Mahāvīra's Teachings in Indian History Textbooks

TARA SETHIA
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Textbooks play a critical role in the process of learning as "authentic" sources of knowledge for college students, who often know little about the subject matter. This is particularly true of college students in the United States enrolling in survey courses such as History of India. Many K-12 Educators (elementary, middle and high school teachers) also rely on Indian History textbooks to familiarize themselves about the subject matter in which they often lack prior training. One primary reason for this is that they are now required, at least in some states like California, to integrate India in their K-12 world history curriculum. Therefore, these texts, in addition to serving as authoritative sources for college students, inform the K-12 teachers, and through them their very impressionable students. One of the topics students are most interested in learning about India is the Indic religions. Of the major Indian religions, the least discussed in the history textbooks is Jainism.

In this paper, I focus on the representation of Mahāvīra and Jainism--India's ancient most *Śramaṇa* tradition--in the Indian History textbooks. Jainism, as we know today, is rooted in the teachings of Mahāvīra. The Jain canonical literature, the *Āgams,* not only serve a significant role within the tradition but are also regarded as primary sources for historians and social scientists, especially for writing about early periods of Indian history. Like Buddhism, Jainism has a rich tradition of art and architecture as seen in the temples, derāsars, *sthānakas,* etc; and is central to the

understanding of India's tradition of *ādhyātmavidyā* (inner sciences). Its fundamental principle of ahiṃsā has inspired significant studies of ecology, peace, and bioethics. Therefore, the study of this religion, like that of Hinduism and Buddhism, is important not only to the understanding of continuity and change in Indian history, but is important also for appreciating the place of our past in our future.

In reviewing six leading college textbooks on Indian History, however, I find a very different message. In these textbooks the coverage of Jainism is less than adequate and its representation in historical narrative is often superficial, impertinent, misleading and, at times, even reminiscent of orientalism. This is a particularly vexing situation given the emerging scholarship pertaining to India as well as World History. Recent scholarship about India has questioned the orientalist approach in the Indological discourse.[1] Over the last few decades, specialized studies about India have become far more inclusive in terms of both content and approach. Historians are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary in their analyses, which are more inclusive in terms of their representations of gender, the 'subaltern' and the underprivileged.[2] Issues pertaining to dynastic history or political history are no longer the major focus. Social institutions, human agency, environment, gender, globalization, etc. have become significant themes in the writing of Indian history. World History too is gradually shifting its focus from Europe to Asia. Historians are increasingly finding the role of India and China in World History much more significant

[1] See for instance the seminal work of Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); and a study questioning the orientalist discourse in the study of India. Richard Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[2] Of particular relevance in this regard is the 'Sublatern Studies' collective over the last twenty years. Ranajit Guha, who pioneered this initiative, has recently published an important study, *History at the Limit of World History,* (New York:Columbia University Press, 2002). For an appraisal of the 'subaltern studies' collective see Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed), *Mapping Subaltern studies and the Postcolonial* (London: Verso, 2000).

than has been granted in the received wisdom of Eurocentric social theory.[3] Historians are also interested in examining historical narratives in ways these were constructed and approaching the past to depict how the contending agents constituted the past through their constant negotiations and interactions. Studies of Indian Religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, have continued to evoke scholarly interest.[4] Even Jainism, which is not quite as established a field of study as Buddhism, has elicited a great deal of scholarly interest in the recent years.[5]

Yet, the majority of textbooks on Indian history continue to be chronologically driven political histories. The textbooks I have reviewed in this paper are written by internationally known scholars of India from Britain, Germany, India, and the United States, and are published by reputable publishers. Some of these

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[3] Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[4] Some of the recent studies are: Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999); Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of Early Teachings* (London: Athlone, 1996); Christopher, Key Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993); Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan R. Williams (eds.), *Buddhism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000).

[5] Beginning with the publication of Padmanabh S. Jaini's, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), which is regarded nearly as a primary source among Jain scholars, and which is both lucid and thorough in its analysis and discussion of Jainism, several key works have been published recently. Of particular mention are the following. Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 1992, revised edition 2002); Lawrence Babb, *The Absent Lord* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); John E. Cort, *Jains in the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher Chapple (ed), *Jainism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Vastupal Parikh, *Jainism and New Spirituality* (Peace Publications, 2002). Moreover, Jaini's own essays on Jainism have also been reprinted recently as *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000).

titles have been reprinted more than once. The books, in order of their original publication dates, are:

- Romila Thapar, *A History of India* (New York:Penguin, 1966, 1991)
- Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 1983, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2000)
- Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (London: Routledge 1986, 1990, 1998)
- Burton Stein, *History of India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998, 1999, 2000)
- John Keay, *India* (New York: Grove, 2000)
- Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, A *Concise History of India* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Based on my analysis, it appears that for the most part, the authors' understanding of Jainism in the context of Indian History is dictated by the assumption that religion is a matter of antiquity and, therefore, does not deserve any discussion in their historical narrative of subsequent time periods. Within the context of the ancient period, coverage of Jainism is often superficial, impertinent and, at times, not grounded in facts but based on assumptions. That is, in their discussion, the authors are more occupied with the description of physical appearances rather than principles; more concerned with the seemingly exotic and strange customs without regard to the understanding of key concepts and values they embody. There is also a tendency to present religions as uniform systems disregarding the diversity that characterizes each of the Indic religions. In what is said about Jainism and Mahāvīra in these textbooks, and also how it is said there, I see a variety of problems that can broadly be categorized as follows: i) inadequate coverage, ii) misconception, iii) flawed comparisons, iv) misrepresentation, and v) neo-orientalism.

I. Inadequate Coverage

I fully recognize that given the longevity and complexity of Indian History, a textbook can only provide limited space to the discussion of various topics. Given such limitation, however, it is even more important that whatever information is provided on any topic in a textbook is at least fundamental and central to the understanding of the topic, is balanced and historically supported. To assess the adequacy of coverage of Jainism in these texts, I have asked the following questions. Is the coverage of this topic too little or too much for a college textbook?Is the information provided central and germane or is it marginal or superfluous to the proper understanding of Jainism? Is it balanced or biased?

Response to these questions may differ from one reviewer to the other, but it is possible to arrive at some consensus on what might be covered for a proper understanding of Jainism in the context of Indian History. For instance, it will be reasonable to expect to learn about Jainism from an Indian History textbook in terms of the following. What was the historical milieu of Mahāvīra, the 'founder' of Jainism? What was the larger context in which Jainism emerged and subsequently evolved? How is Mahāvīra represented in Indian History? What do we learn about his world-view, key concepts, and fundamental teachings or lessons? What do we learn about his followers, patrons, and persecutors of Jainism? What has been the larger historical significance of Jainism in terms of the historical change and impact within and outside India? Equally important is the question of how this information about Jain tradition is integrated in the larger scheme of historical narrative about India.

My analysis suggests that by and large, the coverage of Jainism in the texts books under review is less than adequate. Political history appears as a predominant theme in most of these narratives, except in books by Burton Stein and Romila Thapar. The extent and quality of coverage on Jainism varies a great deal in these books. I will briefly discuss each of these books in terms of its approach and coverage of this topic.

One of the textbooks has no discussion of Jainism at all, since it is actually not what its title--*A Concise History of India*--claims to be, but rather a concise history of India since the Mughals. The term "Jains" and the name Mahāvira do, however, appear in the Glossary of the book [Metcalf and Metcalf].

A History of India by Kulke and Rothermund devotes just two sentences mentioning Mahāvīra. This brevity of coverage by itself is not the only problem. The larger problem arises from the nature of the content and the context in which these few sentences appear. Consider the following paragraph:

> The new Gangetic civilisation found its spiritual expression in a reform movement which was a reaction to the Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance of Late Vedic age. This reform movement is mainly identified with the teachings of Gautama Buddha who is regarded as the first historic figure in Indian history... The Buddha, however, was not the only great reformer of the age. There was also Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, who is supposed to have been a younger contemporary of Buddha...It could be said that Mahavira's teachings reappeared in the rigorous ethics of Mahatma Gandhi, who was influenced by Jainism as he grew up in Gujarati Bania family, the Banias being a dominant traders' caste... [Kulke and Rothermund, pp. 51-52]

The above has problems ranging from lack of focus to inaccurate historical facts, from problems of definition to the problems of interpretation.

John Keay asserts, his history is 'not a cultural history of India, let alone history of Indian "cults." If it has a bias, it is in favor of chronology... This might seem rather elementary; but chronology is often a casualty of interpretative urge which underlies much of Indian history writing.' [Keay, p. xix] There is only a marginal mention of Mahāvīra and Jainism.

Stanley Wolpert's *A New History of India* does, however, touch upon the issues of context, milieu, the "founder" and the schism, although in a somewhat sketchy manner. The discussion of the topic is located mainly in the context of ancient India.

The book by Stein attempts to trace the religious developments beyond the ancient period, but is overtly repetitive.

Like Keay, Stein is concerned more with the extraneous, the seemingly strange and the alien aspects of Indic traditions, including Jainism, than their key concepts and principles. Often, his statements about Jainism are contradictory and confusing.

Unlike the other five textbooks, Thapar weaves the discussion of Jainism along with her discussion of Buddhism throughout the narrative of her book, *A History of India*. The role of the Jains and the Buddhists in making India and Indian sciences known to the West is discussed. Also discussed in the narrative is Jain and Buddhist art and sculpture. The discussion of Mahāvīra and Jainism, however, is lacking both in clarity and substance. Moreover, the basic framework applied to the understanding of this religious tradition remain, as in other textbooks, primarily Western in approach.

While more specific aspects of these books are discussed in the sections that follow, I do want to underscore that the coverage of Mahāvīra and Jainism in these books is simply inadequate. Discussion of Jainism is marginalized, is primarily anchored in ancient India and does not show how Jainism, like other religions, also evolved through history. None of these books provides an understanding of the significance of the key concepts and role of Jainism in Indian history or even discusses the centrality of this tradition, especially of its core principles of nonviolence and compassion—ideas that have influenced and continue to influence political, peace, and environmental movements.

II. Misconceptions

Misconceptions about Jainism abound, and range from the meaning of simple names and terms to the understanding of its key concepts. A few examples will illustrate the points I wish to make in this context.

Jains in India and Abroad

One of common impression given in these texts is that Jains are prominent in Gujarat and Bombay [Wolpert, p. 54; Metcalf and Metcalf, p. xx] and, unlike Buddhism, Jainism "never spread beyond India... [Stein, p.70] Such statements give the impression

that Jainism has been a localized or regional religion and raise questions in the minds of the textbook reader: Are there any Jains in other parts of India today? Did Jainism ever spread outside of India?

According to the 1991 Census of India, there were 3.4 million Jains spread all over in India, with major concentration in Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Delhi—the largest concentration being in Rajasthan.[6] Today, the Jains in India are estimated to be just under 6 million. Similarly, Jainism in the modern times, especially in the twentieth century has spread to different parts of the world via Jain diasporas.

Mahāvīra and the Jains

While students recognize that the term "Buddhist" comes from Buddha, they usually do not know the origin of the word, "Jain." In one of the books, Vardhamāna Mahāvīra's name appears to be listed as "Mahavira Jain," and therefore, Jains are followers of Mahāvīra [Metcalf and Metcalf, pp. xix, xx].

The word "Jain" has never been used as a family name for Mahāvīra. It derives from the Sanskrit word *Jina,* which refers to "spiritual victor," and not to "spiritual conflict" as assumed by Burton Stein [p. 69]. Within the tradition, this word has been used to describe those human teachers, who after overcoming all the passions of anger and attachment, become omniscient, and preach the path to mokṣa (liberation from the cycle of re-birth). The *Jina* are also referred to as *Tīrthaṅkaras* (builders of the ford to lead across the ocean of suffering). Jains are followers of the *Jina*. Mahāvīra was the last *Tīrthaṅkara* in the current cycle.[7]

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[6] 1991 Census of India. Table C-9, Part VB (ii) – Religion.

[7] Jina is the preacher and propagator of truth not "founder." It is believed that 24 of them appear in a every half-cycle which repeats itself at regular intervals in beginning less time. However, only Pārśvanātha and Mahāvīra -- 23rd and 24th *Tīrthaṅkaras* in the current cycle – are considered historical as no sources can historically corroborate the presence of Jainism beyond the 9th century BCE. For more details, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path to Purification. op. cit.*, pp. 1-3. The footnotes are specially illuminating.

Polytheism and Atheism

The inadequacy of Western framework, and the dangers of simplistic analogy to help understand this Indic tradition become apparent when some scholars attempt to explain "*Tīrthaṅkaras*" as "the Jain equivalents of gods," [Wolpert, p. 53] and others label Jainism, like Buddhism, as "atheistic." [See Stein, pp. 64-65; Thapar, pp. 64, 66.] In either instance, it is the construction of the Western "other"– polytheistic or atheistic. Do we have to explain Jainism, or for that matter other non-Western religions, using a Western framework? A more meaningful analysis could emerge perhaps by focusing on the worldview of the Jains. Essential to the Jain worldview is the fact that the existents in the cosmos have neither a beginning nor an end. Hence the concept of creator God is irrelevant to the Jain worldview. However, the Jains do not regard themselves as agnostics or atheists, but believe in mokṣa--where the liberated souls (siddhas) reside--which they regard as their ultimate goal.

Key Concepts and Teachings

What did Mahāvīra teach? These books offer us a range of interpretations of his teachings, but not any substantive discussion of what these were. We are told, Mahavira, like Buddha, "taught an ascetic world-denying philosophical and ethical system." [Metcalf and Metcalf, p. XX] But, we never learn about the nature of this ethical system or even its principal philosophical concepts. The Jains believe, according to one author, "everything in the universe material or otherwise, has a soul. Purification of soul is the purpose of living... purification is not achieved through knowledge, knowledge being a relative quality." [Thapar, p. 65] Such statements result from a misunderstanding of the Jain worldview. First, Jainism maintains that there are two major categories (rāśī) of existents: *jīva* (living) *ajiva* (matter, non-living).[8] Hence not everything in the universe has life. Secondly, knowledge in its highest form, which in Jainism is known as *kevalajñana*, is a precondition for

[8] See Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals*, op. cit., p. 11.

liberation. Also, the significance that knowledge occupies within this tradition is underscored in the dictum, "padaṃ nāṇaṃ tao dayā" (first knowledge, then compassion).

III. Flawed Comparisons

Comparative analysis is a good way of learning and teaching. Comparisons allow us to understand similarities and distinctiveness about things we compare. A precondition to an effective comparative analysis, however, is that we first understand on their own terms and within their own contexts the people, principles, concepts or whatever we wish to compare. When comparisons occur as a way of simply "mapping religions" without clarifying the individual categories of discussion, there is risk of distortion and misunderstanding.

One of the tendencies in the books under review is to often "map" Jainism through comparisons with Buddhism, with Vedic and Upanishdic thought, or with Western thought, without first discussing within each tradition the categories and concepts being compared. Often such comparisons confuse categories and concepts being compared. Take for instance the following statements.

Ātman versus Jīva

> Like *ātman*, all *jīva* are eternal, but in contrast to Upanishadic idealism, there is no Jain equivalent to the infinite cosmic *ātman*, only a finite number (millions of billions) of various degrees of *jīva*, some much more powerful than others." [Wolpert, p. 53]

Here the focus on contrasting the "infinite number" with the "finite number" of the souls is flawed, as the comparison is made on the basis of incorrect information. The number of *jīva* conceived within the Jain world view are *ananta*, i.e. infinite (and not finite as the above passage suggests). The contrast between the very nature of *ātman* and *jīva* can, however, help illuminate a different worldview within each tradition. In the *Upanishads* all *ātman* are part of the cosmic *ātman*, while under Jainism, each

jīva is independent and is fully responsible for its own acts (*karma*) and destiny.

Concept of Karma

The following passage compares the concept of karma among Brāhmaṇical, Jain and Buddhist traditions. For Brāhmaṇism, according to Stein, *karma* meant

> "work or act, and in formulation of Vedic ritual manuals 'action' referred to ritual and ceremonial performances so meticulously executed as to compel the gods to act in obedience to them. For Buddhists and Jainas, however, karma referred to the acts of ordinary men and women, the sums of whose lifetime behavior determined the body in which the soul (atman) would be reborn in the process of transmigration (samsara). Upon death, that is, souls were thought to pass from one to another body and associated social condition. The idea that every good action brought a measure of happiness and each bad action sorrow tended to suggest a mechanical moral process leading to fatalism... " [Stein, p. 66]

Here the distinction made between the *karma* in Brahmanism which refers to ritual and ceremony performed by the elite (by implication) versus the *karma* under Buddhism and Jainism of "ordinary men and women" appears to focus on fundamental differences in terms of "who" the concept of *karma* applied to: ordinary people versus elites. Such comparisons are further flawed as they ignore the fact that the role of karma is defined differently in Buddhism and Jainism--which are lumped together in the above comparative statement. Moreover, the abve comparison assumes a logical connection between *karma* and fatalism, which is misleading.

Jainism and Buddhism

> "Jainism was even more essentially moralistic in its outlook than Buddhism, with an even greater emphasis on austerity and mendicant monasticism as the soul route to salvation..." [Stein, p. 69]

The unclear relationship between morality and mendicant monasticism in the above statement does not allow us to

understand how Jainism was more moralistic than Buddhism. Therefore, such comparison fail to provide any meaningful insight into the extent of Jain or Buddhist morality. A good example to compare could have been, for example, the notions of nonviolence and compassion in the two traditions.

IV. Misrepresentation

Most problematic for the proper understanding of Jainism and its distinctive contributions to *ādhyātmavidyā* is the serious misrepresentations made about Mahavira and his teachings. The following passages not only distort Mahāvīra's *sādhanā* and its significance but also factually misrepresent Mahāvīra.

> Mahāvīra, "like the Buddha abandoned his hedonistic life to become a wandering ascetic... He not only went naked, but also advocated and practiced self torture and death by starvation. Though it took him thirteen years from the time he resolved to starve himself to death before he finally succeeded in doing so..." [Wolpert, pp.52- 53]

> After thirteen years, often as a naked ascetic, he attained enlightenment and thereafter taught his doctrine in the kingdom of the Ganges region before succumbing to a ritual of slow starvation near the Magadhan capital of Rajagriha around 400 BCE. [Stein, p. 70]

The thirteen years referred to in both passages above represent the most significant phase in Mahavira's life as a *Thīrthaṇkara*. His *sādhanā* as detailed in the Ācārāṇga-sūtra, during which he frequently fasted, sometimes for a very long period of time, and often without water (total days when he took food during the period of almost thirteen years is said to be 349), practiced austerities (misrepresented as "self-torture") and renounced all attachment, including the attachment to his body in his single-minded pursuit of his goal and attained *kevalajñana* (inflinite knowledge), becoming omniscient. At the end of this period, Mahavira did not die as the first passage above inform us. Following his omniscience, he lived as a teacher for nearly thirty years, before he became a *siddha* (liberated soul) after his nirvāṇa

in Pavapuri, near modern city of Patna in the year 527 BCE,[9] and not in Rajgriha around 400 BCE. One wonders, then, what are the sources for such distortions, and inaccurate historical detail? The significance of Mahāvīra, arguably the greatest apostle of nonviolence, and his sādhanā has been missed in both these accounts. Since the principles inspiring Mahavira's renunciation in pursuit of mokṣa are not part of the "mapping" strategies used by Wolpert and Stein, their representations are simply of the extraneous, and thus fail to provide any insight into the wisdom and essence of such principles.

Jain Principle of Ahiṃsā

Another misrepresentation centers on the principle of ahiṃsa (nonviolence), the core principle of Jainism. One author represents nonviolence as "an obsession" for the Jains. [Thapar, p.65] Another author after recognizing the complete dedication in Jainism to the principle of ahiṃsā, states, 'the only living being a devout Jain was encouraged to "kill" was himself, through starvation, though such a death would be viewed as liberated "birth" of one's hitherto entrapped *jīva*. More than two thousand years after Mahavira's suicide, Gandhi was to revive the fast-unto-death as a political weapon." [Wolpert, p. 54]

Such interpretations of Jain commitment to nonviolence distort the very centrality of ahiṃsā to Jain worldview, and the way it is interpreted within the Jain tradition. Ahiṃsā is regarded as the supreme virtue (*ahiṃsā parmodharmaḥ*). Under Jainism violence or injury to any living beings is considered violence to self and is a major impediment for one's liberation.[10] There is no evidence to suggest that any Jain was encouraged to commit

[9] The information in this paragraph has been compiled from Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path to Purification*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-37, including footnotes.

[10] For an insightful discussion of nonviolence in Jainism, see P.S. Jaini, "Ahiṃsā: A Jaina Way of Spiritual Discipline," in Jaini (ed.) *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), pp. 3-19; and Christopher Key Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, op. cit., pp. 9-15.

suicide. And, as pointed out earlier, Mahāvīra certainly did no such thing. The practice of *sallekhanā* is practiced among the Jains but it is not considered "suicide," though it may appear as such to those unfamiliar with the Jain tradition and its commitment to the principle of non-attachment (*aparigraha*).[11] On the contrary the practice of *sallekhanā* is regarded as the "most auspicious way that life can end."[12]

V. Neo-Orientalism?

Nineteenth century Indological discourse was characterized either by the Romantic notions of India which represented mystical and the exotic in things Indian or by the Positivist and Utilitarian views of India which expressed about India a sense of contempt and disdain. Neo orientalist discourse is simultaneously mystical and disdainful. Representing people, culture or even ideas in this fashion makes it easier for one to dismiss what might be actually significant about them. The following description of the historical milieu of Buddha and Mahāvīra is the case in point.

> Rival holy men swarm across the countryside performing feats of endurance, disputing one another's spiritual credentials and vying with one another for followers and patronage...Saints or charlatans, they evidently mirrored a society to which the paranormal, the supernatural and metaphysical had a strong appeal. Many of them went naked or unwashed and they cheerfully flouted the taboos of caste system. Defying social convention, they yet enjoyed society's indulgence. Renunciation had become an accepted way of life in which asceticism was seen as a prerequisite to spiritual enlightenment. The philosophies on offer from this rag-tag army of reformers ranged from the mind boggling mysticism to defiant nihilism and blank agnosticism, from the outright materialism of the Lokayats to the heavy determinism of the Ajivikas, from the

[11] Wolpert incorrectly translates aparigraha to mean poverty. See, Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 51.

[12] Chapple, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-109; For a fuller discussion of this practice, see Jaini, *The Jaina Path*, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-233;

rationalism of the Buddha to the esotericism of Mahavira. [Keay, pp. 63-64]

The above description about the sixth century BCE India appears to employs, what Richard Inden calls, "the curious metaphors."[13] In the above passage the author simultaneously uses mystical and scornful expressions which paint certain images in the minds of the reader. The reader is burdened with philosophical terms without a clue to their meaning. There is also the question of contradiction. For example, how can one renounce and yet be an "outright materialist"? How can something be termed as esoteric without even describing it?

Keay's preoccupation with the trivial and sensational remains a hallmark of the book. Without digressing, let me give one more example of this characteristic in the context of the topic of this paper. While no significant space is provided to the discussion of key concepts and teachings of Mahāvīra, one is struck by the way the reference to Jain tradition is made. In the context of Alexander the Great's campaign (other invaders of India as well are of great interest to Keay), Keay introduces and discusses at length a person named 'Calanus' whom he considers "a figure worth remembering" as he was the first Indian expatriate. Preoccupied with chronology and dates, Keay is able to assign Calanus a date as he accompanied Alexander to Persia and died shortly before the latter did, without making any impact on the Greeks. However, unable to assign him to particular philosophical school, he tells us the following.

> ... Calanus and his friends went naked, a condition, in which no Greek could be persuaded to join them, they may have been *nigantha* or Jains. Jain nudity was dictated by that sect's meticulous respect for life in all its forms. Clothes were taboos because the wearer might inadvertently crush any insect concealed in them; similarly death had to be so managed that only the dying would actually die. Jains bent on ending their life, therefore, usually starved themselves to death. Yet Calanus, a man of advanced years, chose to immolate himself

[13] Richard Inden, *Imagining India*. op. cit., p.1.

> on his own funeral pyre. Though an extraordinarily stoical sacrifice in Greek eyes, this was a decidedly careless move for one dedicated to avoiding casual insecticide. Evidently the Persian winter had induced a chill, if not pneumonia, and Calanus had decided it was better to die than be an encumbrance. No one, not even Alexander can dissuade him from his purpose. He strode to his cremation at the head of an enormous procession and reclined upon the pyre with complete indifference. This composure he maintained even as the flames frazzled his flesh. [Keay, pp. 76-77]

This out-of-context association with Jainism (for which no evidence is provided) with an appeal of an eyewitness account creates a new genre of orientalism. It denigrates and distorts Jainism at the same time especially for those who are not likely be familiar with the tradition. Even a basic familiarity with the core tenets of Jainism would show that nudity--which is only practiced by the Digambaras--is not related to the vow of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), but to the vow of nonattachment (*aparigraha)*. Furthermore, fire (*agni kāya*) under Jainism is considered as one of the six forms in which the Jiva reside. Therefore, self-immolation by fire will be unacceptable to a Jain as it violates the cardinal principle of nonviolence.

Stein too, is more concerned with what might appear as strange and exotic in Jainism rather than with the discussion of its core principles. Nearly three pages are devoted to the issues pertaining to female salvation, where the discussion of female biology and sexual orientations becomes a preoccupation with the author (Stein, pp. 70-73). This concern for the extraneous and strange is apparent from the following.

> Both sides [referring to Śvetāmbara and Digambara] recognized that in addition to the three bodily sexual forms, male female and hermaphrodite, each form could have sexual feelings more usual in one of the other forms. Thus, they acknowledged the existence of not only homosexuality, but lesbianism and bisexuality, and did so without the usual anathematizing of traditional religions. In fact, the Digambara argued that scriptural evidence that might be taken to mean that women were eligible for nirvana without having first been reborn as

> male really referred to men with female sexual orientation, i.e. to homosexual men. [Stein, p. 72]

The above is not supported by any evidence or footnote and is a serious misrepresentation of a tradition that emphasized *brahmacharya* or celibacy as one of the five key principles.[14]

These passages from Keay and Stein not only exemplify their preoccupation for the extraneous elements in a tradition, but more importantly, raise a larger issue for the integrity of the discipline of history. In the writing of history should one focus on issues central and germane to the topic or on issues which are only superficially and marginally related to the topic? This type of history writing also sets for the college students a bad example of "doing history" without proper evidence and supporting citations.

Conclusion

In my assessment, the treatment of Mahāvīra and Jainism in these textbooks is a matter of serious concern for teachers and students of Indian history, and also more generally for all those who care about education and scholarship in the Indic traditions. I am reminded of T. S. Eliot's famous lines from **The Rock:**

> *Where is wisdom we have lost in knowledge?*
> *Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*

The cause of sound learning and knowledge about Jainism is lost in the poor and distorted information contained in these books. And in turn, the wisdom of this great religious tradition is lost in the superficial and misleading knowledge imparted by majority of these textbooks.

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[14] This is not an isolated example of Stein's selective emphasis on extraneous aspects while missing the centrality of things. In discussing India's one of the most revered leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, Stein is more concerned to point out Gandhi's "idiosyncratic authoritarianism," his "largely malign influence on women," and his preoccupation with sex and untouchability," and is less concerned by his power of satyāgraha and his sacrifice for the cause of the nation and his people. See Stein, *History of India*, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-302.

Notes on Contributors

Christopher Key Chapple is Professor of Theological Studies and Director of Asian and Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Formerly, he served as the Assistant Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions at SUNY, Stony Brook. His publications include *Karma* His major publications include *Karma and Creativity* (1986), Co-translator of *Yoga Sūtra* (1990), *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Tradition* (1993), *Hinduism and Ecology* (2000), and *Jainism and Ecology* (2002).

Samani Charitrapragya received her initiation (Samaṇi Dikshā) in 1990 from Gaṇādhipati Gurudev Shri Tulsi and Acharya Shri Mahapragyaji. She holds the M. A. degree in Jain and Comparative Philosophy from Jain Vishva Bharti Institute, India. She has organized a number of Prekśa Meditation camps, delivered invited lectures on Jain Philosophy and Culture at colleges and universities in India, Europe and the United States. She has also made presentations at several national and international conferences.

Paul Dundas is Senior Lecturer in Sanskrit, School of Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh. Teaching interests: Sanskrit language and literature, South Asian Buddhism. Research interests: Jain history and institutions, Middle Indo-Aryan philology, Sanskrit court poetry. He has published numerous articles and book chapters. His book, "*The Jains*" originally published in 1992 has appeared in revised edition (2002).

Kamla Jain is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the College of Jesus and Mary, University of Delhi. Her publications include *Concept of Pancasila in Indian Thought*, and *Aparigraha: The Humane Solution*—which throws light on the relevance of *Aparigraha* in modern context.

Padmanabh S. Jaini is Professor of Buddhist Studies in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. He has also taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His major publications include *The Jaina Path of Purification* (1979), *Gender and Salvation: Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women*(1991),*Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (2000), and *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies* (2000).

John M. Koller is past President of the Society of Asian and Comparative Philosophy. He is Professor of Asian and Comparative Philosophy at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. His major publications include *The Indian Way* (1982), *A Source Book in Asian Philosophy* (1991), *Asian Philosophies (2002),* numerous articles and book chapters.

Satish Kumar is Director Center for the Study of Ecological and Spiritual Values, Schumacher College in U.K., and Editor of *Resurgence*. His autobiography, *Path Without Destination*, has been published in several editions in the U.S. and U.K. At the age of 9 he became a Jain monk, and at the age of 18 he became a campaigner for land reform in support of Gandhi's vision of renewed India and peaceful world. Later, inspired by the example of Bertrand Russell, he undertook an 8,000 mile peace pilgrimage, walking from India to America. In July 2000, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Education from the University of Plymouth.

Sonya Rhie Quintanilla received her Ph.D. in South Asian Art History from Harvard University. She teaches in the Department of Art History at University of California, Irvine. Her publications include an article on "ayagapatas" in *Artibus Asiae* vol. LX, and an article entitled "Closer to Heaven than the Gods: Jain Monks in the Art of Pre-Kushan Mathura," in *Marg* (March 2001). She has just completed the manuscript for a book on the history of stone sculpture at Mathura from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D.

Tara Sethia is Professor of History at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Her course offerings include History of India, South Asia, Gandhi, Women in Asia and World History. Her publications and research focus on colonialism and economic development of Modern India. She was the Principle Investigator and Project Director of a multi-year program on India and China for the professional development of K-12 Educators funded by the *National Endowment for the Humanities*. Recently, she has initiated a study on Teaching about Jainism in the College Curriculum.

Kim Skoog is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guam. He has presented papers and published articles in United States, Asia, and Europe. He was the Guest Editor for *Philosophy East and West* (vol. 40 no. 3)—a special issue on Jainism. His paper, "Jainism on Love and Sexuality: A Comparative Study" presented at the 2001 International Seminar on Mahāvīra and Ahiṃsā in the 21st Century will appear in conference proceedings volume published by Bhogilal Leherchand Institute of Indology, India.

Anne Vallely teaches at universities of Concordia and McGill in the fields of anthropology, religion and environmental ethics. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from University of Toronto. In 1999-2000 she had Rockefeller Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities. She is the author of *Guardians of the Transcendent: An Ethnography of a Jain Ascetic Community* (2002).

Kristi Wiley is a visiting lecturer in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley where she teaches courses on religion in South Asia. Her research has focused on aspects of Jainism associated with karma theory. Her publications include several articles, book chapters, and the *Historical Dictionary of Jainism* (forthcoming).