasekere’s dissertation includes an autobiographical story written in the 1930s by a young Terapanthi monk Bhairavdan (Bhairun to his family). He includes it as part of a discussion on the role of charismatic ascetics in inspiring others to renounce the world. Even though it is long (pp 207-209), I include it here, omitting only small sections, because it demonstrates rather excellently how the devotional, mystical and the transcendent are interwoven in monastic life; how the laukik and lokottar are, in many ways, inseparable. In addition, it provides us with a sense of the fabric of lay Terapanthi life and the context in which the decision to renounce takes place. Goonasekere begins by writing that Bhairavdan was a child-renouncer who joined the order because he was attracted to charismatic ascetics.
I followed my mother like her own shadow. I went wherever she went. I was part of her body. She breast fed me until I was two years old. She massaged my body daily with sesame oil. I slept in the same bed as my mother and always ate off her plate. Mother rose at four in the morning and meditated for 48 minutes, the prescribed period in the Jaina religion, the religion of our family. She sat alone on the veranda with the glass timer, and meditated partly in silence and partly chanting the Mantra of Surrender:

I surrender to the One who is enlightened and therefore has no enemy
I surrender to the Released Spirit
I surrender to the Wise Guru
I surrender to the Spiritual Teacher
I surrender to the Seekers of Enlightenment

During her meditation she took a daily vow of limitation, such as today I will eat rice, lentils, wheat, mango, melon, cucumber, cumin, chilli, salt, water, milk, butter and nothing else. Today I will not travel more than ten miles, and only towards the east . . .

When I was seven a group of monks came to spend the ‘chathurmas’ (the four monsoon months) in our town. The news of the monks’ arrival travelled by word of mouth and a group of people, including my mother and myself, went along the desert path to greet them, singing songs of welcome –

Today the sun is golden
because our gurus are coming
with a message of peace . . .

Suddenly out of the sand and bushes, I saw three monks in their white robes walking barefoot and carrying a few belongings on their backs. They were walking fast, their faces impassive to the crowds around them. I had to run to keep up. People had gathered in the courtyard of the house where the monks were staying to hear their first sermon. One of the monks, monk Kundan, who was sitting on a table, started speaking:

“Seekers, we have come to show you the path to liberate your souls. The soul is wrapped up in good and bad karma which imprison it. We have to break away from these illusions. Sometimes we have to leave everything we know and love – mother, father, wife, children. These relationships are the expression of possessive love that destroys, maims and kills, rather than the expression of divine love that sustains the universe and has life in all of us . . . .”

At the end, men of the town went up to the monks, put their heads on their feet and asked for blessings. I went up to monk Kundan. He looked deep into my eyes and talked with me. I asked him if he would come to my home to receive food. He enquired the way. When I got home mother said that he wouldn’t come because it was the first day and he would have been invited to many homes. I insisted we wait to eat and to keep the doors open since monks can only come into a house with an open door. I kept running out into the street to look for him. Nobody else thought he would come. After some time I saw him coming. He said to me, “We’re going to spend four months here. Will you come everyday to receive knowledge from us?”
So I went to the monks in the morning and in the evening. One evening, cool after the monsoon rain, before the story-telling began, the senior monk, Kundan, talked to my mother and me. He said that there was a line on my foot, the lotus line. "We think he is the incarnation of a spiritual soul. He looks and behaves like a spiritual person. For many generations, no-one from your family has offered himself as a monk. Out of eight children surely you could contribute one?"

It was dark. I couldn't see mother's face. Next day monk Kundan said to me, "If you become a monk, the people will come to listen to your preaching, they will bow their heads at your feet. You will go to heaven and after heaven to Nirvana" "What is nirvana?" I asked. He said, "No death".

That impressed me - no death. Father's death had created a deep question in my mind. I couldn't understand where he had gone. Whenever I asked mother about him, she said I asked too many questions and didn't answer. So I used to ask the monks about what happens after death. Monk Kundan described human life in 'samsara' (the everlasting round of birth and death) and the souls of the monks who alone can free the individual from it.

It was October - cool and dry - the monsoon was over. The night before the monks left I couldn't sleep. After the sunrise mother was busy looking after the animals, but I went to see the monks. A crowd had gathered to see them off. Some people walked with them and I also followed. At the next village they stopped. Monks went to beg food for themselves. It was considered wrong to give it to a non-monk and the other followers didn't know I had come alone. So nobody worried about me. I was very hungry. It was the first time I had been out of town without mother. At home mother was worried. She searched everywhere. Eventually someone told her that they had seen me following the monks. She walked the ten miles to the village in the evening and found me. "Did you eat?" she asked.

I said "I haven't eaten. I am hungry. Give me some food" She said "You're stupid. Why didn't you ask someone to give you some food?"

I didn't tell mother that I wanted to be like the monks... .

One morning mother and I rode out on our camel to the land. The maize crop was ripe. We built a small hut with wood and rushes. There we could sleep and protect the crop while we were harvesting. Mother asked me why I looked so sad. I could not answer. She said: "You don't listen properly. You're not interested in playing anymore. Look at other children. See how gay and cheerful they are while you mope around, you miserable little soul."

When I was eight the head of our sect of the Jaina order, the guru Acharya Tulsi, spent the monsoon months in our town. Two rich families gave their homes to the guru for this period. Canvas tents were put up in the courtyard where the people could come to hear the guru (preach) and receive his blessings. Mother took me to welcome the guru. I saw Tulsi walking towards us across the desert. He was plump and short but his eyes were shining like big lights. His face was fair, calm and peaceful. Three deep line cut across his forehead. His brows were bushy and black. His ears were long as I had seen on the statues of gods and hair grew on the outer edge denoting wisdom. His arms were
too long; which meant a man of many resources. His step was firm. He alone among
the monks wore snow white clothes. All other monks carried bags on their backs. He
alone was free. He walked like a lion. He raised his hand to bless us.
After the guru walked forty monks, then sixty nuns, then the male disciples, then the
women. Men and women sang welcome songs:

The sun is golden today
The guru comes to our town
O men and women gather together
And sing the songs of happiness
Now we can swim across
The Ocean of Samsara

The monks and nuns walked with their eyes on the ground and remained silent. They
looked like glorious angels in their robes. Through the clouds of dust I looked for any
monks I might know. I saw monk Kundan. He smiled and raised his hand. I felt as if
the guru had come to rescue me from death.

A few weeks later monk Kundan took me to the guru. Normally the guru remained
aloof, beyond reach, and talked only at sermon times but this day he looked at me with
his kind and gentle eyes.

I said “The monks have told me that they feel something spiritual in me, a link with my
previous life and that I should become a monk.”
The guru replied, “A monk’s life is very hard. You may have spiritual links from
previous life, but in order to continue these links you have to gather strength and
dedication.”

His words reverberated in my mind. I felt I belonged to the guru. He would take me to
nirvana. He would give me light. I longed to put myself in his hands.

I stopped going to school and sometimes I didn’t even go home to eat. I no longer saw
my friends and playmates. At night I walked in the desert thinking of Tulsi. In
moonlight the sand shone like silver and sometimes I slept on the sand. During the day
I wandered around. The town was quiet. Near the well under a Peepal tree sat a rich
man smoking his hookah. Shepherd children rested under the trees with their goats and
sheep. In the market women were buying monsoon fruits and vegetables and chatting.
But all this did not attract me.

As every morning mother was making butter . . . The beautiful sound of butter churning
woke me up. I went to mother and sat by her. I wanted to tell her of my meeting with
the guru but I just sat looking at the butter-making, waiting for the butter to come with
a chappati in my hand.

Impatient, I interrupted her.
“The butter is ready. It’s coming. Give it to me.”
She said, “It isn’t ready. Wait.”
I looked into the pot and pointed to some bubbles, “See, it has come”
Feeling my anxiety she gave me some butter which was still not ready. After a while
she said, “What’s the matter with you, little one?”
i said, “I want to become a monk.”
Mother was shocked. There was silence. Then she said,
"I was dreading the day you would say this. But my son you are too young. You can become a monk later on."

She burst into tears. We didn't speak any more about it.

The Brahmin came to home to ask why I wasn't going to school. Mother told him that I wanted to become a monk and she could not prevent it. She told him of a vow she made when I had smallpox at the age of five (Smallpox is a deity called 'Mata' (mother). So as not to offend her, and if someone has smallpox we say "Mother can come into the body." Every year a special day is dedicated to her when the family doesn't cook but eats the previous day's food. If 'Mata' is offended she is supposed to come into the body in the form of smallpox.) When I had smallpox mother said she thought she had done something wrong and everyday prayed to 'Mata', 'Please leave my beloved son.' In spite of herbal medicines I became so ill that mother feared I would die. She promised 'Mata', 'If you leave my son I will never stand in the way of him leading a religious life.' From the day she made this vow I started getting better. The Brahmin was angry with mother saying, "Your son is not an animal to be sacrificed. You'll regret it later on."

Although the Brahmin was very close to our family he was a Hindu, not a Jain, and therefore mother couldn't trust him on religious matters. I listened to mother and the Brahmin arguing. She said that if she broke her vow, 'Mata' might come again and this time kill me. One day she said to me:

"Bhairun, the thought of your becoming a monk grieves me but I have given my word to 'Mata'. I will not interfere. You must decide for yourself." And then she burst into tears again. My decision was already made.

Together with my mother and some prominent people of the town, I went to guru to make a formal request to become a monk. The guru said, "You should wait. Think more. You are going to be a monk for your whole life and there will be no turning back."

After a week I went to ask him again. Again he said, "Wait more." After many more pleas he said, "I accept to consider your request and I will ask monk Kundan to teach you and examine your intention properly."

A month later Kundan reported to the guru that I would make a good monk. I went to the guru with my final request. He pronounced, "On the last day of the monsoon I will make you a monk."

(From Goonasekere, 1986: 108-113)

Bhairavdan's story demonstrates how the goal of self-realisation is often sought through surrender to the guru. As Richard Lannoy observed,

The active ideal of the spiritual 'teacher' is associated with the Indian concept of compassion, or karuna. He helps others attain liberation. He is a competent therapist and capable of supplying correct answers to the riddles of life...


Attachment to the guru through devotion allows for detachment from worldly existence.

In her discussion of Hindu renunciation, Vail makes a similar argument when she claims that dependence on, and dissolution in, God can lead to a sense of autonomy. She writes,

the spiritual oneness with God... allows for an extreme amount of independence from ordinary social convention, fears or impurity, and so forth

Bhairavdan’s story also reveals that the desire to ‘extend oneself’ by connecting with something or someone greater than the empirical self is a powerful motivation to join monastic life, and a driving force within it – despite the rhetoric of asceticism’s ‘public ideology’ to the contrary.

**Detached Devotion & the Attachment of Asceticism:**

Jainism’s ‘public ideology’ interprets devotion in a utilitarian way; as functional along the *nivṛtti marg*. It is about admiration, emulation and inspiration, *not* attachment. Like Niyojikaji’s view, which we saw at the start of this chapter, this is a rationalised interpretation that maps devotion according to the ascetic values of detachment and aloneness. For example the learned Muni Mahendra Kumar explained devotion this way:

> When we accept someone as an ideal, as a role-model, *arihant*, *siddha*, *muni*, *acharya*… we want to imitate that person. For imitation we must be humble, appreciate their achievements, and eulogise them (fieldnotes, op.cit.).

Paul Dundas states that devotional activity was non-existent in the oldest texts, but acknowledges that the eulogising of the great ascetics came to play an important role early on in the tradition (1992:147). However, he restricts his discussion to the worship of the Jinas, and therefore claims that the motives underlying devotion to be solely that of “self-realisation”.

Jain devotional worship of *fordmakers*[^173], who are frequently also referred to by the designation ‘god’, should be interpreted as being directed towards this [i.e., the *paramatman* or ‘supreme soul’] and as an acknowledgement of the spiritual principle within every individual (1992:94).

He adds that the ancient tradition,

> ... is emphatic that worship of *fordmakers* does not actually elicit a response from them but rather brings about an internal, spiritual purification in the worshipper. ... So, while it may be the case that worship destroys karma, such an effect is regarded as having been brought about by the inner transformation which worship effects (1992:180).

On *bhakti*, Nalini Shântâ similarly confines her discussion to this narrow interpretation,

> Le *bhakti* jaina a son aspect propre, c’est-à-dire la louange, la dévotion, l’admiration – quelles que soient leurs expressions extérieures – s’adressent à la réalisation spirituelle d’êtres éminemment dignes de vénération, des vaillants, des victorieux, les *tirthankara* et autres paramesthin, dans le but...

[^173]: A ‘fordmaker’ is used synonymously with ‘Tirthankara’, denoting one who creates a ford or passage across the ocean of *samsar*. 
ultime de les imiter, de les suivre, et par là, de se purifier, de se libérer (1985:72. Italics added).

A Jain textbook likewise emphasises a functional motive behind devotion. It states,

When a person worships the Lord he forgets his worries, his problems, even his whole existence. He starts praising and singing. He admires and does all sorts of adorations. Sometimes a layman gets more peace and joy by some sort of ritual worship than by reading scriptures which he may not even understand (Kapashi, Shah, Desai, 1994:59).

In the public ideology, therefore, as these examples demonstrate, devotion is seen to exist only as a tool in the ascetic’s arsenal of self-purification. In this view, devotion has nothing to do with emotion or with attachment – the “seed” of all worldly problems. Instead it is focused on the self. This, however, is not the dominant way it is experienced or understood within the order. For most, their devotion is more conventionally “other-oriented” bhakti - involving love and surrender (prapatti) to their gurus.

Devotion is an unquestioned and integral part of their lives as ascetics. When asked how their devotion is reconciled with the dominant ascetic discourse of nivrtti-marg, most do not invoke the sophisticated rationale of self-realisation above. Many try to put into words something that has always been apparent to them, but which they never thought to define. When pressed to do so, many interpret it as “samyag darsana” or “enlightened worldview”, one of the three pillars of the ascetic path – evincing its centrality in their minds. However Dundas writes that devotion, in any form, was not part of the early ascetic path (1992:147), and the literature does not support the translation of samyag darsana as “devotion”. Rather, according to the Tatvartha Sutra, samyag darsana means,

[T]rue understanding, informing an individual’s thoughts and actions in solving the ethical and spiritual problems of worldly bondage and of release from that bondage (TS, 1994:5).

But interestingly, the ascetics’ interpretation is based less on the definition of samyag darsana than on its foundational role; its function as the bedrock for the creation of an ascetic life. The Tatvartha Sutra continues,

Enlightened worldview (samyag darsana) begets enlightened knowledge, which in turn begets enlightened conduct. So enlightened worldview is the

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174 Devotion does have utilitarian functions within the order, in addition to that of spiritual purification. In the hierarchically organised monastic structure, its practice is a sort of currency in that it enables the ascetic to secure a place of privilege. As discussed in Ch. 6, the ascetics compete amongst themselves for the guru’s affection.

175 Guru Dev Tulsi writes, “Mind tainted with attachment is filled with the emotion of love whereas one tainted with aversion is filled with hatred. Love, in its turn, produces avarice. Avaricious mind becomes deceitful, lustful and possessive” (Tulsi, 1995:69).
cause, enlightened knowledge and conduct the effect. The spiritual path is determined by this integrated trinity (ibid.).

The ascetics’ interpretation is, in this sense, accurate: it mirrors their experience of ascetic life where devotion serves as the foundation upon which ascetic practices are carried out. For the majority of ascetics, reconciling nivṛtti and bhakti is unproblematic. Most do not make a connection between emotional attachment and devotion. They profess their devotion as earnestly and vigorously as they denounce attachment and emotion. Clearly, they believe that their ‘attachment’ to the guru is fundamentally different from the evil of ‘worldly attachment’. Since attachment is the chief villain of the ascetic discourse, something so obviously ‘spiritual’ to them as devotion could clearly never have anything to do with it. And the years the ascetics spend in the monastery do not teach them to tame their devotion, but on the contrary, to extend, develop and amplify it. Whatever contradiction this poses on the discursive, philosophical level for Jains and Jain observers, it is not experienced as such. Even in the story of Lord Mahavira’s devoted disciple Gautama, where the connection between devotion and attachment is made explicit – the lessons are not.

Lord Mahavira, being omniscient, knew exactly when his own mokṣa would occur, and as the time approached, he sent his disciple Gautama away on the pretence of needing him elsewhere. Mahavira knew his disciple was deeply attached to him, and did not want him there when he left this world. Later, when Gautama learned of his guru’s death, he went into a state of shock.

He had immense devotion for Bhagavan Mahavira. In the presence of Bhagavan Mahavira, Gautam’s consciousness experienced perfect protection; Bhagavan Mahavira found a dependable devotee in the latter. Gautama had much attachment to the mortal frame of Bhagavan Mahavira and was not prepared to bear separation from him. *His attachment to Bhagavan Mahavira never waned, even in his physical presence with the result that he could not attain the state of kaivalya².* His attachment knew no bounds on hearing the news of the nirvana of the master. Being overwhelmed, he grieved like an ordinary man. But this state lasted for a few moments only. Gautama was a great sage and was conversant in the *sūtras* was possessed of an insight into the Truth. . . . Such a wise man could not be lost in sorrow. He regained himself. The image of Bhagavan Mahavira symbolising non-attachment flashed before his eyes. His attachment melted away. He became free from all attachments and attained the state of kaivalya (Tulsi, 1995:85 Italics added).

Though Gautama was prevented from attaining liberation until he abandoned his attachment to his guru, without loyalty and devotion he would never have reached such spiritual heights. It is as though the ascetics accept that total detachment is for a future time; a
time that their devotional practices will – ironically – prepare them for. This is how the two ideologies – one of aloneness; the other of dependence, come to coexist. Sadhviji once offered me an ‘official’ explanation of devotion. She said,

Jain bhakti is different from Hindu bhakti. Jain bhakti is mental. Bhakti marg is about pleasing the Lord with music, singing and it involves attachment. Jain devotion is not like this, it is not done to please (fieldnotes 08/96).

When I asked what the purpose was of Jain devotional songs, she replied, “They lead to samyag darsana and encourage creative power; they are not to praise or to form attachments”. A discourse that demonises attachment and emotion, yet embraces them in the expression of devotion, may appear contradictory and even disingenuous, but what we are observing are efforts to reconcile two discourses that exist on complimentary levels of reality. The public ideology of Jainism, which emphasises aloneness and detachment, naturally problematises attachment, but within monastic life the discourse of bhakti prevails – the discourse of love, surrender and attachment. ‘Official’ efforts at reconciliation attempt to reinterpret bhakti along the lines of ascetic detachment, and define it as a tool of self-realisation. The more candid interpretations of the majority of ascetics see the two as inseparable: bhakti is the progenitor of asceticism, making it desirable and possible in the first place.

It would appear that for the majority of the ascetics – and despite the exhortations of the public ideology to the contrary – it is not so much that attachment and emotions are problematic, it is how they are directed. The critical factor, in effect, becomes the objects of these attachments – be they spiritual and acceptable, or worldly and not. Muniji’s interpretation probably most accurately captured this when he said,

Emotions which attach us to worldly pursuits, or sensual concerns are bad, but those that sweep us away in spiritual pursuits are good.

Recognition of the co-existence and even complimentarity of asceticism and devotion in monastic life challenges the more commonly espoused view which considers them as antithetical. Richard Lannoy, for example, in analysing the phenomenon of “discipleship” in India from a psychological approach, treats the devotee and the ascetic as opposites. He writes, “In acute cases of insecurity, there exist only two alternatives: the utter detachment of kevalya, isolation, or utter attachment of guru-shishya relationship” (1974:366). But in Terapanthi

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176 Kevalya = state of omniscience. Kevalin or Arhat refers to one who has attained infinite knowledge.  
177 The ascetic path is one of ‘knowledge’ (jñana), whereas the devotional path is the path of attachment and emotion. Knowing and feeling are opposed.
monastic life, the 'utter attachment' of the guru-disciple relationship is regarded as the best path to attain a state of utter detachment.

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Guru Dev's Birthday:

You are the knower of superior conduct and you are perfect in conduct,
You are the preceptor of religion, you are preeminent in religion.
You have knowledge about everything, you are able to understand everything.
You believe in truth, you are in right faith and with the controlling
power of the mind and with peace,
You are with eight types of good attributes and the knower,
of matter, of space, time and emotions.
You are the disciplinarian-administrator of the four orders of this Religion.
You are the representative of the Tirthankara.
You have thirty-six virtues, Gannadapati Guru Dev Sri Tulsi and var\*\*\*\*an

On the morning of Guru Dev’s birthday, the samanis recited the Guru Vandana prayer (above)
as they did every morning, but with greater enthusiasm. Then they added original poems
written specially for the exceptional day:

An earthen lamp in the night, an island in the sea
A tree in the desert, fire in the snow
Like these things you are to me,
Your feet are lotus flowers, as is the sand which
touches them.

Moksa is not possible in this age. But if
I live in your heart, I find it possible;
But if You live in my heart,
I want nothing else.

A guru who awakens my intuition power
Makes my heart pure and is identical with my
Soul, I bow my head to him.

Many stayed kneeling for a few extra moments, softly speaking their own private
words of devotion to their guru. Then we were off to Rishabdwara to meet up with (and pay
respects to) the sadhis. We didn’t dawdle there, as the nuns too were moving in high-gear.
Everyone wanted to get to the assembly hall as quickly as possible. The sun was breaking
through the splendid sky, providing us with the necessary light to begin our trek.\(^ {178} \) As our large group walked briskly in the cool morning air along the narrow Ladnun roads towards the monastery, sounds of excitement and cheer could already be heard. A car honked continuously in the distance; its volume increasing with our every step. Soon we saw a small jeep weaving its way down the main road, avoiding the *tongas* and sleepy dogs. A group of at least six young men sat in the open-top jeep, holding a life-size cardboard cut-out of Guru Dev, and chanting slogans, "*Anuvrat Anushasana Yug Pradhan Ganadipatti Shri Guru Dev Ki - - -" and then responding "*Jay Ho!*\(^ {179} \) The nuns paid no attention to the cheers, and kept up their fast pace right into the monastery grounds. As we entered, the buzz of the crowd around the main gates recalled a *diksa* ceremony. But nothing so momentous was going to occur today. It was simply a commemorative occasion; an opportunity to venerate the community’s aged and revered guru. I was surprised to see how many had come for the morning prayers since the ceremony proper wouldn’t begin until ten o’clock, after the *bhiksha* rounds. Perhaps receiving Guru Dev’s morning blessing on this day was particularly auspicious. We entered the assembly hall from behind the monks’ residence. I walked behind the nuns as they strode swiftly but silently in unison, their white gowns flapping in the gusts created by their own speed. Each approached Guru Dev and Acharyasri and paid homage on their knees:

\[\begin{align*}
Tikkhuto \text{ Ayahinman Payahinam Karemi} \\
Vandami \text{ Namansami Sakkaremi Sammanemari} \\
Kallanam Mangalam Devayam Cheiyam Pajjuvasami \\
Matthayena Vandami^{180} \\
\end{align*}\]

The day had finally arrived. It was October 20\(^{th}\) and Guru Dev was now 82 years old. Some said that he was so uncomfortable with these annual birthday celebrations, that he decided to designate October 20\(^{th}\) as "*Anuvrat Day*", and claimed that the celebrations were really about the peace movement, not him. For the occasion, many people active in the Anuvrat movement from all over India had arrived in Ladnun over the past few days. Later in the day, they would make speeches on the successes of the movement. Although all Terapanthis (lay and ascetic) are justly and immensely proud of the achievements of the movement, and are usually very eager to talk about them, for them this day was the birthday of their Guru. In the weeks leading up to October 20\(^{th}\), they scarcely spoke of ‘*Anuvrat Day*’. Nothing could detract

\(^{178}\) It will be recalled that the nuns and monks are forbidden to be in the same place in darkness. The sun must be up before the two groups can gather.  
\(^{179}\) = "*Anuvrat Disciplinarian World Leader Religious Patriarch Guru Dev!*" - - - "*Victory!*"  
\(^{180}\) = "Three times from right to right circumambulating I adore, make obeisance, revere and respect you, the auspicious, the absolute good, the embodiment of religion and the truly learned. I wait upon you,\)
from the significance of this special day, that would end up being Guru Dev's last birthday. The assembly hall was packed as Acharyasri and Guru Dev led the morning prayers.

To end the prayers, Guru Dev recited the "mangal path" (auspicious blessing). The monks disappeared behind the stage wall into their quarters, and a few sadhvis left to collect bhiksha, but most of the crowd were slow to move. The samanis were uncharacteristically slow in their steps as they headed to the rear of the monks' residence. There, they met with a group of sadhvis, mumukshu sisters and a growing number of shravaks. Each morning, after the mangal path blessing, lay and ascetic devotees wait for Guru Dev and Acharyasri to emerge from their residence; then follow them through the western gate and out of the monastery grounds. The procession moves slowly and then comes to an abrupt halt when the gurus turn into an open field, behind a large grey stone wall, to defecate. Nearly a year ago when I first found myself amidst that chanting morning crowd, I was sure we were all headed to some special event. I tagged along with the samanis, talking with Urmilla along the way, until I nearly walked into the back of a woman devotee who had abruptly come to a stop. I looked around and wondered what was going on. I couldn't see Guru Dev and Acharyasri, but the crowd was fairly large, and I assumed they were simply hidden from my view. But within a moment the crowd began to disperse - heading home into the village, or returning to the monastery to meet with other ascetics. I was left standing with Urmilla and a few other samanis. I was aghast when they told me why. My astonishment at what I considered to be an extreme invasion of privacy was met by laughter from the samanis, who simply saw the procession as an expression of bhakti. Clearly, the public display of devotion is part and parcel of the renunciant's life.

Today the crowd awaiting the gurus after the mangal path was as large as I had ever seen it, and there was definitely a degree of excitement in the air. The crowd lined up facing each other, forming an impromptu path - an alley of about four feet wide - providing just enough space for the gurus to walk side by side. Guru Dev had been frail for some time, and needed the support of another monk's arm to walk even short distances. For somewhat longer distances, householders had built a three-wheeled wagon in which he could sit and have two other monks push. I once saw him use it when he was visiting the PSS and Rishabdwor - but everyone said he was deeply embarrassed to have to do so. According to the rules of ahimsa, ascetics are forbidden to travel by any means other than by foot. The gurus finally appeared, and immediately the householders gathered tightly around them, chanting slogans of reverence,
with many prostrating themselves at the gurus’ feet. Acharyasri held onto Guru Dev, while a younger monk walked a few steps ahead of them, and another walked immediately behind. When they are indoors, the monks and nuns always throw down their shawls for the leaders to walk on. For practical reasons this is not often done outdoors. Standing back with the samanis, it was difficult to see much of anything, but the crowd moved forward fairly quickly, the pace being dictated by the resolute monks. I stopped at the monastery gates, watched for a few moments as the especially large crowd shuffled its way towards the opening in the wall, and then I was off to join the sadhis for alms collections.

This morning on their bhiksha rounds, the ascetics would receive a variety of delectable delights – unquestionably prepared for the occasion – and they would not be so fast to pull their patras away from the householders’ generous offerings. They would accept all with pleasure because they could then, in turn, offer what they collected to Guru Dev as an expression of their love. And at the end of the day, the sweets would be exchanged once again: Guru Dev would pass them out to each and every ascetic in his order. It was a wonderful time; it was a joyous day for all.

By ten o’clock the crowd was gathering in the assembly hall again. The sun was only a few hours in the sky and yet it was already warm, and the intensity of the crowd made it feel even warmer. The ceremony began with a group of neatly dressed school children belting out the Anuvrat-Gita, a lovely tune about Anuvrat that Guru Dev himself had composed. Then two little girls, dressed in fancy frocks, stood in front of a microphone and ‘performed’ a humorous song about the life of a pious Jain. When they sang about things Jains should not do, such as drink ‘raw’ water, they wagged their index fingers, as in censure, like matronly school masters before a class. The audience of householders were delighted, and Guru Dev also appeared amused. Following them, a monk stood before the microphone to introduce a number of prominent lay speakers who wished to say something about their devotion to Guru Dev and the Terapanthi order. Time passed slowly until finally it was the ascetics’ turn to speak. Monks and nuns made heartfelt devotional speeches of varying lengths, punctuated by an occasional song by the mumukshus.

When Sadhvi Kanak Prabha was called, she spoke of her devotion to her guru and of the importance of his Anuvrat movement. Acharyasri Mahaprajna’s speech, which followed, lasted for half an hour until, at last, it was Guru Dev’s turn. Unlike the others, his talk was brief. He spoke on the importance of the Anuvrat movement and of his pride in his monks and nuns. On cue, a small group of samanis with truly beautiful voices stood again to sing.
Women & Devotion:

On this occasion of Guru Dev’s birthday, the nuns played a much more prominent and important role than did the monks; they were ’centre stage’ throughout. They prepared and presented artwork, performed their own songs, and recited poetry to mark the event. The monks were, by and large, spectators. The nun’s visibility on this day was customary, and reflected the monopoly they have on the expression of devotion in the order.

My research suggests that not only do monks display their devotion to a lesser degree, they narrate their lives less in terms of bhakti than do the nuns.\footnote{Although my contact with monks was more limited than it was with nuns, the differences I describe above were conspicuous. The monks freely admit that devotion forms an important part of their ascetic lives, but they did not provide it the same centrality as did the nuns in their ‘public’ narrative accounts to me} Their language is not saturated with idioms of surrender and devotion to the same degree. I use the word “narrate”
because I am referring specifically to the self-conscious presentation of their lives; accounts derived from looking at their own pasts. These narrative accounts structure past and present events in order to provide a coherent self-image and interpretation of renunciation. Although all ascetics are encouraged to interpret their lives through a framework of nivrtti-marg – as I have argued throughout this chapter – the nuns juxtapose the framework of bhakti alongside that of nivrtti to a much greater degree than do the monks.

One reason for the sadhvis’ predominance in matters of devotion may be that there is a cultural assumption that women innately possess the virtues of the ideal devotee. And, because girls are socialised to see their self-worth as stemming from other-oriented actions, most of them ‘naturally’ accept this role. The ‘archetypal’ Indian woman is the loyal and virtuous wife (pativrata) and devoted mother. The value in her life is derived from her ‘other-oriented’ devotion and self-sacrifice. In Women Images, Pratibha Jain writes,

Since marriage is regarded as the noblest avocation and the true destiny of Indian women, there is an enormous emphasis on the cultural ideal of faithful and uncomplaining wifehood. . . The pativrata regards it as her saubhagya (good fortune) to willingly suffer all kinds of adversities and privations for the sake of her husband and accepts service (sewa) to her husband, in-laws and members of conjugal family as her basic gender duty (stridharma) (1996:15)

Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that women’s position in religion is very often a reflection of their status in society; that religious systems typically reinforce cultural values and patterns of social organisation (Sinclair, 1986). However, given the fundamentally egalitarian religious doctrine of Jainism, and given that the status of female ascetics among the Svetambar Jains is highly atypical of other religious traditions in the Indian subcontinent – with nuns outnumbering monks three to one (Balbir, 1994), the life of a Jain sadhvi could appear as an alternative to the Indian woman’s traditional roles as daughter, wife and mother. Holmstrom suggests this very point when she writes,

The same religious tenets of renunciation, self-discipline and sakti, which partly define the constraint of women can also, in posing renunciation as central to the whole cosmology of Jainism, offer women a means of escape – in some measure – from that constraint, by adopting renunciatory action completely, as ascetics. In a religion where enlightenment is attained by control over the self, and by not just controlling but increasing one’s sakti through tap, it is women who overwhelmingly make up most of the community of Jain ascetics. Women as powerful are not just controlled; they control too, but the nature of these relations involving many-meaninged powers, land us in a whole complex of ambiguities and contradictions (1988:7).

I would agree with Holmstrom in maintaining that renunciation offers women an alternative – “in some measure” from the dominant feminine norm. But I would add that in the
Terapanthi monastic environment, renunciation is both a creative and a conservative institution. It is conservative in its alignment of women with bhakti – the vibrant but subordinate discourse of monastic life.

From the moral point of view, the most important aspect of the tradition of devotion (bhakti) is its universality. . . It is repeatedly asserted that all, irrespective of their caste or sex, are freed from mundane existence by hearing and reciting God’s names and qualities. No external qualification is required for practising devotion to God which is essentially a matter of inner feelings or attitude (Jhingran, 1989:153. Italics added).

It is precisely because devotion is “essentially a matter of inner feelings” that it is considered to be quintessentially the domain of women, and why it is ultimately subordinate to nivṛtti marg and its values of detachment and aloneness.

Sadhvis are regarded first and foremost as “devotees”. Their role as “ascetic” and “guru” is rare and a relatively recent phenomenon. The nuns would often tell me that their lives are completely different from the previous generations of sadhvis. As recently as 30 years ago, nuns never learned Sanskrit or Prakrit, so they were unable to read the scriptures, and they were never taught to speak in public. Today’s generation of nuns attributes all the changes to Guru Dev, who was determined to see the women of his order receive an education. Today Guru Dev marvels at “his” confident sadhvis. He tells them that in the early years of his Acharyaship, if he would call upon a nun to answer a question, she would be too bashful to even look at him. Let alone speak. This change in the nuns’ behaviour, however, must be understood within a wider context than that of Guru Dev’s motivation alone. It is important to note that asceticism as a freely chosen vocation by young unmarried women is be a relatively new phenomenon among Jain women, and parallels their new-found self-assurance. In P.S. Jaini’s study of just twenty years ago, he states that most Jain nuns are widows ((1979)1990:247). This is not the case today among the Terapanthi order. None of the current samanis or mumukshu upasika sisters have ever been married. Reynell claims that Jaini’s statement reflects a condition prevalent in the past (1985:268). She writes,

In general it is the older nuns who are widows. This suggests that widowhood as a cause for taking dikṣā was related in the past to the institution of child marriage whereby if a husband died still in his teens, before he had begun to work or accumulate wealth, then his widow would be left totally dependent of his affines. In addition to this many such widows would be childless which would increase their lowly status within their affinal family. . . In fact, in those days (fifty years ago) it was rare for a woman to take dikṣā who had not previously been married (1985:269).
Today, for most, nunhood is a highly esteemed vocational choice within the Terapanthi community. And within the monastic organisation, women are given opportunities that would not be available to them in household life. Because of their long training at the PSS, for example, the nuns receive much more formal education than do their lay sisters. In addition, they tend to be much more ‘book’ educated than the monks. But the nuns were quick to remind me that the knowledge the monks learn at Guru Dev’s feet is far more valuable. Although there have been many important changes for Terapanthi nuns, the lay community still tends to regard them as devoted followers, more than powerful teachers.

Nuns are aligned with the devotional element of monastic life, and dominate in its practices. This provides them with a visible and important function in monastic life, but it is in the realm of bhakti that the position of nuns is most clearly seen as an extension of the householder’s life. Devotion is the domain of the nuns because they are considered to be “natural” devotees. Surrender, sacrifice and nurture are natural attributes of the ideal woman (Jain, 1996). Thus, it is in their status as devotees that they are both elevated and devalued: praised and permanently subordinated. Devotion is expected of them; it is considered a normal rather than extraordinary attribute as it is with monks. Being a bhakta (devotee) is like being a pativrata (devoted wife) in that the virtues associated with both (devotion, self-surrender, self-sacrifice) are assumed to be natural to women. The monks, reflecting dominant patriarchal notions, generally consider nuns to be better devotees because of their “emotional natures”. For example,

- “Monks are more rational”.
- “Nuns make better devotees because they are not so argumentative as monks”.
- “Women are more emotional than men, they cry more, for instance. This can be very bad for they can be dominated by their emotions. But for spiritual women, this means that they make excellent devotees”.
- “They don’t ask as many questions, they accept what the guru says”.
- “Women make better devotees because they are more accepting and are followers”. (Fieldnotes).

Nuns do not typically explain their superior ‘devoteeship’ in terms of being more ‘emotional’ – though when asked, most did accept this to be true. Instead they tend to emphasise positive values:

- “Women are more compassionate than men”.
- “Women are more caring”.
- “Nuns do not challenge as much because we accept what our guru says is right”.
- “Women can endure more than men”.
- “Women are kinder”.
- “Nuns care more about others. Men can be selfish”. (Fieldnotes).
Reflecting pan-Indian ideas of womanhood, nuns are considered better devotees because they are more emotional, less stubborn and more nurturing. This idea is also advanced (by both sadhvis and munis) to explain their greater numbers in the order. Therefore, the fact that they outnumber the monks by over three to one is not generally perceived as a source of potential power, as Holmstrom suggested. Instead, it is simply seen as reflecting women’s devotional/emotional natures. Rather than interpreting renunciation as a challenge to the orthodox feminine norm of marriage and childbearing, it is in many ways seen as an extension of it – even by nuns themselves.

Even in monastic life, though she has renounced family, marriage and childbirth, the sadhvi is still evaluated according to the pativrata virtues of devotion, surrender and self-sacrifice. These traditional virtues prescribed for women are not substituted but rather supplemented with values more accordant with those of the ascetic ideal (i.e., detachment, independence). Asceticism therefore is not a negation of traditional feminine values, it is an extension of them. Although devotion is expected of all in the order, its alignment with emotions is ever-present. Male devotion, because it is not believed to come easily or naturally, is seen to represent extraordinary humility. For the nuns, it is commonplace and “natural”. As a result, devotion serves as both a creative and conservative force in the nun’s lives; it allows them to play an active and pivotal role in monastic life, but it aligns them permanently with their bodies, emotions and attachment.

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Guru Dev's Divinity:

At the morning birthday celebrations, the samanis sang proudly. The enthusiasm in their voices revealed their zeal and several amongst them were truly gifted singers. When they finished and returned to where they had been sitting, Guru Dev took the microphone again. He waved his long arms first in the direction of the sadhvis and samanis, and then towards the munis and samans. He spoke of pride in his disciples, whose path is the most difficult of all, but who tread it admirably. His speech was animated and full of good humour. Laughter came easily to the enthusiastic and adoring crowd. Today, he had “gifts” for his ascetics. Before him,
in a large pot, were great quantities of delicious sweets of all varieties. He beckoned his disciples to come. Laughter and smiles abounded; the serious ascetics were exuberant as they each went up to receive a sweet. The mumukshus, since they are still householders and not part of the receiving group, could only watch. But they appeared to share in the joy anyhow.

The ceremony had already gone on for several hours and would continue again in the afternoon with talks more specifically to do with the Anuvrat movement. But many had other plans: namely to visit Guru Dev’s birth place. I decided to follow a group of mumukshu sisters as they headed towards his home in the centre of Ladnun.

The house in which Guru Dev was born and grew up (until he took initiation on December 5th 1925 at the age of eleven) has now become a Terapanthi pilgrimage site. No one lives there anymore, but the building is maintained by the community. Most days it remains quiet, frequented only by a few devotees. But on this day it was crowded. Although I knew the story of Guru Dev’s birth very well, and the mumukshus knew that I knew it well, I listened earnestly as they retold it again with ebullience upon entering the old building. Mumukshu Promika gestured as she spoke, “When Guru Dev’s mother became pregnant – oooof!!” She flung both hands forward, fingers outstretched, as if describing an explosion, “She knew he was different.”
We walked through the heavy iron gates of the house and entered a small unlit landing. At one time, this area would have led to the courtyard, but now it was closed off. Only one room remained accessible; the room in which on October 20th, 1914 Guru Dev Tulsi was born. We stepped from the dark grey stone landing into a bright colourful room, crowded with photos and mural paintings of Guru Dev. There were photos of him as a young adult. In one photo he was without the muhpatti, and I couldn’t stop staring at the large, white teeth and perfect smile of a man in his twenties. Another showed Guru Dev and a group of monks in a boat on a river! I looked to the mumukshus to explain such un-ascetic behaviour. It was an exceptional time, they told me, when the monks were being physically threatened by a hostile community, and their lives were in danger. Only by taking a boat could they be assured safety. I found it odd that the photo should have ended up in this pilgrimage site. Objects belonging to Guru Dev when he was a child were, like the photos, encased behind glass. The crib in which he lay; clothing that he wore. Over the spot where he was born was an enormous, larger-than-life mural of a reclining woman with her eyes shut, dressed in a red sari. It took up the whole back wall. It was of Guru Dev’s mother. Promika continued,

When his mother became pregnant she had many auspicious dreams. One night she dreamt of a god’s beautiful golden chariot flying over her home. And then she dreamt of *kum kum* footprints [footprints made out of red powder] on the roof of her house, as if the god had stepped out of his chariot there. When she woke, she was startled by her dream. Immediately she climbed to the roof and there she found the *kum kum* marks!
The archetypal auspicious “dreams of the mother” are treated with respect and awe in Jainism, as they are indicative of future greatness. They are a regular part of all the Tirthankaras’ and Kevalins’ lives. The dreams of Bhagavan Mahavira’s mother (Queen Trishala) are most well known. She “felt an unprecedented joy on the night of her conceiving the child. She saw a series of significant dreams in a half-waking state” (Tulsi, 1995:12). She woke her husband and said, “I saw an elephant and a bull and several other things in my dream. I feel a very pleasant sensation. The whole atmosphere seems to be throbbing with light and joy” (ibid.). A soothsayer was called to decipher the Queen’s dreams. He then presented himself to the king and said,

The queen has seen very significant dreams. She will give birth to a son who will be a... dharma-cakravarti, the Emperor of the Kingdom of religion, and will develop the ideals of ahimsa, freedom, relativism, co-existence and non-possessiveness. He will be a great exponent of these (ibid.:13)

Clearly, the birth of Guru Dev was not like that of an ordinary person; it, like the birth of Lord Mahavira, had a divine mark on it. He was destined for greatness.

I should like to have stayed longer in the room where Guru Dev was born and hear more about his life, but today there were many devotees waiting to come in for a visit. We headed back towards the monastery. Pictures of Guru Dev were in full force, lining the walls of the street and dangling from homes and shop windows.

Bhakti is treated as an alternate answer to the sannyasi’s quest for the authentic self. The latter is the way of cognitive reason; the former is based on the human psychic resource: feeling emotions to judge the spurious from the authentic. According to Professor A. N. Pandeya, bhakti marg and moksa marg have been the two dominant paths in Indian culture (Pandeya, 1996 pers comm.). Bhakti is rooted in the human experience of authentic belief and emotion which takes one away from the individual ego, enlarging one’s range of concern to empathise with, and to merge in, the other – like falling in love. The model is from everyday experience, and uses the human emotion of love as the vehicle to realise the authentic self. To plumb the depths of human emotion is liberating because it allows total self forgetfulness; it enables one to be totally free from ego. As such, the goal is the same as that of the ascetic path. Moksa marg and bhakti marg are treated as two parallel ways of authentication and discrimination, with bhakti the easier and more democratic path in that it does not require a special skill, only love. Ascetics are considered to be an elite, the ‘talented few’ to use Kakar’s words. But, as I have argued throughout this chapter, within the Terapanthi ascetic order, an individual becomes an ascetic via both paths concomitantly: ascetics are made through a process in which they are progressively detached from ‘worldly life’ (or where worldliness is
objectified, reified and then exiled) and simultaneously attached, via devotion, to the order, guru, rules, hierarchy, etc.

“We are so lucky to be his devotees. Otherwise why not stay in society? [Monastic] vows are adopted by people who are keen to uplift their souls and sacrifice all worldly pleasures for its sake. For this purpose they have to renounce the life of a layperson, give up all possessions and all ties of worldly attachment. It is a thorny path and an ordinary person would not dare to undertake these rules and regulations. But those who follow this path lead a happy life. They always live free from any kind tension. They are not worried about their future because they have dedicated their lives to their guru. Their guru takes care of them. It is the guru who thinks to develop the internal power of his disciples” (Sadhvi Visrut Vipa, fieldnotes, 08/96)

Devotion, divinity and asceticism are not separate religious paths to achieve moksa, they represent intimate dimensions of the one path.

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CHAPTER 8

ASCETIC WOMEN:
The Link in the Laukik & Lokottar

Tap* & Purity:

A group of householders entered the room in which Samani Urmilla and I sat talking. At first they stood back, perhaps not wanting to intrude, but Urmilla gestured to them to come closer. Amongst the group was a woman in her thirties dressed in an ornate red sari. Her face was tranquil, unlike those of the accompanying group who beamed with pride. They were a local family from Laddun and Urmilla appeared very familiar with them. The men in the group stood a few feet back as the women took turns touching Urmilla’s feet, paying her homage. The woman in the fancy sari was at the end of a sixteen-day fast, during which she had consumed only boiled water. She was being honoured by her family (natal and affinal) who today would escort her as she visited the ascetics for their blessings. Tomorrow her husband would have a feast in her honour and many relatives and friends would attend. The woman, adorned with splendid jewellery, was silent and kept her eyes lowered as her family spoke of her virtues. Among the group were two of her sisters-in-law, a brother and mother-in-law as well as her natal sister and mother. Urmilla said a few words directly to the honoured woman, but most of what she said was for our ears. She explained that the woman was a very pious and a real tapasvini (heroic faster). Last year she had completed the very arduous \( m\ddot{\mbox{a}}skam\ddot{\mbox{a}}n \) fast of thirty-one days. It is considered to be one of the most difficult of the many genres of Jain fasts and, as Reynell points out, most women do it only once in their lifetime, if at all (1985:191).

The mother of the celebrated woman was carrying a photo album cataloguing her daughter’s fasts. She passed it to me for a quick look while Urmilla spoke to the family. I had been shown many such albums before by women proud of their achievements. Reynell writes, “The photos of the fast symbolise the woman’s continued purity of conduct after marriage, showing that she has proved worthy of wifehood within her affinal family and has brought them only honour and prestige” (ibid.:194). It was a particularly thick photo album, documenting several different fasts over a period of ten years. In one photo, the daughter was among a large group of women, all equally adorned with beautiful jewellery and ornate saris.

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* Austerity

** Reynell writes that not only is fasting a demonstration of female honour, “it is a source of prestige for the woman’s husband in that it gives him a chance to demonstrate his wealth to the community” (1985:191), (e.g. through his well-jewelled wife, and by holding lavish feasts).
Surrounded by a large audience of householders, they stood before Guru Dev with their heads lowered to receive his blessing. Glancing at what I was looking at, Urmilla said,

“I have a niece who completed the same fast. She is just eleven years old and a real tapasvin! She wants to take diksa. Everyone can see she is very pure”.

Turning back to the family, Urmilla raised her hand as she gave them a blessing. The woman at the centre of the attention bowed deeply at her feet, prostrating herself so as to press her eyes against Urmilla’s large toe – an auspicious and respectful act. She then left with her family to receive blessings from other samanis at the residence.

When we were alone again, Urmilla confided, “I cannot fast so long. I become sick”, she said holding onto her head. “Some shravaks are very pure; even more spiritual than us”.

Continuity vs. Rupture:

Remarks like those that Urmilla made to me are not rare. Parallels are commonly drawn between the religiosity of lay and ascetic women. Both can be compared and even equated because their religious practices are analogous. Whether demonstrating suitability for the ascetic life or establishing female honour, the methods are the same: withdrawal from worldly activities, restrained bodily demeanour, and the performance of austerities. Practices of bodily renunciation demonstrate proper gender socialisation as well as ascetic suitability; the behavioural expectations of lay women and sadhvis remain constant. For both lay and ascetic women, social legitimacy is sought through their behavioural purity. Balbir likewise grants that the preoccupation with female physical chastity “to some extent removes the boundary between a woman in the world and a woman outside the world” (1994:126). It is radically different for men, in that male gender socialisation does nothing to prepare them for renunciation. Indeed, male lay and ascetic lives call for competing and even contrary demands. I suggest that the gendered universes from which women and men “opt out” are centrally implicated in the type of stance they take vis-à-vis the ascetic ideal.

Denial, difference, rejection, transformation, change – these are some of the idioms of renunciation used to define a process of un-doing which makes diksa so spectacular and makes the ascetic a symbol of otherness. For women, their denial of the world is more circumscribed than men, and the fabric of their ascetic lives is less a renunciation than an extension of what came before. The gendered universe of lay women is essentially ascetic in its ethos but – significantly – its renunciatory practices are expressed in terms of requirements in the
management of female nature, reflecting a woman’s need to restrain her body, not a will to renounce the world.

Women, because of their association with sexuality, corporeality, emotional bonds and family ties, have always represented an obstacle to India’s ascetic traditions (Goldman, 1991). Both the veneration and the vilification of women are centred on their physicality. As a symbol of attachment, she is condemned and portrayed as the greatest threat to ascetic discipline; as a symbol of fidelity, she is extolled for her celibacy and devotion. Jain stories involving women centre on these dualistic themes: women play the roles of the seductive temptress or the faithful pativrati (see Granoff, 1993). Devout queens, nurturing mothers, prostitutes and temptresses – women serve as foils against which ascetic values can be demonstrated.

In the public ideology and religious imagination of Jainism, women are more closely associated with ‘the worldly’, making their acts of renunciation less absolute and more ambiguous. Ascetic women are perceived as mediating between the worldly and the transcendent; as ‘liminal’ beings within the Jain moral universe. As symbols of renunciation and attachment, ascetic women represent the link in the laukik and the lokottar.

Sectarian Differences & Female Nature:

The question of female religiosity represents one of the central differences between the Digambar and Svetambar Jain traditions and reveals ancient and deeply entrenched cultural beliefs about female nature. According to Digambar tenets, a woman is of inferior religious status to a man due to her anatomy – in particular her reproductive system – which is considered to be inherently violent (Jaini, 1991), and due to her mind which is considered to be of a fickle and deceitful nature (Reynell, 1984). Because of these ‘innate flaws’, the Digambar argue that liberation can never be achieved from a female body – that a woman would have to be reborn as a man before liberation could occur (Jaini. 1991). The Svetambar tradition likewise holds that the female body is flawed and that to be born female is evidence of the sin of deceitfulness (Reynell, 1984:21, Banks, 1997:225-6). However, it does not deny women the possibility of liberation. Renunciation via a female body may be an encumbered process, it claims, but not an impossible one. The Svetambar’s version of the story of the nineteenth Tirthankara ‘Malli’ (or alternatively, Mallinath) reveals its ambivalence about female spirituality. It claims that, unique among the twenty-four Tirthankaras, Malli was female. The Digambar deny this possibility, and argue that all souls that have attained moksha were liberated
from male bodies. The Svetambar belief, in spite of its position of ostensible gender equality, does not refute negative claims about women. Instead, in a circuitous way, it supports them. Reynell writes,

The story goes that Mallinath, the female Tirthankara, was, in a previous birth a Prince called Mahabal. He renounced the world together with six friends. His strict religious practices incorporated the twenty deeds necessary for accumulating Tirthankara Karma. However, he commits one small sin. He and his friend had vowed that they would all perform exactly the same penances. However, to accumulate more merit, Mahabal prolongs his fast by making excuses as to why he cannot break the fasts, when the allotted time to do so arrives. Through this deceitful action he does longer penances than his friends, but in the process he accumulates Striveda, namely that karma which leads to rebirth as a woman. His prior accumulation of Tirthankara karma destines him for birth as a Tirthankara. The fact that he is born also as a woman is almost accidental – a punishment for a sin committed at the last moment. In this way the existence of Mallinath serves rather to detract from female religious status rather than to support it by re-affirming the insidious association between women and sin (1984:24-5).

This debate over female religiosity, which is over two thousand years old, forms part of a more general dispute over ascetic practice. The Svetambar (white clad) tradition claims that nudity is not essential for mendicancy and that the white garment worn by ascetics is not an obstacle to liberation. The Digambar (sky-clad) tradition, by contrast, asserts that the practice of nudity is essential for a Jain ascetic in order to fulfil the vows of non-attachment and non-possession. Moreover, since nudity is ‘unacceptable’ for women, the Digambar concludes that women cannot attain salvation. Dundas writes that

By establishing a direct connection between the fact that a woman cannot go naked and the affirmation of nudity as sine qua non condition for the attainment of emancipation, Kundakunda put forward the central argument of a debate that subsequently became a locus communis of the Digambar/Svetambar doctrinal rivalry, which has continued to the present day (1992:131).

The practical outcome of these theoretical debates is that among the Digambar, as with most ascetic traditions in India, women are denied full monastic vows and thereby are incapable of representing the tradition’s highest cultural ideal. In the Svetambar Jain tradition, by contrast, female asceticism has a long, stable and even illustrious history. According to the scriptures, since the time of Rsabh (Jainism’s first Tirthankara of mythic

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times), nuns have always outnumbered monks by more than two to one. Lord Mahavir, the last Tirthankara of our era, and an historical figure (599-527 bce), is said to have had 36 000 nuns and 14 000 monks as disciples (Dundas, 1992:49). Reynell writes,

> In view of the prevailing Hindu attitudes to women during the period in which the Svetambar sect arose, and in view of the influence of these ideas of new non Hindu religious groups, the Svetambar attitude is quite exceptional in that it went against the grain of contemporary thought. The Svetambars state that women are the religious equals to men and can attain enlightenment in their own right through religious action. As a result they recognise an order of female ascetics who are considered on a par with the monks (1984:7).

Theoretically, nuns are "on a par with the monks" as Reynell writes, but empirically as well as on the level of symbolism, they are subordinate. Although the Svetambar and Digambar are often depicted as opposites with respect to their views on female religiosity, the ideas they share in common are as important as those on which they differ. Both hold the same negative understanding of a female nature as flawed, associated with sexuality and sin. The vigour and persistence of these ideas inform practices of gender socialisation and form the basis of a religious imagination, which rejects the female form as a symbol of renunciation.

**The Gendered Laukik & its Repercussions for the Ascetic ideal:**

**The Construction of Femininity:**

The world from which women and men 'opt out' is very differently gendered, with very different repercussions for their ability to represent the highest cultural ideal. The way in which women and men are produced as gendered beings in patrilineal, patrilocal Jain society results in renunciation being a *process of extension* for women, and heroic *rupture* for men.\(^{184}\) The social environment out of which a woman 'opts out' in order to pursue asceticism is characterised by confinement to the domestic domain and by 'religious' practices centred on the management of her sexuality. Dube in her essay on the construction of gender in India shows how the body is the axis around which gender socialisation occurs.

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\(^{184}\) As we saw in Chapter 4, Terapanthi girls go through a training period, often up to ten years, during which time they 'learn' to be ascetics. By contrast, the process through which boys become ascetics is much shorter, and hence, more dramatic.
The phenomenon of boundary maintenance is a crucial element in the definition of the cultural apprehension of the vulnerability of young girls and the emphasis on their purity and restraint in behaviour. This is expressed in the construction of ‘legitimate’ and ‘proper’ modes of speech, demeanour, and behaviour for young girls and in the organisation of their space and time (1988:15).

And, Considerable importance is attached to the way a girl carries herself, the way she sits, stands and talks, and interacts with others. A girl should walk with soft steps: so soft that they are barely audible to others. Taking long strides denotes masculinity. Girls are often rebuked for jumping, running, rushing to a place and hopping. These movements are considered part of masculine behaviour, unbecoming to a female; however, the logic of the management of a girl’s sexuality also defines them as unfeminine: they can bring the contours of the body into greater prominence and attract people’s attention. A girl has to be careful about her posture. She should not sit cross-legged or with her legs wide apart. Keeping one’s knees close together while sitting, standing, or sleeping is ‘decent’; and indicates a sense of shame and modesty. ‘Don’t stand like a man’ is a common rebuke to make a girl aware of the demands of femininity (ibid.:16).

Female socialisation occurs through the imposition of a set of behavioural norms and restrictions which call forth and imply sexuality; it revolves around a process of the “sexualisation of the female body” (Haug, 1987) The management of sexuality informs the organisation of a woman’s space and time (e.g., parda norms) as well as explains her predominance in religious activities. Religion becomes the primary means through which female honour is both privately and publicly demonstrated. It is seen as “an essential quality of womanhood” (Reynell, 1985:68) and therefore, a girl’s religious education begins early. Reynell writes that from the age of five a girl is instructed in religious stories and is taught the fundamentals of Jainism by a female family member. After the age of ten she fasts, learns the minute details about food limitations, alms giving, the pratikraman and samayik rituals, and is expected to visit the nuns regularly (ibid.:69). Reynell writes, ...

...[B]etween the two sexes, it is the women who are most heavily involved in religious activity. ....[F]ieldwork results show that in terms of regular temple going, the performance of samayik and pratikraman, the attendance of preachings and pujas and the observance of food restrictions, women are considerably more assiduous and regular in their practice than men. Fasting in particular seems to have become a female sphere of influence and most of the orthodox Jain women undertake quite long and complex fasts, regularly, which gains them both status and public admiration from the rest of the community (1984:28).
For example, the behavioural code of conduct, called the chauda nyem (fourteen principles) is meant as a guideline for all Jains to follow but, in practice, is observed almost exclusively by women. It is women who restrict their consumption of green vegetables and fruit, who limit the number of clothes they wear and the geographical space they move in (see p 103 for full code). Through such essentially renunciatory practices, Jain women demonstrate their purity and honour. Holmstrom writes,

...[W]omen are perceived as the embodiment of another power, that of sakti, ‘energising principle of the universe’ [Wadley 1977:115]. Both men and women contain sakti, both can increase or decrease it by specific means including tap, “heat”, but it is women who are seen as embodying sakti and in Hindu ideology femaleness is thus a representation of sakti. Sakti is the active power of creation; without this action, this dynamic creation cannot continue; the gods without their female consorts representing sakti cannot act. Women then, as uncontrolled power, are sexual beings; yet while their fertility is vital to men, in that they are powerful they are dangerous, they sap men’s energy, they must be controlled... They must therefore be “cooled” (it is not for Jains the sakti itself which is ritually “hot”, but the emotional energy which the power of sakti generates that endows women with an inner heat) [Reynell, 1985:155]. Hence the social roles available to women are centred upon this idiom of the married wife and mother of sons, defined and controlled by men, and who is therefore channelling her inherent powers into the prosperity and well-being of her family [Hershman 1977, Reynell 1985] (Holmstrom, 1988:5 emphasis in original)

Lay and ascetic women are constructed as moral beings through renunciatory practices: both lay and ascetic women fast in order to demonstrate, with their bodies, their piety and honour. Reynell has demonstrated that women’s religiosity is intimately construed as an extension of the nurturing role of wife and mother (Reynell, 1984, 1985, Holmstrom, 1987:28). In the religious imagination, the connection between female religiosity and the pativrati (faithful wife and mother) is so intimate that even when female religiosity reaches its acme – in the form of renunciation – the connection is not severed; it is enlarged. Holmstrom writes on ascetics,

Diksa can then be seen as analogous (in that young women see it as a choice in life opposed) to marriage, and as a further extension of it, in that it is a channelling of sakti not for one husband but for the (male oriented) Jain community at large (1987: 29).

The world that female ascetics stand outside of is not the abstract “laukik”; it is the narrowly circumscribed domestic domain of marriage and motherhood. Their rejection of marriage and motherhood might appear to represent a challenge to the dominant female ideology of the pativrati, but in practice, ascetic women operate inside, not outside, the same ideological parameters that define lay women. The following is a well-known story, told to me
several times by the nuns, which demonstrates the association of female religiosity and sexual purity, as well as the view that treats a woman's decision to renounce the world as a natural progression from lay piety.

A youth named Buddhadas from Champanagri saw Subhadra on a visit to Basantpur and was so attracted by her beauty and the serenity of her countenance that he collected information about her. He was happy to learn that she was still unmarried. However, he learned that her father was determined to give her away in marriage to a Jain family. Buddhadas belonged to a family of Buddhist tradition, and so he decided to disguise himself as a Jain house-holder. One day, he orchestrated an 'accidental meeting' with Jindas, the girl's father. Finding Buddhadas a capable youth and devout Jain, Jindas gave Subhadra to him in marriage. But when Buddhadas returned to Champanagari with Subhadra, he threw away his adopted guise of a Jain youth, because its purpose was served.

When Subhadra came to know she had been deceived, she was stunned and hurt, but, because of her inner strength, faced the situation boldly and courageously. As the only Jain in a Buddhist family, she was taunted and ridiculed, but she held her head high and kept her religious resolve.

One day a Jain monk came to Buddhadas's house to collect alms. Subhadra gave him alms joyfully. When he was leaving, however, she noticed tears falling from his eyes due to a straw stuck in his eye. Practicing detachment, the monk ignored the pain, but Subhadra could not bear it. She went to him and drew the straw out with her tongue. Her mother-in-law, who witnessed the incident, yelled at her, "You have blemished our home by your indecency! You boast of your Jain religion. Does your religion promote lewdness?" The whole family was furious and tried to convert her to Buddhism, though she remained devoted to the Jain religion.

When the news spread to others in the city, the situation worsened and Subhadra felt dejected. Instead of fearing the blemish on her own name, though, she worried that the Jain religion and its practitioners were being condemned wrongly because of her. She restrained herself a great deal and kept firm faith in her religion and chastity. She decided to abstain from food and drink until she cleared herself of the false charges, and absorbed herself in chanting Namaskaar Mahamantra.

On the fourth day of her fast, all the four gates of Champanagari jammed mysteriously and all efforts to open them were in vain. Because all the roads to go out from the city were blocked, the inhabitants were worried. All of a sudden, a divine voice exclaimed, "Citizens! Your efforts are in vain! Only if a chaste woman, having tied a sieve with a thin thread, draws water from the well, and sprinkles it on the doors, can they be opened". The voice created much discussion and deliberation among the women of the city. Some women appeared to have confidence in their chastity but doubted whether their efforts would open the door. If the door didn't open, a woman was likely to be branded as unchaste. Though most women opted not to participate because of the dilemma, a few with enough courage went to the well, tied the sieve with a thread but could not draw any water.

When Subhadra heard of the city's problem and the suggested solution to it, she thought to herself. 'What an excellent opportunity for me to get rid of the blemish wrongly cast upon me'. She said to her mother-in-law, "If you allow me, I may go and open the door," to which the mother-in-law looked at her with widened eyes and said, "O wretched woman! Do you want a further defamation on our family? Have you forgotten how you acted so immodestly with that monk?" Subhadra was quiet for a
moment and then again requested. When her mother-in-law did not answer, Subhadra concluded she was not protesting.

Though people stared at her with suspicious eyes as she approached the well, she paid them no heed and resolutely tied the sieve with a thin thread, mentally recited the Namaskaar Mahamantra and drew the water, which she sprinkled on three of the gates. They immediately opened. She left one closed, with the idea that if any other woman would be required to prove her chastity, that door would be for her.

After the event, Subhadra was given much acclaim. When Buddhadas and his family learned what happened, they all apologised and felt proud to have Subhadra as a member of their household. They adopted the Jain religion. Eventually, Subhadra became a Jain nun and attained liberation from all worldly bondages.

(paraphrased from Sadhvi Visrut Vibha's story "Chastity" in Journey into Jainism, 1994)

Leaving aside its negative commentary on Buddhism, the story presents the journey from lay life to nunhood as a natural progression for the pious Subhadra; it conveys a sense of continuity between the laukik and lokottar for women. In addition – and importantly – it demonstrates the importance of female sexual honour and the role of religion in establishing it.

Female renunciation does not constitute gender transgression. Instead, their power comes from laying claim to the female virtues of chastity and restraint and adopting them fully, thereby constructing themselves as symbols of purity par excellence.

The Construction of Masculinity:

The sadhvi's experience of 'continuity' from lay life contrasts sharply with the monk's experience of 'rupture', and consequently, with the male relationship to the ascetic ideal. Many of the monks of the Terapanthi order claimed that their knowledge about spiritual matters only began with diksa. And several spoke of the piety of their mothers as being an important factor in their decision to renounce. As boys they would observe, but not participate in, domestic religious practices. This reflects a common feature of Jain life, namely that lay men, for the most part, are far less familiar with religious matters than women (see Babb. 1996:23, Reynell, 1985). Men's relative ignorance is explained in terms of the gendered division of labour, which involves men in the public domain. Babb writes,

There is a basic division of labor among temple-going Svetambar Jains: women fast, while men – too immersed in their affairs to do serious fasting – make religious donations (dāna; in Hindi, dān) (1996:25).

Reynell's research corroborates this.
In Jain eyes, male work precludes men from extensive involvement in regular religious activity for it is important that all their time and energy should be invested in their business. By contrast, the woman, confined to the domestic sphere, is perceived by the menfolk to have more free time which she can devote to religion (1985:125).

Thus, lay male religiosity and honour is demonstrated through 'performances' in the public domain. It is not centred on bodily management or behavioural practices as it is with women. Reynell writes,

Men must also demonstrate a degree of moral uprightness, but this is accomplished less through actual behaviour and more through using their wealth in a particular way. Consequently, there is less scrutiny of their actual daily behaviour, whereas for a woman the converse is true. They continuously demonstrate their honour, and that of their family, through their behaviour which must be impeccable. In particular, it is through their religious activities that they express their moral worth to the community (1985:162-3).

Male religiosity is demonstrated through outward religious acts, most quintessentially through public charitable giving (dan) which, to the Jain community, signifies a state of inner detachment and moral purity (ibid.:165). Reynell describes female tap (fasting) and male dan (donations) as "structural equivalents" (ibid.:194). Both are concerned with family honour and with the valorisation of the ascetic ideal, and both are public affairs. But their methods differ. Women’s religiosity is fundamentally deportmental or behavioural, centred on bodily practices, whereas male religiosity is performance, centred on things they do in the public domain.

When a man renounces the world, he renounces the common male orientation which is outward and worldly. In effect, he 'opts out' of the public domain.185 There is no question of an extension of lay practices into the ascetic life. Instead, there is a sharp break with the religiosity of the 'public theatre' and, interestingly, a redirection of religiosity to focus on his bodily behaviour.

The paradigm of female religiosity:

Centred as it is on behavioural restraint and withdrawal from worldly life, Jain asceticism can be seen as modelled after female religiosity: ascetics must take care in walking, speaking, picking things up and laying them down; they must be concerned with sexual purity, self-control, the minutiae of ahimsa and 'questions of ingestion' (Banks,1997:229) and they

185 If the ascetic aspirant is young, it would be more appropriate to say that he renounces the 'promise' of the public domain.
should always display restraint and modesty (see Jaini, 1979:248). Ideal ascetic behaviour corresponds with standard feminine virtues, and yet asceticism remains quintessentially a male ideal. Why this is, may simply reflect an asymmetry in the cultural evaluations of male and female activities whereby male activities are, ipso facto, recognised as more important (Rosaldo, 1974:19), but it must also reflect the fact that the drama of renunciation – so central to the valorisation of the ascetic ideal – is largely absent in the case of female renunciation. The continuity of female religiosity across the laukik lokottar boundary undermines its drama. Male renunciation represents a break with worldly life in a manner that female renunciation does not. It is the very absence of continuity (or, the creation of difference) that establishes men as renunciants. The break or rupture with the former householder life is the important thing symbolically. The fact that female renunciation is perceived as more of a continuation rather than a renunciation of lay religiosity has important and negative implications for women as symbols of the lokottar. Women remain associated with the worldly realm and are thus hindered from becoming cultural heroes.

The Heroism of Asceticism:

The role of heroism in constituting what Babb calls the ‘worship worthiness’ (1996:62) of ascetics should not be underestimated. It is the extraordinary nature of asceticism that fuels the worship of the ascetic and the glorification of renunciation. Asceticism must be perceived as an accomplishment to elicit the reverence it does. For men, it is a bold and heroic achievement. For women, it is less so, for both socio-economic and ideological reasons. External socio-economic factors continue to motivate some women to take diksa, which undermines its heroism. Although today the majority of female renunciants chose asceticism as a deliberate, and often hard fought for, vocation (as was the case among my study group. See also Reynell, Shântâ, Holmstrom), the association of asceticism with an institution of refuge for unmarriageable women persists (see fn #171). For instance, Padmanabh Jaini’s study published in 1979 states that the majority of Jain female mendicants are widows (1979:247). Jaini’s claim may simply reflect a common association in the Indian imagination of female ascetics with widows (Clementin-Ojha, 1988:34) or, as Reynell suggests, it may reflect a social reality that is no longer widespread (see Cort, 1991:660, Holmstrom, 1988:23-4, Goonasekere, 1986:88). Reynell states that.
Nowadays, with the rise in the age of marriage, women are more likely to have given birth to children by the time they are widowed. This, together with the lifting of restrictions of widows' behaviour and dress, serves to militate against widows taking diksa quite as readily as they seem to have done previously (1985:269).

A more germane and critical reason why renunciation is perceived as - and to some extent is - a form of refuge for women is rooted in the ruinous demands of the contemporary dowry system. In the lay (largely business) Jain community, a daughter's dowry is a crucial status indicator. Reynell writes,

This creates considerable problems for the less well off Jain families who, unlike the middle income and wealthy families, are not able to open deposit accounts for their daughters to save the required cash over the years. Such families usually only have an income of 6000 rupees a year. All of this incoming cash is used for subsistence and it is extremely difficult to save the required 50,000 rupees which is the minimum cost of a respectable wedding. Nor does the financial outlay end with marriage, as throughout a married daughter's life the parents are expected to provide gifts at various festive occasions. Thus dowry is, in a sense, a life long obligation (1985:265).

Reynell writes that although the prospect of financial distress may motivate a young woman to enter monastic life, it is difficult to prove "as no nun will admit to the dishonour of family poverty as a reason for taking diksa" (ibid.:266). Reynell lists physical deformity and sexuality impurity as other possible 'external factors' motivating female renunciation, both of which would lessen a girl's chance at finding a marriage partner. In unpropitious situations, therefore, renunciation may present itself as a 'way out'.

A woman who is unmarriageable is a problem in that spinsterhood is virtually unacceptable, not only within the Jain community but within India as a whole. In the Jain case it is a problem, firstly, in financial terms in that women cannot work in the conservative small towns and villages. If a woman does not get married, she becomes an economic burden to her father and then to her brothers, who will have their own wives and children to support. Secondly, her moral and sexual purity will also be questioned. Where marriage is not possible, nunhood is a viable solution in that it removes a woman from financial dependence and restores her reputation to one of inviolable purity (ibid.:264).

In such cases, it is worldly life that 'renounces' women, not the other way around. Though such cases may be few, they have a powerful and negative effect on the status of female renunciation in the social imagination. Even among contemporary nuns, the majority of

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186 That asceticism is perceived as much more of an achievement for men than for women resonates with Rosaldo's (1974) and Chodorow's (1974) thesis which states that, cross-culturally, masculinity must be achieved whereas femininity simply come to pass 'naturally'.
whom choose nunhood as a vocation, asceticism represents an alternative to, or escape from, marriage. On the Terapanthi nuns, Holmstrom states,

...[N]ow it is overwhelmingly younger women who, after their studies, take diksa as an oppositional choice to marriage – the reason nearly all gave, from the oldest to the youngest, was to escape the “bondage” (bandhan, the same word as that of the soul enmeshed in karm) of marriage (1988:24).

As long as female asceticism is perceived as a refuge from, as opposed to renunciation of, worldly life, the raw materials for public heroism are limited. Thus, these external socio-economic factors contribute to the popular view in India that asceticism is fundamentally a noble vocation for men (Clementin-Ojha, 1988:34), but a sanctuary of last resorts for women.

Ambiguous symbols:

Throughout the dissertation I have argued that the ideological split between the worldly and the transcendent – (between the laukik and lokottar) is fundamental to an understanding of Jainism. Although interaction and interdependence characterises the relationship between shravaks and sadhvis sadhus in their day-to-day life, it does not undermine the significance of the ideological rupture. Jainism esteems renunciation above all else and ascetics are its cultural heroes. Babb considers the worship of ascetics to be “the most important fact about Jain ritual culture” (1996:23). The ascetic symbolises the negation of worldly existence and a way out of samsar (the cycle of birth and death). Through their very beings they communicate the hope of salvation: for those with unyielding courage, liberation is possible. The ascetics are worshipped because they are extraordinary beings capable of what the majority is not.

Renunciation is a momentous and creative act. Through it, ‘the worldly’ and ‘the spiritual’ are delineated. The ascetic, as a symbol of liberation, represents the triumph over the worldly. As I argued in Chapter 4, renunciation establishes Jain identity negatively vis-à-vis the external world. Jain moral identity is defined in terms of what it is not, and the ascetics, as symbols of negation, interdiction and restraint, reveal another way of being. As representatives of the spiritual ideal they must be seen as ‘other’ – as different from those engaged in dharma marg (the householder’s path of duty) because dharma marg serves as a foil against which the ascetic ideal demonstrates itself. Renunciation is about making ‘real’ the ideological split between the laukik and the lokottar; it is about creating difference. In the religious imagination,
the act of renouncing worldly life and all its components is at least as significant as the state of renunciation. And it is the male, because of the breach renunciation brings to his life, who publicly dramatises renunciation best.

Rules governing female ascetics reveal their continued association with the worldly and their need to be under male control. Balbir cites the Chedasutras [law book dealing with monastic offences] on the proper behaviour of nuns,

A nun is not allowed to be alone. A nun is not allowed to enter alone the house of a layman for food or drink, or to go out from there alone. A nun is not allowed to enter alone a place to ease nature or a place for stay, or to go out from there alone. A nun is not allowed to be without clothing. A nun is not allowed to be without superior. A nun is not allowed to stand in [the ascetic posture called] kayotsarga (1994:122).

In practice, nuns are dependent on, and subordinate to, the authority of their male counterparts (Balbir, 1994, Cort, 1991). So, for instance, the Sadhvi Pramukha (head nun) is subordinate to the Acharya (head monk) and it is only when no monks are present do nuns take over the responsibility of lecturing to householders (in practice this does occur very often due to the greater number of nuns). Ascetic institutions mirror the structure and values of the wider patriarchal society (see Babb, 1996:54). Cort explains,

Within the gacch [ascetic order] one has the samuday [subdivision of the gacch] and the parivar [family, small group]. The samuday corresponds to the family lineage, the kutumb, while the sadhu parivar corresponds to the kutumb in its smaller sense, the parivar or immediate family... All these units, both mendicant and lay, are defined by the male members: a woman is attached to her father's, and after marriage her husband's, kutumb; and the sadhvis are always attached to the samuday of a sadhu. In both forms of organization, the men have absolute primacy over the women (1991:662).

Both practically and symbolically, ascetic women are less able to make use of their 'renounced lives' rhetorically in the construction of difference. They are less able to contrast the lokottar with the laukik because they do not have the tools to create difference. As discussed in Chapter 4, renunciation can only effectively take place in a context of abundance; one cannot renounce what one never had. We see, therefore, that renunciation is intimately connected with power - and for those members of society without power (women, the poor) their ability to renounce is undermined. Boys renounce the promise of future power. When they take diksa, they sever ties to their natal home. They renounce the tangibles of their family name, the possibility of carrying on their family lineage, family property and sexual pleasure - essential elements of lay male identity. In patrilineal, patriarchal Jainism, women cannot do the same. A girl has only temporary membership in her natal home, does not carry the family
name, has no decision-making powers, no autonomy and owns no property (Dube, 1988). Other than her dowry, at the time of marriage she retains nothing of her family’s wealth. Her body is her only “property” which is given on her wedding day as the gift of a virgin (kanya dān) to her affines (Reynell, 1985:194). And, to establish sexual purity, ascetic women tend to deny, as oppose to renounce, sexual pleasure (see Chapter 5) Thus, in the public ideology, women are perceived as having less to renounce than men.

Nuns are less able to make use of the idioms of the archetypal ascetic life – of solitary pilgrimage, detachment, detachment, independence, and homelessness – in the construction of themselves as cultural exemplars. For women who have renounced the world – i.e., renounced family ties, emotional bonds and sexuality – and pursued the Jain ascetic ideal fully as renunciants, the shadow of the worldly realm still pursues them because their ascetic lives constitute an extension, rather than a rejection, of their lay religious lives. Symbolically women are prevented from wholly embodying worldly negation and ‘difference’. They are not perceived as capable of severing ties to the worldly domain completely. Ironically, therefore, not only is female nature considered more closely tied to the worldly realm, but lay women’s very strategies of religiosity – because they are unequivocally renunciatory – prevent ascetic women from making their act of renunciation a statement about difference. Ascetic women are only ambiguously symbols of ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ – the very essence of the ascetic ideal.

The Power of the Inviolable:

Ascetic women carry with them the feminine virtues of restraint and modesty from the domestic domain, but these virtues are redefined within the arena of asceticism as ‘samiti’ – that is, as rules of conduct and self-regulation having to do with non-violence and detachment. Ironically, as ‘samiti’, their comportment is less restrained, giving them a degree of forthrightness and spontaneity that they previously lacked. They do not walk ‘softly’, but stride confidently. They do not assume a demeanour of modesty around men, instead, when in conversation, they look at them directly and they speak authoritatively with women and men of all ages.187 These behaviours, normally considered ‘outside the feminine norm’ are not seen as such, due to ascetic women’s greater status. By laying claim to the virtues of restraint and

187 M Banks (pers. comm., 1995) mentioned that he was struck by these differences in demeanour between lay and ascetic women.
purity which characterise the dominant female ideology, yet divorced from sexuality and the domestic domain, ascetic women become symbols of inviolable purity and power. They see themselves, and are seen by others, as cultural exemplars of purity.

Both marriage and nunhood control female sexuality and ensure morality and family honour. Both equate religiosity with behavioural purity, demonstrated through restrained body demeanour and austerities. However, whereas lay women’s religious practices are associated with the management of female sexuality and are intimately associated with the role of the pativrati (Reynell, 1985), ascetic women’s practices are ostensibly outside the sphere of sexuality and are unequivocally self- or soul-oriented. Renunciation allows them to redefine renunciatory practices in terms of worldly detachment, instead of in terms of sexual management. The bodily restraint of nuns, like monks, does not signify modesty and humility, it demonstrates spiritual advancement. Outside the sphere of sexuality and domesticity, women become symbols of purity and are objects of veneration for the whole Jain community.

***

Sitting in a half circle around Urmilla was her sister Vivek, her mother, and a group of other lay women with whom I was not familiar. “My mother has stopped looking for a boy for Vivek” Urmilla said with a smile as I entered the room. All appeared cheerful and anticipated a response, but subtlety was lost on me. Forever patient, Urmilla explained. “Vivek will take diksa”.
In the conservative Jain families of Rajasthan, young women have essentially only two ‘career’ options: marriage and renunciation. The world, therefore, that ascetic women renounce is quintessentially that of married life; it is *samsar* in its most tangible form. Because *diksa* is perceived as an alternative to married life, the *laukik* is typically discussed in terms of the tangibles and bondage of married life: wifehood, motherhood, sex, childbirth, the *himsa* activities of cooking and cleaning. This makes it distinct from male renunciation: monks are far less likely to talk of their monkhood as a renunciation of the domestic particulars of the *laukik* e.g., of marriage and fatherhood. As discussed above, because renunciation is more meaningful in a context of abundance, men tend to emphasise that which they have *given up*, as opposed to that which they have *escaped*. The bondage which men renounce is therefore rhetorically presented as “golden” (e.g. the fortune of wealth and sensuality). Women, on the other hand, renounce the concrete “bondage” of marriage (Holstrom, 1988:24).

When I first met Vivek, nearly a year earlier, she was twenty-two years old and very ambivalent about her future. Neither marriage nor renunciation appealed strongly to her. Her eldest sister, now in her forties, was married with several children and living in Gujarat. The youngest of five girls, she was the only one whose future remained undecided. Her other three sisters, including Urmilla, had already taken *diksa*. She would often sigh and say, “It is too difficult a choice”. Today, however, she appeared self-assured and certain.

“I have thought very hard. I decided I must not waste my life,” she said. And placing her hand on her chest, she added, “I am doing this for myself”. Just as she understood *diksa* and marriage in oppositional terms, so too did she see her future as a choice between a life dedicated to others (husbands, in-laws, children) or a life dedicated to her own spirituality. The idiom of renunciation is unequivocally and unabashedly soul-centred, and nuns can avail of it every bit as much as monks. Female asceticism represents a continuation of the female virtues of chastity and restraint, but significantly, it also represents a renunciation of *struharma* (gender duty) which emphasises *sewa* (service) to, and sacrifice for, others. Religious practices are no longer observed for the welfare of family or to demonstrate sexual purity, they are for their own liberation. They take *diksa* for themselves.

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Appendix 1

The 14 Gunasthanas (stages of spiritual development)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Number</th>
<th>Stage Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mithyadrsti (perverted belief)</td>
<td>Non-Jain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sasvadana samyagdrsti (lingering relish of right belief)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Samyagmithyadrsti (right-cum-wrong belief)</td>
<td>Mixed View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aviratisamyagdrsti (right belief attended with non-abstinence)</td>
<td>Laity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Desavirata (right belief with partial abstinence)</td>
<td>Laity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pramatta (self-restraint unexempted from remissness)</td>
<td>Ascetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Apramattasamyata (self-restraint with freedom from remissness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nivrtti (dissimilar coarse passions)</td>
<td>Removal of Passions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Anivrttibadara (similar coarse passions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Suksmasamparay (subtle passions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Upasanta (subsidence of delusion)</td>
<td>Removal of Deluding Karma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ksinamoha (Exirpation of delusion)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Samyogi (omniscience with activities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ayogikevalinah (omniscience with total cessation of activities)</td>
<td>Emancipation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Tulsi, 1985:133-4 for list on left. The summaries on the right were commentaries from the ascetics).
Appendix 2 Rules & Regulations in the Ascetic Life

The following are some examples of rules that the samanis are obliged to observe, as well as some questionnaires they must respond to and submit to the acharya. They demonstrate how their lives are structured, scrutinised and compared.

Daily life:
- Wake up by 4am; sleep after 9pm
- Sleep side by side, lined up according to seniority
- Get permission to leave building
- Inform group leader or nojika of all activities
- Do pratikraman, arhat vandana in group daily
- Involve self in pratikraman, meditation, jap for 3 hours/day
- Do swadhi daily (memorisation of texts\textsuperscript{188})
- Do vandana to elders
- General meeting with all samanis every 2 weeks
- Get permission to wash clothes, alms, water, meeting male shravaks or monks

Keep diary:
Written details about day-to-day life (e.g. how much tea drunk, how many days fasted, scriptures memorised, clothes received etc.) must be presented to Acharya at Maryada Mahotsva

A samani can keep:
- 4 saris; 3 blouses, 3 choluck (bras); 2 petticoats; 2 kavatchan; 1 shawl; 1 elwan (special shawl); lunkar (thick shawl); 2 hankies, 2 small towels.
- If shawl tears, must keep it for 1 ½ months before getting a new one
- 3 patras each
- Can borrow from shravaks 4 tubs, 2 balti (buckets) – for duration of stay in village, town etc.

Re: Education Shiksha sutra
- Can’t study with monk or male householder unless get permission of Guru Dev / Acharyasri
- Can’t teach men, unless in a group of samanis and with permission
- Keep 1 metre distance from men
- Don’t display affection with each other or with shravaks
- Don’t wash clothes in front of shravaks
- Whichever samani borrowed ‘pari hali’ (items from householders) must return them
- Concerning horoscope, kundalini, palmistry. Don’t give this information to shravaks
- Don’t tell shravaks’ mantras for worldly things (e.g., getting a child).
- If having a problem and want a mantra from an outsider, first get permission to do so
- Keep no personal photos, except of Guru “because without guru we have no existence”

Re: Contact with Shravaks whilst travelling
- How many people did you inspire to renounce?
- How many camps were organised? How many people attended? When? Where?
- If you gave lectures, describe.
- How many did you make anuvrat?
- How many fasts did you encourage; how long were fasts?
- How many units of ‘group fasting’?

\textsuperscript{188} They are tested on this constantly. Guru Dev may call on one to stand up and recite something.
- how many people took vows of silence; for how long?
- how many people took santara? Where? Who? How long did it take? Anything special? (e.g. fragrance around person, premonitions, bright lights etc)

Yaatra (travelling)
- how many kilometres?
- how many villages with Terapanthis?
- how many villages with Jains?
- how many villages, towns and cities in total?

Seva (service)
- how many days did you help with this sadhvi samani?
- if someone was ill – who? When? how many days?

Kala (art)
- how many pictures did you make (of Guru Dev/ historical pictures etc)
- how many rajoharan and ojha did you make?
- how many bowls did you make? How many polished? Painted?

Lipi (to write)
- how many special writings? (lekan)
- how many miniature writings? (sukhmakshar)

Viryachar (ethics of strength questionnaire)
- how long and how many fasts did you do?
- how many limitations did you take?
- how many mala did you recite in one day?

Punishments
If take food in patra and it is living: ekhasin
If take water in pot and it is living: ekhasin
If eat living thing: upwaas
If loose/break clock, thermus, thermometer (1 grain without water/ 1 day)
Say bad words (100 long breaths)
Tell a lie (100 long breaths)
If sleep for more than 30 minutes during day 100 long breaths
If break Niqikaji’s rule (100 shlok swadhai standing)
If tell a secret of another person (100 long breaths)
If weep, 25 long breaths
If hurt immobiles (100 long breaths)
If hurt 1-4 sensed organ beings (ants, worm etc.) 200 shloks swadhai
If take something without permission (even a pencil), 2 days consecutive upwaas
If hurt 5 sensed organ being 1-2 days upwaas; kill – 3 days upwaas consecutive
If one keeps more than prescribed limits (e.g. 3 instead of 2 pairs of glasses) – 2 days upwaas
If eat during night - 1 day fast
If go out during night – 6 long breaths

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189 E.g. Muniji once told me a story of how he opened a window where a lizard was resting, and accidentally squashed it. For penance, he fasted for three days.
If still doing *pratikraman* after the prescribed 48 minutes after sunset – 25 long breaths
If keep anything of own outside at night – 12-25 long breaths
If miss *pratikraman – ekhasin* (one meal in a day)
If dream of violence, or of eating etc. – 100 long breaths
If vomit during night – 25 long breaths
If wring water out of clothes - 2 *logus* (14 lines) meditation
If take anything before sunrise – 1 day fast
Appendix 3 An Encounter with Monastic Maan

About half way into my stay, I began to collect poetry written by the nuns. I was particularly interested in its devotional content. I learned from one of the samanis that a particular sadhvi “Sarala” wrote poetry in English. I was interested in seeing it and asked another sadhvi – “Dipika”, with whom I had been working on English translations – to introduce me. When she enquired why, I told her frankly that I was interested in reading Sadhvi Sarala’s English poetry. Immediately she dismissed the idea – stating that I was wrong about the sadhvi; that in fact her English was terrible and her poems, therefore, would be of no interest to me. I insisted that I would still like to see them, but she said that I should forget it or take the matter up with Sadhvi Promukha.

That same afternoon when the Sadhvi Promukha happened to be passing by, I approached her with my request. At first she just seemed to be smiling at my awkward Hindi, but then Sadhvi Dipika joined me and began to argue against my request. There was an active exchange, and many sadhvis looked on. I could not make most of it out. All I understood was that Dipika was concerned with me reading such poor quality work. Sadhviji Promukha then raised her hand to us in a blessing and moved on – without saying another word. I looked to Dipika, but she too said nothing. It wasn’t until a few moments later when we were sitting at her mini desk again, did I ask,

“Did she say it would be alright?”

“No. Don’t bother with this matter any more” was what she answered without explaining. But another plumpish and elderly sadhvi who had entered the room after Sadhvi Promukha left, started talking to Dipika. She appeared upset, her face becoming increasingly flushed. The two spoke in their native Marwari and appeared to be in a tense exchange until the elderly nun let a sari she had had in her hands fall to the floor, and left the room. Immediately, Dipika turned to what we had been working on, and said no more. I left the nun’s residence that afternoon feeling agitated. When I met up with Urmilla and Sanmati shortly after, they told me that the plump elderly nun must have been Sadhvi Sarala herself. They told me my mistake was to have asked Dipika for an introduction because she is extremely jealous of others who can speak English.

“She likes to think that she alone can speak English,” Urmilla said. “She just wants to impress Acharyasri”.

Their faces revealed scorn for her.190 Several weeks later, Urmilla did something that surprised me. She had arranged with Sarala to copy the poems for me (See below for some examples.). During pravachan, sitting in a large group, Urmilla hastily transcribed. Dipika was present of course, but unaware.

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190 On another occasion when a saman with no background in English at all was chosen to go overseas (to the States) along with another saman, it was explained to me this way: “She is connected with Sadhvi Dipika, and Sadhvi Dipika is very close with Acharyasri – this is the only reason she has been sent”.
Examples of Sarala's poems (abridged)

"Circulation"

After every birth
Comes a rain of death
Just as the night follows
the run of the day
Never can one stop
This motion of destiny
They are necessary actions
Of Nature
Which changes the spring
To autumn
And autumn to spring.

"Glorious Death"

Death is better
Restraint and renunciation,
Than Life
Of Lust and luxury.

"Great Terapantha"

We are peaceful in this Terapantha
We are blissful in this Bhikshu Sangh

Never can come near
Darkness or fear
Only the flow of sweet air
In this Terapantha

Product of dedication
Product of legislation
Product of instruction
That is the Terapantha

We are peaceful in this Terapantha
We are blissful in this Bhikshu Sangh.
Appendix 4: The Ascetic Ideal

THE UTOPIA: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDEAL MONK

(1) A monk's life shall I lead, perceiving the truth,
   Wishing well, upright, tearing off intents deep;
   Abandoning acquaintance, longing not for objects sensual,
   Who begs from families strange, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(2) With affection ceased, and vivacious,
   Abstaining, knowing the lore, self-protected,
   Wise and conquering, perceiving all,
   Who is attached not anywhere, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(3) Overcoming abuse and injury, steadfast,
   Vivacious ever, the sage travels self-protected,
   Undistracted in mind, not elated,
   Who endures all, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(4) Using beds and seats lowly,
   Cold and heat diverse, gnats and mosquitoes,
   Undistracted in mind, not elated,
   Who endures all, he is the ideal monk.

(5) Desires not treatment respectful, nor homage,
   Nor reverence, let alone praise;
   Self-restrained, keeping the vows, ascetic,
   Wishing well, who introspects the self, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(6) For whom one gives up life,
   Or falls into delusion deep;
   Such women ever the ascetic avoids,
   And is not enamoured, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(7) The rent (in garment), tones, (portents) earthly and celestial,
   Dreams, science of signs, staffs and building-sites,
   Defects physical, and the science of cries,
   Who lives not on sciences such, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(8) Charms strange and doctor's prescriptions,
   Emetics, purgatives, fumigation, and bathing.
   The patient's asylum and treatment medical.
   Eschewing, who renounces, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(9) Ksatriyas, guilds, Ugras, princes,
   Mahanas, Bhogas, and artisans of all sorts;
   Who praises not, nor honours,
   And avoiding them, renounces, he is indeed the ideal monk.
The householders whom, after renouncing, he met,
Or, ere renunciation, was acquainted with;
With them, who, for gains earthly,
Cultivates not acquaintance, he is indeed the ideal monk.

Beds and seats, drink or food,
Dainties various, and spices, by others,
Refuses to partake of, the Nirgrantha,
Who gets not angry, he is indeed the ideal monk.

Food and drink of kind any,
And dainties various, and spices, by others,
(Being offered), who blesses them not in the triple way,
Restraint in thought, word, and deed, he is indeed the ideal monk.

Rice-water and barley-pap,
Cold sour gruel, and barley-water,
Insipid alms, who despises not,
And visits the houses lowliest, he is indeed the ideal monk.

Sounds manifold there are in the world,
Of gods and men, and of beasts too,
Dreadful, frightening and awful ones;
Who bears them unperturbed, he is indeed the ideal monk.

Knowing doctrines, different in the world,
Wishing well, griefless, and learned;
Wise, conquering, and perceiving everything,
Tranquil and inoffensive, he is indeed the ideal monk.

Not living on craft, without house and friends,
Subduing his senses, free from ties all;
With passions minute, eating light and little,
Homeless and living alone, he is indeed the ideal monk.

(Tatia & Kumar, 1981).
Appendix 5 Examples of the Nivrtti-Marg: Jainism's Public Face

Paul Dundas depicts the ascetic path as one of total withdrawal and restraint,

In the widest sense, the entire range of ascetic behaviour is aimed towards both the imposition of mental and physical constraints in order to ward off the influx of new karma and the cultivation of ascetic practices which, if exercised with sufficient intensity, will destroy karma which is already clinging to the soul. These two areas are defined as being 'restraint' (samyama) and 'asceticism' (tapas) (1992:138)

The Tattvartha Sutra (TS), the only text considered authoritative by all Jain sects, likewise describes the ascetic path as one of restraint. It states,

Progress in spiritual development depends on progress in inhibition . . . Psychic inhibition is when the mind disengages from worldly action. Physical inhibition is when karmic inflow actually ceases because of this mental detachment (TS, 1994:213).

And,

Inflow is inhibited by guarding, careful movements, morality, reflection, conquering hardships, and enlightened conduct (TS, 1994:219).

P. Jaini's description of asceticism similarly centres on the importance of restraint,

The purpose of assuming the mahavratast [at the time of initiation] is to reduce to a minimum the sphere of activity and frequency of activities that would otherwise generate the influx of karmas and the rise of fresh passions. The stopping of karmic influx, called samvara, is achieved by various methods; these basically involve control of the senses and the development of extreme mindfulness (1990:247).

The Tattvartha Sutra (TS) emphasises the importance of detachment in the ascetic path,

Absolute renunciation of all possessions and passions including the body is the aim of ascetic practice. . . . [and] The ascetic has to be free of the sense of mineness. Whatever he seeks for the bare maintenance of life is to be used with absolute detachment. The feeling of detachment from the body is an integral part of compulsory daily practice” (TS:236).

Acharya Tulsi writes,

Righteousness consists in complete self [i.e. soul ] -absorption and in giving up all kinds of passions including attachment. It is the only means of transcending the mundane existence (Bhava-pahuda,83) (Tulsi,1985: 88).

Discussion of ascetic life typically centres on the rules governing this “realigned way of life”.

Jaini writes that the ascetic is distinguished from that of the householder, “ . . . by the manner of his observance of ahimsa in daily practice”(1990:242):

(1) He must refrain from all acts of digging in the earth, in order to avoid the destruction of earth bodies:
(2) he must refrain from all forms of bathing, swimming, wading, or walking in the rain, thus showing proper concern for water bodies;
(3) he must protect fire-bodies by never extinguishing fires; nor may he light a match or kindle any flame, for such is the evanescent nature of the fire bodies that the very act of producing them is virtually equivalent to causing their destruction;
(4) he must refrain from fanning himself, lest he injure air bodies by creating a sudden change of temperature in the air;
(5) he must avoid walking on greenery or touching a living plant, since either action might injure certain vegetable bodies (Jaini 1990:242-3).

And Jhingran writes,

...the search for liberation requires a complete breaking away of the mind from the outer world and its direction towards the innermost reality of the self, culminating in the total absorption of the former (mind) into the latter (self). This is the nivruti-mārga which seeks to forcefully curb the outgoing tendency of the human mind and is supposed to be the sine qua non of self-realisation or mokṣa” (Jhingran 1989:114).

Jaini goes on to describe the mechanics of withdrawal, embodied in the three ‘restraints’ (guptis) and the five rules of conduct (samitis) which “prepare an ascetic for the advanced meditational states through which kamic matter is finally eliminated from the soul” (1990:247):

The term gupti refers to a progressive curbing of the activities of mind, body, and speech: hence the monk undertakes long periods of silence, remains motionless for hours on end, strives for one-pointedness that stills the intellective process, and so forth (ibid.)

The samitis include:

(1) care in walking (irya-samiti) – a mendicant must neither run nor jump, but should move ahead slowly, gaze turned downwards, so that he will avoid stepping on any creature no matter how small;
(2) care in speaking (bhasa-samiti) – in addition to observing the vow of truthfulness, he should speak only when absolutely necessary and then in as few words as possible;
(3) care in accepting alms (esana-samiti) – only appropriate food may be taken, and it should be consumed as if it were unpleasant medicine, i.e., with no sense of gratification involved;
(4) care in picking up things and putting them down (adana-niksepana-samiti) – whether moving a whisk broom, bowl, book or any other object, the utmost caution must be observed lest some form of life be disturbed or crushed;
(5) care in performing the excretory functions (utsarga-samiti) – the place must be entirely free of living things” (1990:248).

Jaini continues that an ascetic is “encouraged to reinforce his practice of the guptis and samitis by constantly manifesting the ten forms of righteousness (dasa-dharma):

(1) perfect forbearance
(2) perfect modesty
(3) perfect uprightness
(4) perfect truthfulness
(5) perfect purity
(6) perfect restraint
The aspirant must also continuously contemplate the twelve mental reflections (*anupreksa*) which will lead to detachment from the world:

(1) the transitoriness of everything that surrounds one,
(2) the utter helplessness of beings in the face of death,
(3) the relentless cycle of rebirth, with its attendant suffering,
(4) the absolute aloneness of each individual as he moves through this cycle,
(5) the fact that soul and body are completely separate from each other,
(6) the filth and impurity which in reality permeate a seemingly attractive physical body,
(7) the manner in which karmic influx takes place,
(8) how such influx can be stopped,
(9) how karmas already clinging to the soul can be driven out,
(10) fundamental truths about the universe, namely, that it is beginningless, uncreated, and operates according to its own laws—thus each person is responsible for his own salvation, for there is no divinity that might intervene,
(11) the rarity of true insight (*bodhidurlabha*), and the number of creatures who, because they have not been so fortunate as to attain human embodiment, are currently denied the wonderful opportunity to attain moksa,
(12) the absolutely true teachings of the Jinas (*dharma-svakhyatata*), how they are the most fundamentally expressed through the practice of *ahimsa*, and how they can lead one to the ultimate goal of eternal peace (ibid., 248-9).
Appendix 6: The Daily Routine of the Sadhvis

Holmstrom, who spent several months travelling with the Terapanthi sadhvis in 1987, provides a sketch of the daily routine of the sadhvis. I quote at length:

The structure of the day itself hardly ever changes, though here it is not explicit rules which order it but an undeclared rhythm of action... The sadhvis rise at 4am, the last quarter of night, and meditate or recite a list of acarya Bhiksu’s rules for the order. At 4:30 they gather and chant the arhat vandana together, the most fundamental Jain prayer, and then the pratikraman, which covers roughly one muhura [48 minutes], a long Prakrit list taken from the Pratikramana Sutra. When light is adequate to make out the finger-print on one’s hands, they start on the day’s first pratilekhana, checking their belongings and changing into their day clothes, and pack up their possessions into bundles of white cloth.

At sunrise (c 5:30am) they sling their bags and rolled-up mat over one shoulder, fill their gourds with water from householders, straining it through cloth (this they have not taken since sunset), and set off on the road. The group I was with stopped off to pay darsan on the acarya, though they can only enter the place where the munis are staying after the shout has gone up inside that the sun has actually risen. The daily journey, through relatively well-populated Harayana, was usually 13-18km, taking some two hours; they travel in twos or threes, striding rapidly through the early morning countryside. Since our group was so big we stayed often in village schools (especially suitable if separate wings for girls and boys) or, in larger places, in dharmasalas or private houses.

Immediately they arrive there are jobs to be done; it is about 8am and morning begins. If there are enough houses, they go in pairs for alms of breakfast, to collect water which is poured into maikas, large clay jars borrowed from householders for the day, and there are informal classes and other work to attend to. If the village is reasonably sizeable, the acarya when he gets in gives a public lecture to the local community: a few monks generally go to support and sing bhajans, but normally the sadhvis do not bother to go unless they are specifically taking notes from the acarya’s speeches for editing and publication...

At 11am or so it is time for pairs to go for gotercer or bhiksa, alms. The sadhvis in this large group are divided into three smaller groups only for the purpose of collecting and eating alms; as many pots as are needed are collected from the various members of the group and stacked one on top of the other in the jholi, a sling of white cloth knotted. As they can only take a little from many places (“like bees”), collecting alms enough can take a lot of trekking around; women often come to ask the sadhvis to come to their houses, or the sadhvis will go to local Terapanth houses, then other Jain sects (though some of these too come to offer alms), or vegetarian Hindu houses. Eventually the three pairs return, full patras skillfully balanced, and “show” the sadhvi pramukha or the most senior sadhvi what they have collected before settling down to eat. They all eat more or less together, squatting in three circles, sharing out everything equally within groups, sometimes between groups, as far as possible. Eating times are the only times when they can legitimately shut the doors to householders and approach anything like “privacy” in a collective sort of sense. The sadhvi pramukha eats separately, cross-legged on her mat. It is a mark of respect to her authority (and also affection) first to share out her meal onto a separate patra, rather than diving into the joint ones like everyone else.

After eating everyone wipes their patra as clean as possible with their fingers and swills a little water around, drinking what is left. The idea is not to leave any remains of food as it would bring insects wherever the patra is washed; I think this is also to do with non-reciprocity: you cannot leave anything given to you, nor give it back to a householder (unless it was an unacceptable e.g. “live” article and, realising, you hand it back at once – books are exempt too.
once they are read they are given away, too heavy to accumulate, the bodies of dead sadhvis are also handed back of course). Nothing of a sadhvi's is to serve the purpose of a householder (old clothes must be torn first into strips and then little squares, and buried in earth). Every day two sadhvis take it in turns to finish washing everyone's pairas, and in the evening they also wash the cloths used for making jholis and straining water.

The midday meal marks the beginning of afternoon; some take a short nap if they have been travelling, though if they have not then they should not sleep unless they are over 50 or sick or fasting. (The ideal is to do 30 days' fast a year; most fast every 15 days, on the eve of the full moon and the dark moon, but it usually works out more sporadically, especially whilst travelling; those who get sick when fasting are not directly pressed.) It is a case of the emphasis on constant awareness, control over one's sense and actions, wakefulness which is the whole mode of renunciatory conduct. Many women come for darshan at this time, bringing assorted children.

At about 4-4:30pm the sadhvis start on the second pratilekhna which marks the third quarter of the day, the start of evening. It includes unwrapping and rewrapping the rajoharan, the woollen broom each one owns, flicking through both sets of clothes to rapidly check for insects or dust, and changing into one's "night" set, usually the slightly dirtier or more torn set. This is the lull before the rush for collecting alms and water which immediately precedes sunset. At 5:30 or so they set off, and by about 6:30pm have usually finished eating; then each sadhvi takes a brimming paira of water with which to clean her teeth, face, hands and feet, and to get as much inside herself as possible before the long hot night. Meanwhile the two will be washing out paira-cloths with a little water and washing powder (begged along with dollops of toothpaste with the evening alms), hastily hanging them out to dry.

Quick, quick, the shout goes up: 20 minutes to sunset – 10 minutes to sunset – 5 minutes to sunset – the sun has set! The cloth-washers immediately empty out what water is left (carefully, in a place free from grass or insects); water gourds are emptied and wiped dry. No spot of water is to be left, nor food; you can keep food from the midday to evening meal, but not overnight. The matkas are emptied and overturned. Even medicines are handed over to householders for safekeeping and asked for again at sunrise. It is extremely important, and seen as a definite act of tyag, to renounce food and water at night. (Also they try to avoid going outside at night and sleep on a roof or balcony only if shaded by a parapet or similar – this stops 'germs' (English word) or insects falling out of the sky onto them and hence being injured. Another frequently given reason for not eating at night is that they might eat one of these beings unknowingly).

Immediately after sunset the sadhvis gather for pratikraman, the repetition of rules in their form of the renunciation of sinful acts and meditation upon any sins one may have committed. Whereas the morning pratikraman is uttered immediately before sunrise, the night one is immediately after sunset; these times are the meeting points, sandhyas when the deities visit earth and categories are confused. For one muhurta (48 minutes) either side of the sandhyas no other scriptures may be recited, as they are in (Ardha Magadhi) Prakrit, which would irritate and provoke the gods, whose language it also is. The pratikraman itself would not do so being a list of rules rather than preaching, and is in any case a purifying strengthening of boundaries in the repetition of right conduct. The pratikramans also punctuate the year; every 15 days (the full moon and dark moon) they are 3 times their usual length, every four months they are 5 times their usual length, and once a year at samvatsari during the week of prayasan they are a mammoth 10 times their usual length, with meditation upon the sins committed during the intervening period, and the mutual asking for and granting of pardon.

After the pratikraman, the sadhvis each pay homage to all those senior to themselves in diksa terms... Finally they gather once more for the arhat vandana and then sit it the cool evening chatting; this was when most of this dissertation was created, in the discussions as the light faded until around 10:30pm, one quarter into night, when they spread their mats, drew their caddars over themselves and at last slept (1988: 24-28)
GLOSSARY

Acharya  spiritual leader of order
Agam  canonical literature, scripture
Ahimsa  non-violence, nonharm
Ajiva  non-soul, matter, that which is not alive, sentient
Anuvrat  ‘small vows’
Anuvrat Movement  a movement of moral rehabilitation launched by Acharya Tulsi in 1949
Arihan  one who is worthy of worship; one who has attained omniscience
Bhiksha bhiksa  alms
Bhut  souls of unhappy deva (ghosts), demons, preta
Camatkar  miracle
Chaturmas caturmas  four month rainy season retreat
Chappals  sandals, thongs
Darshan  to be in the guru’s presence; to see and be seen by the guru
Daya  compassion
Dharma  duty /religion /righteousness
Dharma Marg  path of duty (shravaka’s path)
Dharmasangh  ascetic community
Dhyana  meditation
Digambara  Jain sects whose ascetics are ‘sky clad’. i.e., naked
Diksha diksa  initiation
Diksharthi  initiate (n.)
Fordmaker  one who has created a ford (passage) to cross the ocean of samsar; used synonymously with Tirthankara and Jina
Gali  path, road
Gan  an organised group of ascetics, a religious order
Gautam Shaila  name of samanis’ residence in Ladnun
Gunasthana  stages of spiritual purification
Harijan  individual of an ‘untouchable’ caste, literally “people of god”
Himsa  violence
Jholi  sling to carry stacked patras
Jina  epithet of the Tirthankaras, “one who has conquered”
Jiv jiva  sentient, soul
Kavatchan  tunic worn by upasikas, mumukshus and samanis
Kayotsarga  body-abandonment (a technique of meditation).
Kheer  sweet rice porridge
Kruta ptyana  long top and trouser suit
Laukik  of the world, of society, worldly, mundane
Laukik punya  social merit
Laukik daya  spiritual compassion
Lokottar  transcendent, spiritual, other-worldly
Lokottar daya  spiritual compassion; that leading to liberation
Lokottar punya  religious merit
Mahavrata  ‘great vows’ of an ascetic
Mala  rosary beads
Moksa Marg  path of spiritual liberation/ release
Muhpatti: mouth covering worn by Sthanakavasi and Terapanthi ascetics

Mumukshu: “One who is desirous of emancipation”, a student training to be an ascetic at the PSS

Muni: monk, male ascetic, sadhu

Namaste: a greeting: “I bow to the divinity within you”.

Nivrtti-marg: ascetic path, path of turning away from the world

Paap: bad karma

Pappadum: crispy bread

Patra: bowl/vessel/container used for carrying alms.

Pratikramana: a ritualised confessional prayer

Pratilekha: careful checking of clothes, books etc. for insects before use.

Pravachan: sermon, lecture

Pravrtti-marg: path of worldly life


PSS: Parmarthik Shikshan Sanstha (training school for girls who aspire to be ascetics) in Ladnun

Punya: good karma, merit

Rag: desire

Rajoharan: a whiskbroom carried by ascetics

Rishabdwar: name of sadhus’ residence in Ladnun

Roti: bread

Sadhana: spiritual practices (meditation, fasting, prayer etc.)

Sadhi: nun

Sadhi pramukha: chief female ascetic, appointed by the acharya

Saman: semi-ascetic category created by Terapanthi

Samavasaran: the Tirthankara’s universal assembly

Samnyasi: ascetic, renunciant, hermit

Samsar: worldly existence, cycle of birth, death and rebirth

Sangh: assembly

Samyag darsan: true inner religious experience

Shravak: householder

Shramana: ascetic

Shishya: pupil

Singharpati: leader of small group, agrani

Stotra: religious stanza of praise

Sutra: canonical scripture

Svetambara: Jain sect whose ascetics wear white garments. Terapanths are a sub-sect of the Svetambaras

Tap tapas: austerities, fasting

Tapasvini: someone who performs heroic austerities, usually long fasts

Tirth: passage/ford

Tirthankara: one who has created a passage to cross the ocean of samsar, omniscient teacher; used synonymously with Jina and Fordmaker

Tyag: renunciation

Upasika: “Worshipper”, term used for first year student at the PSS

Vairagya: state of complete detachment

Vara: one of four main categories of brahmanical social system

Vihar: ritualised annual itinerary: ascetic wandering

Tevacharya: assistant and designated successor to Acharya
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