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JAIN VEGETARIANISM: FROM ASCETICISM TO AN ART OF LIVING

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Translated from the French by Brianne Donaldson

Translator's note

This original article by Marie-Claude Mahias was published in French in 2021 as "Le végétarisme des Jains: De l'ascétisme à un art de vivre." [1] Mahias brings the lens of anthropology and a candid analysis to her multi-year fieldwork (1975–2010) with Jains in various north Indian states. In addition to providing an approachable introduction to Jain religious conceptions and biological classifications as the essential backdrop of Jain food practices, Mahias helpfully frames the socio-political, religious, and economic factors of Jain diet. Even as vegetarianism emerges as a hallmark of Jain identity, the author pluralizes the foodways of global Jains by multiplying meanings and practices through sect, generational differences, diaspora, gender, wealth, the level of spiritual advancement, and even kitchen organization. Mahias invites readers to consider "food as a mediator of the individual's relationship to society and the universe; and a conception of the individual as physically and mentally linked to what they eat…". The author's focus on Digambara practices, for which there is less research compared to other Jain sects, further sets this study apart. The addition of four photos taken by Mahias, not included in the original publication, allows readers a rare glimpse of Jains living out their tradition in India.

As the translator and a Jain studies scholar interested in how global food practices constitute the "human" metaphysically with and through other living entities, it was a true pleasure to translate this work. That Mahias was able to contribute to my translation process was an additional gift. I thank S. C. Kaplan for her expert review of the first draft and Marie-Claude Mahias for ongoing conversations and good humor that enabled me to share the acuity of the original French for an English audience. Transliterations follow the author's preference for vernacular use. Any remaining errors are mine.

What and how we consume is a fundamental expression of our social and cosmic

[1] Marie-Claude Mahias, "Le végétarisme des Jains: De l'ascétisme à un art de vivre," in *Religions et Alimentation: Normes alimentaires, organisation sociale et représentations du monde*, 71–89. Edited by Rémi Gounelle, Anne-Laure Zwilling and Yves Lehmann. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2021.

existence. I hope that readers are nourished through this layered examination of Jain dietary practices to consider how eating expresses one's place and aspirations within a dynamic living universe.

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The Jains (with a population of approximately 5 million people in India) are almost all city dwellers involved in commerce, industry, liberal and intellectual professions, and civil service; these lucrative professions ensure a certain degree of economic power and a comfortable standard of living. This also means that they live fully in the modern globalized world. They eat very well, two or three meals a day, expensive products (such as fresh and dried fruits), nourishing products (such as legumes and dairy), and they are all rather plump. Nowadays, it is more the fear of diabetes than religious principles that lead them to reduce the amount of fried foods, butter, or sweets in their diet.

They are often characterized, in the eyes of their fellow citizens, by the combination of professional activities, strictly vegetarian diet, and scrupulous behavior in matters related to food. From the outset, this establishes a relationship between religion, economic activities, and dietary codes. This is relatively common in India. What is less common is the emphasis on vegetarianism, despite it being recognized as a superior diet, according to Brahmanical values.

The Jains in India[2]

The Jains are followers of a religion that developed in the sixth century BCE, in the same period and region as Buddhism. In order to grasp the rupture that this emergence implied, we must look to the religious context in which it arose.

"Vedic" India, named for its founding texts, the *Vedas*, had established a polytheistic religion centered on animal sacrifices. In ancient Brahmanism, sacrifice wove the links between the visible and invisible worlds, ensuring the perfect functioning and order of the cosmos. Sacrifice also justified the organization of human society into four functional classes (*Brahmans*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, and *Śūdra*) and the recognition of Brahmans as responsible for socio-cosmic order. The prosperity of a family, society, and the order of the world depended

[2] In the 19th century, in the context of questioning and reformulating identity in reaction to the Hindu revivalism of the Ārya Samāj, a reform movement led Jains to assert themselves as a distinct religious group. A number of castes in the northern states then changed their patronymics, substituting "Jain" for their caste or clan name.

on the proper performance of sacrifices, which were also occasions for meat-based meals shared by the officiants.[3]

Alongside these married, wealthy, priestly Brahmans were ascetic-renunciants (*śraman*) devoted to celibacy, living on alms, preoccupied with meditative knowledge and putting an end to the cycle of rebirths. For them, all acts, including rituals, condemned humanity to indefinite rebirth. The reformers and founders of new religions, Siddhārtha Gautama and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, both being born to princely families, renounced family, power, and all possessions to lead a wandering life. It was under their influence that Brahmanism was transformed, integrating the values of renunciation and the aspiration toward liberation and developing the notion of *ahiṃsā*, which has been known as "nonviolence" ever since Gandhi used it as a political weapon. Brahmanical rituals became essentially plant offerings, and Brahmans the main proponents of nonviolence and vegetarianism.

The adoption of vegetarianism was simultaneously:

- A religious attitude: Buddhists and Jains rejected the authority of the Vedic texts and the Brahmanical pantheon. Instead, they have their own deities, temples, and particular forms of worship. Thus, the Jains worship twenty-four mythical heroes, called *arhant*, "blessed," *tīrthaṅkar*, "fordmakers," or *Jina*, "victors," the last of whom, Mahāvīra, is a historical figure who lived in the 6th century BCE.[4] These are human beings who, through asceticism and meditation, attained supreme knowledge and were freed from the cycle of rebirth.
- A social-political attitude: To refuse to eat meat was to oppose blood sacrifices and the supremacy of Brahman priests. This is why we can say that the Jains were the true Pythagoreans of India, in the political sense attributed to them by Marcel Détienne (1970): beyond the differences in food classification and selection, there was the same refusal of a dominant socio-political order based on sacrifice and the search for another mode of relationship to the divine.

Two distinctions are important to clarify the limits of this study. As early as the 5th century CE, a split occurred between the Śvetāmbar, "clothed in white," whose ascetics wear white garments and a mouth veil, and Digambar, "clothed in space" who consider nudity necessary on the path to liberation. This article sometimes refers to both sects, but more often to the Digambar alone.

More importantly for our purposes, the Jain community is divided into two orders: ascetics and laypeople.

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[3] According to the *Laws of Manu* (V, 27 ff.), the orthodox code of Hinduism, eating meat was lawful provided the animal had been offered as a sacrifice.

[4] The hypothesis put forward by some philologists, that the true initiator of Jainism was the 23rd *tīrthaṅkar*, Pārśva, dates this religious trend back 250 years, to around the 9th century BCE (Schubring 1966, 250).

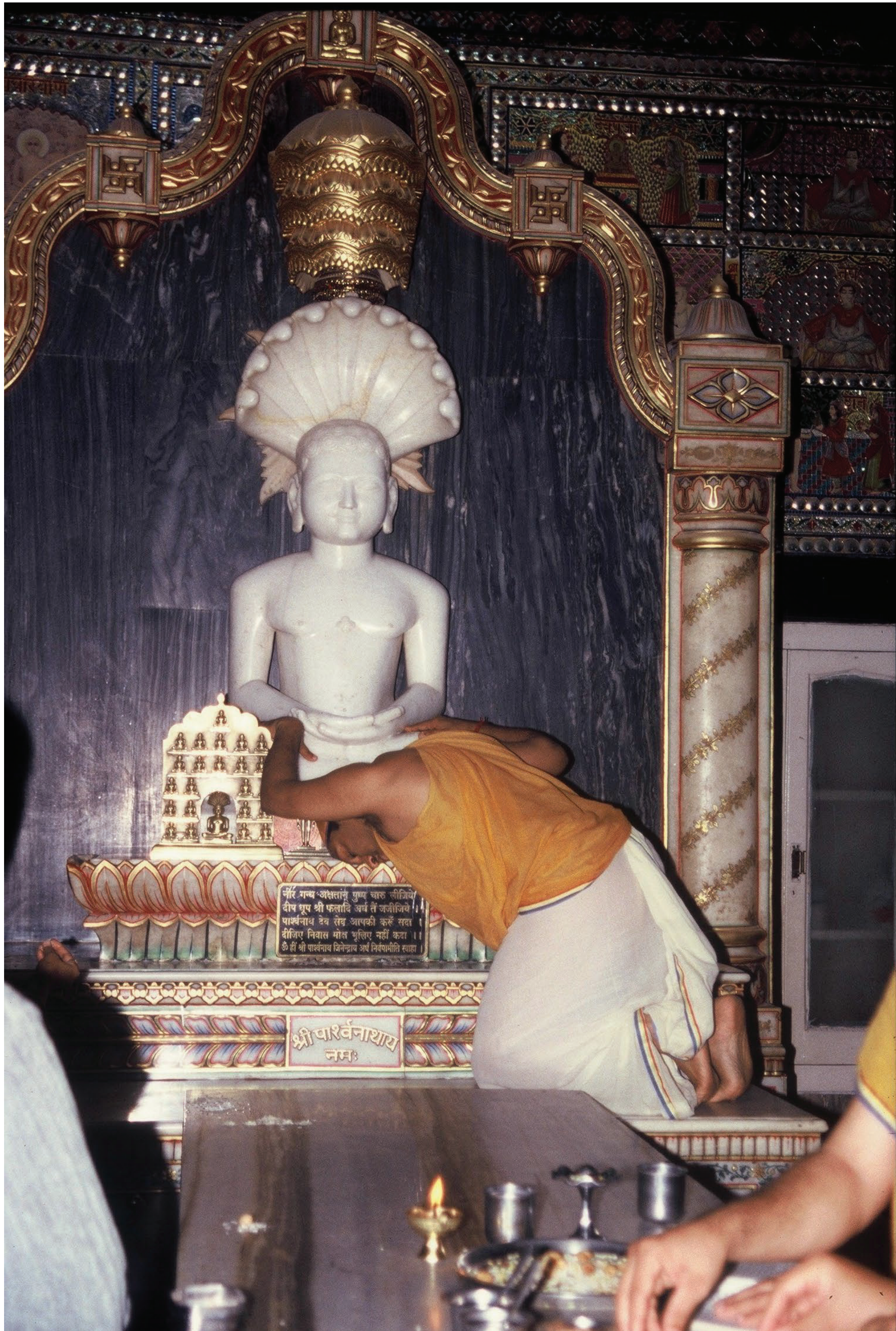

Figure 1. After the images have been sprinkled with water, a worshipper bows deeply, kissing the feet of an image of Pārśva, the 23rd *tīrthaṅkar*, who is always represented with a cobra hood spread over his head; Delhi, 2004 (photo by Marie-Claude Mahias).

Ascetics, whether called renunciants, "*religieux*", or monks[5], have undergone an initiation during a rite that forges a new person, inscribing in the body and its attributes (hair, clothes, food, gestures) the renunciation of lay life and the entry into the world of ascetics, under a new name. The new ascetic receives a peacock-feather broom, a waterpot, and a book, all necessary instruments for his state. He then leads a life of wandering under the guidance of an ascetic master, never staying more than a few days in any one place, except during the four sedentary months of the rainy season.

The laity, literally "listeners" (*śrāvak* [male] and *śrāvikā* [female]), designates the faithful who listen to the "Voice of the Jina," the doctrine transmitted by the ascetics. A more modern (and more sociological) interpretation of the laity includes all those born into this religion, married and with families. They too may be experts in ascetic practices, although not all are.

Let us clarify the place of each and the relationship that unites them. Ascetics embody the religious model and are, for laypeople, a guide on the path of spiritual development (Fig. 2).

The basic form of worship is the recitation of a formula paying homage to five categories of sovereign beings: the Blessed (*arhant*) or "ford-makers" (*tīrthaṅkar*), the Perfected (*siddha*), the Masters (*ācārya*), the Teachers (*upādhyāy*), and all ascetics (*sādhu*). *Tīrthaṅkar*s and *siddha*s are free from the cycle of rebirth, and it is before their image that humans perform worship in temples. The other three categories of these venerable beings are ascetics of three ranks: masters, teachers, and others, who are living persons.

The gods are not opposite to humans, with ascetics mediating between them, like the shamans, diviners, or priests of other religions. According to worship practices in Jain religion, on one side are mythical heroes and human ascetic-renunciates; on the other, in a relationship of devotion and worship, are the laity, as well as countless gods and goddesses who are also in the cycle of rebirth and who will have to be reborn in human form to work toward their liberation. Indeed, only human beings, who have a body, can, thanks to ascetic exercises, work to detach from the body and progress toward liberation. Being more advanced than the gods on this path, human beings are superior to them.

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[5] I speak of ascetics or renunciants, instead of monks, broadly used by English-speaking scholars. Ascetics for the reason that "Jain ascetics are the heirs of a form of asceticism which dates back to an era before our own" Shântâ 1985, 59); and renunciants as the closest translation of *tyāgī,* a term used by laypeople to designate collectively a large group of ascetics.

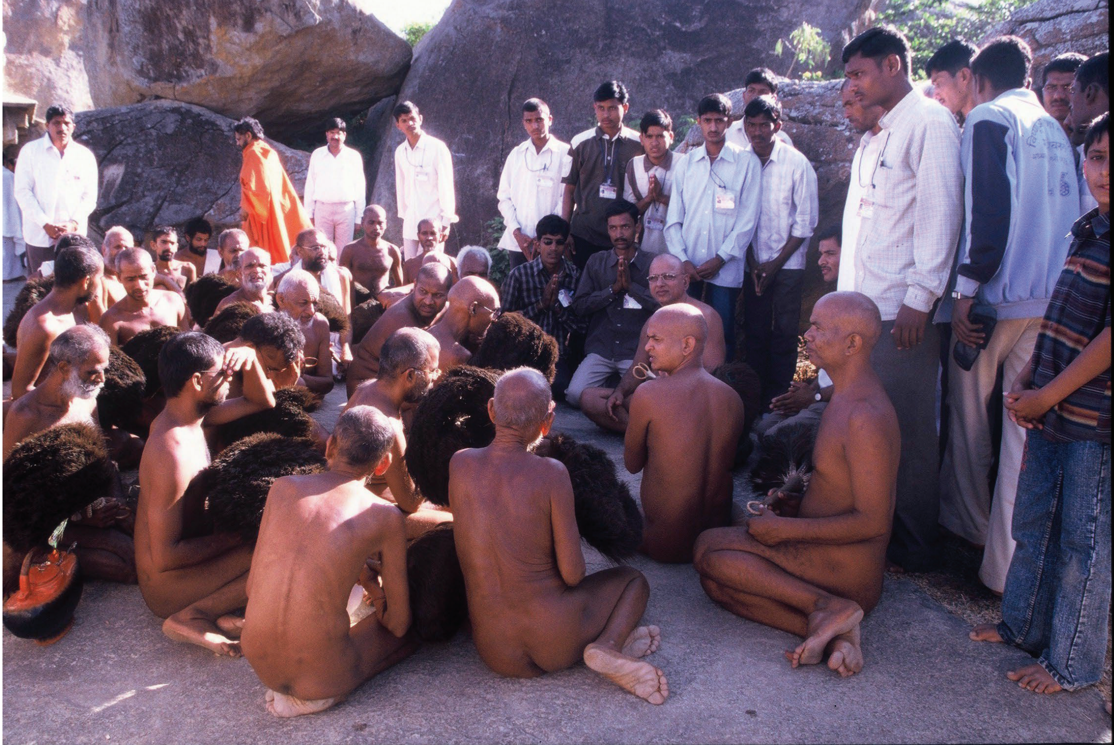

Figure 2: Outside Bhadrabāhu's cave in Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa, a group of Digambar ascetics perform the veneration of the masters (*vandanā*), in front of the then *paṭṭācārya*, Vardhamānsāgarjī, 2006 (photo by Marie-Claude Mahias).

The Uniqueness of Jain Vegetarianism

The study of menus, prohibited and avoided foods, and fasts reveals a number of rules that also appear in the codes of conduct for laypeople, written from the 5th century CE to the present day.[6] The main food restrictions concern the following products:

- animal flesh, which implies murder; alcoholic beverages, fermentation being conceived of as the multiplication and destruction of living substances, and intoxication being incompatible with self-control; honey, the harvesting of which leads to the destruction of numerous insects; the fruits of five fig trees. These are also called the prohibition of the three or five *makār* or *ma*, as their names begin with the syllable *ma*: flesh (*māṃs*), alcohol (*madya*), honey (*madhu*), as well as fish (*machlī*) and fresh butter (*makkhan*); plus the fruits of five fig trees (*udumbar phal*).
- multi-seeded fruits (*bahu-bīja-phal*), among which the eggplant is emblematic, even though it is an indigenous plant and greatly appreciated by other vegetarians in India.
- "everything that grows in the ground" (*mūlkand*): roots, bulbs, tubers.

[6] The earliest being Samantabhadra s *Ratnakaraṇḍa Śrāvakācāra* (5th c. CE).

Although written down in treatises, the list of foods not to be eaten was able to evolve, since it includes plants introduced by Europeans, such as potatoes and cabbages, especially cauliflower.

In addition to foods to be avoided, it is also prescribed to:

- Drink "pure[7]" water, i.e. filtered, respecting time limits, that is, the duration in which it can be drunk without causing harm. These temporal limits (*maryādā*) also apply to milk and yogurt, as well as flours and herbs, which must be ground and pounded at home.
- Not eat after sunset (*a-ratrī-bhojan*).

From a doctrinal point of view, these prescriptions constitute the eight "fundamental qualities" (*mūlguṇa*) that define "pure" food and which, along with the worship performed in the temple each morning, are set forth as markers of Jain identity. They constitute the first step in religious practice, in that they are indispensable for acquiring the "right vision."

Fasts, which extend the dietary prohibitions, are of several kinds and degrees: without water (*upavās*), with pure water (*anupavās*), and eating a single meal before noon (*ekāsan*). On certain days, fresh fruit and "green vegetables" are omitted, unless they have been dried in the sun previously. In its various forms, fasting is the most common exercise in self-control and purification of the soul. On these days, one is enjoined to abandon all worldly activity, everything that flatters the senses, in favor of meditation and spiritual knowledge.

Not all dietary prohibitions have the same force, nor are their violation of the same gravity. One cannot compromise on animal flesh. The others are more strictly observed as one ages, and at certain dates and times of the year: the eighth and fourteenth days of each lunar fortnight, three eight-day periods that take place annually[8], during the four months of the rainy season (early July to late October), during the month of *bhādon* (August-September), and above all the ten days of the "celebration of the ten virtues"[9] (*daślakṣaṇ parv*), from the 5th to the 14th of that same month.

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[7] To be qualified as pure, water must be drawn from a well, then filtered through a double layer of gauze. It will remain pure for 1 *muhurta* (48 minutes). When colored with ground cloves or saffron (considered as not generating any living element), it remains pure for 2 *pahar* (six hours), and up to 4 *pahar* (twelve hours) if it has been heated Mahias 2006, 434).

[8] From the 8th to the 15th of the clear fortnight of *phālgun* (February–March), *aṣārh* (June-July) and *kārtik* (October–November).

[9] The ten virtues are forgiveness, compassion, humility, truth, purity, temperance, austerity, renunciation, non-attachment, and chastity.

The presence of multiple generations living under the same roof demonstrates how different behaviors coexist, leaving room for each and influencing each other reciprocally. But following dietary regulations to the letter quickly leads to installing a separate kitchen and no longer sharing common meals. One quickly recognizes a Jain house by the several kitchens, by the presence of a grain mill (previously manual, today electric), a gauze fabric filter tied on the taps, or even a tap connected to a well.

A Conception of the World

To grasp the logic underlying these practices, let us revisit a few fundamental notions shared by several South Asian religions.

In an eternal world, there are an infinite number of souls or animated beings (*jīva*), all alike. Each of their acts produces positive or negative *karma*, which, through the effect of passions, adheres to the soul, imprisons it in a materiel body, and sets it on the cycle of successive rebirths. This explains the difference in condition between humans (handsome or ugly, rich or poor), as well as between humans, gods, and animals. Religious practice aims to purify the naturally bright and happy soul, erase karmic matter, stock up on merit (*puṇya*) in order to obtain a better rebirth, or better still, reach the state of omniscience and never be reborn again. This path to what we call liberation (*mokṣa*) involves acquiring the "three jewels": right vision, right knowledge and right conduct. Right conduct, or from another point of view, morally and socially valued conduct, requires the observance of the rules of life, particularly dietary rules, based on strict observance of nonharm, or *in-nocence*[10], the original meaning of nonviolence, and compassion towards all living beings. This "nonharm" has a very broad meaning, since it designates abstention from any act, word, or thought that could harm any living being.

This begs the question: what is a living being? The answer has been worked out in a classification specific to Jains.[11]

Classification of living beings

Souls (*jīva*) are only perceptible through the material body in which they are incarnated. They are divided into five (or nine) large classes, characterized by the number of bodily senses. The

[10] *In-nocence* has the same etymology as *ahiṃsā*, defined by Gandhi as "absence of malice against all that lives" quoted by Muller 1997, 16-17), although the history and meaning of the two terms diverged over time.

[11] Elaborated in texts such as the *Uttarādhyayana sūtra*, this classification is part of the fundamental knowledge passed on to children and all pious people. It can also be reconstructed from culinary practices and the justifications given for them.

animated beings of the five first classes have only one sense (touch) and are found in earth, water, fire, wind, and plants. Above them, those with two senses (touch and taste) exist in worms, shellfish, etc.; those with three senses (adding smell) as in certain insects, ants, etc.; those with four senses (including sight) in large insects like flies and butterflies; those with five senses (adding hearing and thinking) in animals (large domesticated ones), humans, gods, and demons. A second distinction is introduced in the plant kingdom, i.e. among beings with only one sense. While most plants contain only a single soul, others have a multitude of souls "that share the same body." These are the plants that grow in the earth, as well as buds, shoots, and the fruits of fig trees. To complete this classification, beings with five senses and the capacity for thought are divided into four conditions or "species": divine, human, animal, and infernal. As already noted, only the human condition opens up the possibility of liberation.In this conception, there is no absolute break between the plant, animal-human, and even mineral and divine kingdoms, in terms of their fundamental natures. Belief in the transmigration of the soul through successive rebirths, and its possible incarnation in different material bodies, reinforces the feeling of species continuity and of the unity of the living world. The essential distinctions are:

1. mobility, which separates one-sense beings from others.
2. the number of senses, from one to five, plus the mental organ (*manas*), which enables thought and discrimination. The number of senses is crucial, since each one contributes to the acquisition of knowledge, notably hearing, which enables one to listen to and understand sermons. The senses are therefore the means and index of progress on the path to liberation.
3. the number of souls, which divides the plant world in two parts, placing the grasses with the wind, and tubers with the animals.
4. the means of generation, since the union of seeds in an embryo results from beings endowed with thought, and gives the ability and responsibility to direct one's destiny.

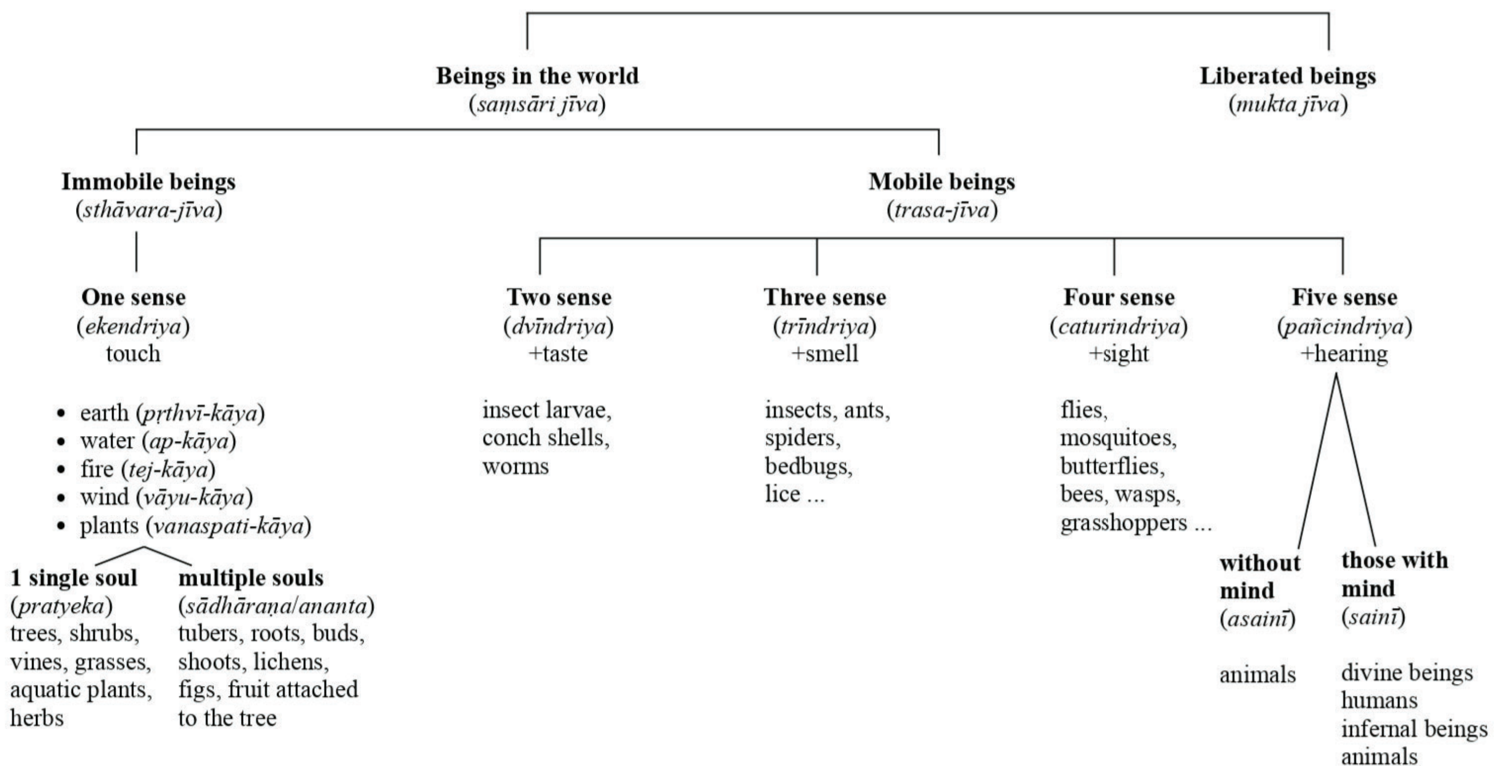

Figure 3: Table: Classification of living beings

Right conduct

As we can see, food selection is based on a classificatory biology that explains the living world, embedded in a cosmology that organizes the universe. It is articulated through a morality which answers the question of humanity's place in this world and its relationship with other living beings. It implies a dietetic, that is, a conception of food as a mediator of the individual's relationships to society and the universe, and a conception of the individual as physically and mentally linked to what they eat, since the properties of food shape temperament, thought, and behavior.

Several rules of conduct - dietary, culinary, and moral - make sense in the light of the above classification and the fundamental obligation of to do no harm. Laypeople must not destroy living beings possessing more than two senses. They can therefore feed themselves using water, fire, air, and plants, as long as nothing from the higher classes is included. From this rule derives an exclusively plant-based diet (to which dairy products are added), alongside various culinary tasks such as filtering water, carefully cleaning grains and spices before grinding or pounding them (to be done by oneself), not biting into a whole fruit, drying green plants, as well as respecting time limits (such as those described above for water, see note 7) and not eating after sunset. A second rule concerns plants: because of the abundance of souls that inhabit plants growing underground, these vegetables must not be consumed. As for ascetics, they must not destroy any form of living being, even those with only one sense. Having renounced all possessions and taken the great vow of *ahiṃsā*, they may not cook, as this set of actions inevitably causes harm. As ascetics still need to eat and stay in good health, since the body is the means to study, meditate, and perform the prescribed ascetic exercises, it is up to the laity to cook for them and feed them, whether through alms, among the Śvetāmbar, or through meals taken in a very ritualized way called "the gift of food" (*āhārdān*), among the Digambar.

Feeding the Ascetics

Digambar ascetics eat once per day, when they are not fasting, and the meal is eaten standing up, holding the food in their hands, the symbol of their ascetic state.[12] This is why, when an ascetic is elderly or ill and can no longer eat in this way, that is, can no longer follow the rules of his state, he takes the last vow (*sallekhanā* or *samādhi vrat*) and gradually abstains from all solid food, then water, until his last breath. This practice is less a question of voluntary death than of fidelity to all one's previous vows, so as to be in the best possible condition at the

[12] An in-depth study of this was published in Mahias 2006.

moment of death, since this moment is decisive for future rebirths. All Digambar ascetics end their lives in this way, and the date of their last meal and last water intake is a crucial milestone recorded in their biography. Many laypeople strive to follow this model. This final decision reveals the logical outcome of the Jain doctrine: abstention from actions and the total respect for life, in a fully animated world, lead to the obliteration of the human being.

On the lay side, it may seem paradoxical to cook for ascetics who, borrowing Max Weber's expression, can be described as "*virtuosos* of fasting."[13] This meal, however, is a structural event in the religion's organization. First and foremost, it is necessary to the very existence of the ascetics. Above all, it is a moment of intense interaction allowing laypeople and ascetics to build a personal relationship. It is also an act that brings about progression within a personal religious journey.

We recall that the fundamental prayer (*namōkar mantra*) pays homage to five categories of beings: the Blessed and Perfected Ones, who are freed from the succession of rebirths; and the Masters, Preceptors, and Ascetics of lower rank, who are living persons. Feeding ascetics translates this invocation into action. The "gift of food" to ascetics must be made with "nine kinds of devotion" (*navdhābhakti*): welcome, an elevated seat, feet washing, worship, greeting, and fourfold purity of mind, speech, body, and food. Thus, the ascetics' meal and the worship performed every day in the temple present many similarities: the same purity and devotion are demanded of the one who feeds an ascetic as the one who goes to the temple; the triple circumambulation, the worship with the eight substances, the offering of light, the ritual formulas are identical in front of ascetics as before images of the *tīrthaṅkar*s. It is therefore perfectly justified to consider the ascetics' meal as the equivalent of worship performed in the temple before the first two recipients of the five-fold homage formula.

The "gift of food" obliges one to advance along a personal religious path, since it is an opportunity to publicly take "vows" or make a commitment, for a determined period or forever, such as abstaining from potatoes or other root vegetables, not drinking after sunset, no longer buying cooked food from the market, or limiting the number of one's material possessions. Since giving is the first duty of the laity, and the "gift of food" to ascetics is the model of giving, it is a particularly meritorious act that one should perform when concerned about the salvation of one's soul.

Gifting food is also an act that contributes to the social reputation of those who perform it. Feeding ascetics means putting into practice knowledge and gestures which are both culinary and religious and contribute in a very concrete manner to the construction of the person and of the society. Gifting food demonstrates one's knowledge of the rules, practice of *ahiṃsā* (nonharm), and devotion, as well as recognition granted by the ascetics.

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[13] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press 1963, 162–63).

Figure 4: The worship with eight substance materializes the abandonment of all that binds human to the cycles of rebirth. The items are placed in small piles or in a way that forms a design such as the *sathiyâ* (*svastika*-shape), whose four branches represent the four conditions—divine, human, animal, infernal—in which humans can be reincarnated and the path to deliverance through right vision, right knowledge, and right conduct; Delhi, 2002 (photo by Marie-Claude Mahias).

All these regulations and expectations have the effect that, among the laity who serve the ascetics, one talks constantly of food. Even if it is common to contrast laypeople, who eat for the satisfaction of taste, with ascetics, for whom eating is an ascetic exercise, food remains a constant preoccupation, entailing considerable work and expense.

The Limits of the Doctrine

Analysis of the logics underlying the practices and representations linking food and religious thought highlights a worldview that tends to encompass the greatest possible number of elements and aims for completeness, a universe of meaning in which everything is justified. The inscription in texts, the translation into norms, prohibitions and ritualized conducts, compel-toward a discipline that we tend to believe as intangible and immutable. This would be incorrect, however, both from an epistemological point of view and from the point of view of sensitive experience, not to mention setting aside the human and social dimensions of the phenomena being studied. If we consider religion as a total set of beliefs and practices by those who claim to be an adherent of it, we cannot reduce it to a set of doctrinal texts. Religious

Figure 5: The gift of food to Muniśrī Amitsāgarjī, 2001 (photo by Marie-Claude Mahias)

principles by themselves are insufficient to account for lived experience, unless we seek to define norms or decide on an orthopraxis. Consequently, a historicized sociological approach to phenomena that are never entirely religious is essential, as it reveals their capacity for change and evolution.

The eclipse of the kitchen

Religious rules state, explain, and justify what should not be eaten. Some texts teach how to let oneself die, or "dry out," from starvation. They say nothing about what you can eat, with whom, or how. They leave the faithful to make do with what society has to offer in the way of vegetables, recipes, neighbors, and cousins, for matters of eating as well as marrying. But just as religion is not limited to dietary prescriptions, food is not limited to religious prohibitions. Presenting Jain cuisine would have been a very different article. It would have been necessary to get into the recipes, the composition of meals, the dishes, the colors and flavors appropriate to the calendar festivals and the life cycle ceremonies, the distribution of food, and undoubtedly also the gluttony, the excesses, or the alcohol drunk on the sly.

The kitchen can also shed light on unseen aspects of religion. It was through an anthropologist's approach, by not separating doctrines from practices, nor classifications from pots and pans, that I came to study the ascetics' meal, which is not provided for in any doctrinal text (or at least, so elliptically that it had escaped the attention of philologists), and which proved crucial to the relationship between Digambar ascetics and laypeople, that is, in the transmission and dissemination of their religion. The kitchen also raises questions about the notion of "religious community." While religious prescriptions concern all Jains, but Jains alone, and may suggest the existence of such a community, their cuisine still situates them in particular geographical, historical and social spaces, where caste matters at least as much as religion. Just the cooking of flatbreads which form the basis of most meals in North India, reveals the contributions, borrowings, and transformations that have crossed the boundaries of caste and religion (Mahias 2015). In fact, the Jain diet has diversified according to regions, castes, and eras. This reveals a parallel between dietary practices and the situation of Jains in global society, highlighting their "diglossia."

Dietary prohibitions are based on a classification specific to Jains and are articulated around exclusive ritual practices, while cooking classifies food into categories linked to the structure of meals, and shared with other Indians. Recipes can be exchanged and shared between Jain and non-Jain neighbors.

Variants and flexible rules

While remaining on the topic of religious rules, it is worth emphasizing the flexibility of the doctrinal framework which allows, and even provides for, degrees of observance, and thus, variations depending on individuals and circumstances.

Complementarity between the laity and ascetics

Ascetics embody the model to follow, but they are exceptional beings who aim exclusively for their own liberation. The lay faithful are householders who must first (or also) fulfill social obligations: to have children, to raise and marry them, to eat, to earn wealth in order to make donations and build temples. Religious duties therefore vary depending on whether they are imposed on one group or the other. Even when laypeople take vows with the same name as those taken by the ascetics[14], it is in a lesser form that allows for adjustability, and for a limited duration, precisely as an exercise. As we have seen, the rule of nonharm is interpreted differently for ascetics and laypeople. The abstention from all possession required of the ascetics becomes for the laity a limit placed upon the quantity of goods owned. Consequently, a space for negotiation is open between laypeople, who constantly bring in elements of modernity, in terms of foodstuffs or cooking methods, and the ascetics, who try to maintain genuine archaisms by making them out to be doctrinal rules.

Degrees within each order

There is an entire hierarchy among both the ascetics and laypeople.[15] The former are divided into three ranks for men and two for women. Only the *muni*s are truly Digambar, "clothed in space," or naked. Having taken the five great vows and abandoned all clothing, they pull out their hair and beard; no longer bathe; sleep on the ground, a rock slab, or a wooden plank; and eat a single meal per day, standing up, holding the food in their hands. They can continue their monastic progress and rise to the rank of Preceptors, who teach doctrine and texts, as well as Masters, who are the only leaders who can initiate humans and consecrate religious images to be worshipped. But one can also enter the religious order at two lower levels (*kṣullak* and *ailak*), which allow one to keep one or two pieces of clothing, to eat seated and from a container, to cut one's hair, and to ride in a vehicle. Even the *Mūlācāra*, the fundamental

[14] This is the case with the five fundamental vows: nonharm (*ahiṃsā*), truth (*satya* , not taking what has not been given (*asteya*), chastity outside marriage (*brahmcarya*), non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*).

[15] For a detailed study of this hierarchical organization, see Mahias 2009.

treatise on monastic discipline dating from the 2nd century CE, provides for three degrees in the observance of each rule: superior, moderate, and inferior, leaving room for personal choice. Finally, the personal abilities and inclination of Masters for intellectual work or ascetic rigor give rise to further divergences, and confer on each group of ascetics a particular atmosphere.

Laypeople, too, experience degrees of renunciation. The path leading to initiation into the ascetic order is a series of eleven "spiritual stages" (*pratimā*), made up of an increasing number of vows to be taken. These can be completed in a few years, or they may never be completed at all. Accommodations between contradictory duties, between religious requirements and social obligations, between purification of the soul and human desires remain possible for a long time. In the house, the number of different kitchens materially inscribes the values of asceticism and purity, the religiosity of the elders, as well as the presence of several generations under the same roof and the relative freedom of children.

During the days and months of required fasting, all degrees of privation, from the most austere to the least, are encountered. The most devout persons fast completely, without even drinking water, while others eat just one meal before noon, the half-hearted abstain from green vegetables and do not eat after dark; while still others go out to eat! The aim is not to achieve a feat but to stick, come what may, to a decision made in front of a *tīrthaṅkar* image or a Master. This plurality of practices corresponds to a religion whose soteriological project is personal.

Contemporary Variations

Religion does not exist in a social vacuum. It is constituted and maintained through processes of interaction with a particular context, which gives it a unique form that is nevertheless subject to change.

Let us remember that, from the outset, the adoption of nonharm and vegetarianism was stimulated by a specific religious and social environment. Even if vegetarianism became, in medieval times, the diet adopted by most high-caste Hindus and was considered superior in terms of ritual purity, it remains the result of individual and collective choices. In all eras, this vegetarian ideal has coexisted with and permitted other dietary models. Examples can be found in Bengal, Orissa (Odisha), the Konkan region in Maharastra, where even Brahmans enjoy fish, goat meat, and poultry. The politically powerful, from princes and local chiefs to the Mughal and British dignitaries, have always eaten meat and drunk alcohol. The princely courts of Jaipur, Lucknow and Hyderabad have developed veritable gastronomies where meat dishes took pride of place. Medical treatises dating from the beginning of the Christian era also accorded an important place to meat and raw blood, the model for broths being meat broths, and even broths made from the meat of carnivores (Zimmerman 1982). Each diet exists and

evolves in relation to others, opening up a sociological and dynamic dimension. Meat eaters are also accustomed to vegetarian meals. Conversely, young people from Jain families may happily enjoy spicy salads (*cāṭ*) combining raw fruits and cooked vegetables, including onion, sweet potato, and potato, which they eat after dark outside the house, or at least out of sight of their grandparents.

Like all religious systems, that of the Jains came up against Christianity, and then Western scientific thought, which took hold with colonization and sought to explain the world independently of any religious conceptions. From the 19th century onwards, thinkers have been looking for what, in their religion, could pass for scientific or prefigure the truths of natural science, physics, or mathematics. Presenting Jainism as a "scientific religion" has become a commonplace of Jain proselytism. However, the question of modernizing a traditional doctrine arises for everyone, ascetics and laypeople, women and men, since Jains are generally well-educated. Everyone must confront and resolve the disagreements between the religious construction of the world and that of science, the basics of which everyone learns at school. Jain doctors help to present what was once linked to a worldview and morality as a rational, scientific way of life. One of the most active doctors, head of the neurology department in a major capital city hospital, who is involved in all the battles against slaughterhouses, uses his professional authority to assert that non-vegetarian diets are the cause of over a hundred diseases, including heart disease, paralysis, and cancer. At a time when a growing proportion of the Indian population is eating eggs, and omelets are a common breakfast item in university canteens, this Jain doctor lists the economic, nutritional, and ecological detriments of this consumption (Jain 1986).

This trend is consistent with a more global movement, described as "neo-orthodoxy" by Marcus Banks (1991). Neo-orthodox Jainism is no longer a soteriological system for achieving the realization of the soul in its original purity, but "a science for the individual," here and now; dietary rules, meditation, and other ascetic practices have become important for one's health. It is even presented as an art of living, if we are to believe the title of a conference organized by the Federation of Jain Associations in North American (JAINA), in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2003: "Jainism: The Art of Living." Even in India, as erudite and renowned a Digambar ascetic as Ācāryaśrī Vidyānandjī presented vegetarianism as a means of keeping the body and mind strong and healthy, at the *World Vegetarianism and Animal Protection Day* in New Delhi.

This neo-orthodox Jainism bears witness to a profound transformation. Doctrinal themes, chosen according to one's personal inclination or abilities, are reinterpreted and reformulated in light of contemporary and more universal concerns. The Jains have no shortage of arguments drawn from their religious tradition to promote themselves as champions of nonharm, ecology (far from the scientific approach of the same name), or animal

protection. In response to a request that all religions bring their contribution to the conservation of nature, Dr. L. M. Singhvi, former Chairman of the High Committee of the Indian Diaspora, presented His Royal Highness Prince Philip, president of the *World Wide Fund for Nature* (WWF), with a short text entitled *The Jain Declaration on Nature*. This event, which took place on October 23, 1990 at Buckingham Palace, marked the official entry of Jainism into the *Network on Conservation and Religion* and later into the *Alliance for Religions and Conservation* (ARC). This text presents the Jain tradition and its cosmology as a "philosophy of ecological harmony" and an "ecological philosophy." It highlights the five fundamental principles of nonharm (*ahiṃsā*), interdependence of all living beings, plurality of perspectives (*anekānta-vāda*), mental equanimity (*sāmāyik*), and compassion for all living beings (*dayā*). Humans' position in the highest category of living beings endowed with rationality and intuition (*manas*) is said to give them moral responsibility for their relationships with the rest of the universe and for the protection of the environment. Finally, five principles of conduct – non-harm, tenderness towards animals, vegetarianism, moderation, and charity - provide a guide to environmental protection, peace, and harmony in the universe. This text clearly keeps pace with values that are in the agenda of the West, in order to gain recognition for Jainism as a model of ecology.

Diaspora and globalization of vegetarians

This brings us to the diaspora,[16] where neo-orthodox Jainism has found particularly favorable conditions for its development.

The emigration of Indian traders to East African countries, then part of the British Empire, dates back to the early 20th century. Their expulsion from Uganda in 1972, prompted by their economic domination of the country, led these English-speaking traders with British passports to emigrate throughout all Commonwealth countries, where they joined the Indians who had been emigrating from South Asia since the 1960s. Separated from India for several generations, even if they maintained links for marriages, these Indian migrants had, on average, a good education but little knowledge of written Indian languages and of their religion, reduced to a few festivals celebrated jointly by Jains and Hindus.

In the new host countries, their demographic growth and rising economic power, as well as community organization in support of cultural activities and the search for spouses, led to the rediscovery of a specifically "Jain" religious identity, as opposed to that of the *baniya* (i.e. traders) or Gujarati (Sanghrajka 2008: 56). In these countries, the promotion of Jains as a religious community is first and foremost a consequence of the fact that the notion of caste

[16] It is estimated that around 100,000 Jains emigrated to Great Britain, the United States, and Canada.

is very poorly accepted there, whereas that of community is legitimate. Moreover, it brings recognition and respect, whereas, if we listen to Indian writers in these countries, claiming to be "Indian" remains devalorizing, regressing to the colonial situation of the past. The religious group can, therefore, become an official lobbying group, and the construction of a temple a source of pride (Banks 1991). They may even call on Indian clerics to celebrate annual ceremonies or for long-term stays to teach the values of Jainism, and even on academic specialists to rediscover their "original" religion. These countries have thus become missionary lands for young Jain monks and nuns, especially among the Śvetāmbar, who receive permission to travel and stay in foreign lands. Financial success has also led Jain immigrants to build large temples on the model of the most prestigious ancient sites in India, and to organize and take part in elaborate religious celebrations, both in their country of origin, where the role of the diaspora is stimulated by economic measures favoring them, and in their host country. The development of this religious aspect has been spectacular since the 1980s, leading to the invention of a Jainism for the present day. This has enabled the community to be recognized as a political player at the national and international level, and to be consulted on issues of immigration, education, and multicultural organization, which they also do very well. In this way, they are thus reconnecting with a very ancient tradition, since Indian history reveals numerous Jains, lay and ascetic, who became advisors or financiers to princes.

Various trends are emerging within these diasporas. Some diasporic Jains, in search of an identity and roots, are turning to their country of origin, organizing pilgrimage trips, study sessions for young people, and financing religious celebrations. Others attempt to distance themselves from India and live out their faith in accordance with the values of their host society. In the United States, they describe themselves as "global Jains", that is, certainly Jain, but different from those in India. Perhaps they have become aware of the gap between the vows preached by Jain ascetics and the violence of social relations in which Jains are involved in India.

In the 1970s, vegetarianism was a novelty in Western countries and the majority of Jains were unaware of or had forgotten the particular concepts of Jain vegetarianism, particularly as it relates to plants. They have been able to develop all kinds of trades and restaurants allowing them to eat well while normalizing the vegetarian diet within their host societies. Vegetarianism is no longer a sign of asceticism, deprivation, or respect for all life, but has become a promise of delicious food, nostalgia for the homeland, and the pleasure of eating. For those living in Great Britain or the United States, abstaining from animal flesh was enough to define you as a strict vegetarian and a faithful Jain.

However, Western vegetarians and, more recently, vegans are becoming increasingly vocal, advocating a dairy-free diet. In Mumbai, there is at least one catering company that provides vegan meals made from organically grown products. It is frequented by a health-

conscious, English-speaking, Westernized clientele who find expensive, elitist food there. The director, an academic with a passion for dietetics, discovered this approach to eating during a nutrition course in Texas (Quien 2007: 96). While there is a certain logic to eliminating milk from one's diet in the West, it clashes with a fundamental logic of most Indian cuisines, which stems from the representation of dairy products as beneficial foods, endowed with intrinsic purity and resistant to pollution. Dairy also includes butter used as a cooking medium and for frying, which is the preferred method of cooking festive foods; this also includes sweets, whether they are made from milk which is boiled, condensed, curdled, drained, and pressed; and all the sauces made with yogurt. All of these dishes are signs of festive meals, rejoicing, good omens, sharing as much as possible, and the honor paid to guests.

The Jains, who not so long ago were seen as fussy extremists when it came to abstinence from certain foods and dietary precautions, now find themselves outclassed on their own turf. No one can predict how they will meet this new challenge.

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