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WOMEN IN JAINISM

Jainism, a religious movement born in India around the sixth century B.C.E., has survived as an influential minority of about three and a half million followers until the present day. It has never excluded women as such, since one of its key concepts is that of the "fourfold *saṅgha*," comprising monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen. The discussion of the religious status of women, however, slowly became a crucial point, since it is at the background of the ancient sectarian division between the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras (79 C.E.). In this paper I will constantly refer to these two sects which, in spite of a common doctrine and much common religious behavior, have different scriptures. The fact that the Jains were never numerous did not prevent the rise of subsects especially among the Śvetāmbaras: namely, the Mūrtipūjaks (idolatrous), the Sthānakvāsins (nonidolatrous) and the Terāpanthins.

On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that except in recent times, when a few prominent Jain nuns have spoken of their own lives, Jain women have not been able to speak for themselves: almost all the texts we read are written by monks or male-oriented.

THE JAIN NUNS' ORDER

It is quite likely that the place to be assigned to women was a point of disagreement between early Hinduism (which denied women access to the religious scriptures) and the ascetic movements born in the sixth to fifth century B.C.E. which, on the whole, defended egalitarian attitudes. Women were permitted to enter the early Buddhist *Saṅgha* (Schuster Barnes 1987, 106). They were also

allowed to enter the order of the Jains and the Ājīvika-sect (Basham 1951, 106). Ṛṣabha, the mythic founder of Jainism, or Pārśva and Mahāvīra, who are both historical figures, all had among their followers numerous female ascetics and laywomen, some of whom became paragons of virtue in the later narrative literature (Caṇdanā, Sulasā, Revatī). It is interesting that the number of nuns given in the texts is always more than twice the number of monks. This is probably a distinctive feature of Jainism. According to the Śvetāmbara Jain books of discipline (the corpus of the so-called Chedasūtras), only two types of women are forbidden to receive initiation: those who are recognized as pregnant and those who are still very young (under eight years old) or have a small child.

Now the question is whether the probably massive initiations of women had any effect on the nuns' rank within the religious order. Data provided by Digambara sources on the organization of the church are so scanty that they can hardly be used. The Chedasūtras, on the other hand, contain a whole set of rules stating what is allowed or what is prohibited for both monks and nuns in their daily routine. In most cases they are similar, but special regulations and stricter restrictions are imposed upon nuns. They concern, for example, the type of alms that nuns can accept, the places where they are allowed to stay, or the implements they can use. Further:

> 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 wander about alone from one village to the other. 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] kāyotsarga. (*Bṛhat-Kalpa-Sūtra* 5.15–21: Schubring 1977, 31)

Generally speaking, the nuns are more dependent than their male colleagues and are subordinated to the latters' authority: "The male-ascetic is governed by two persons: the teacher and the preceptor. . . . The female ascetic is governed by *three* persons: the female-superior (*pavattiṇī*), the preceptor and the teacher" (*Vyavahārasūtra* 3.11; 3.12).

In the Chedasūtras the rules are simply stated. But from the justifications expressed in the exegetical literature, it seems that most prohibitions are motivated by the wish to avoid all objects and conditions of life that could endanger the vow of chastity. Although it is not always clearly stated, the belief that women are more fragile creatures in this respect seems to be all-pervading.

The inferior status of nuns results in the fact that, even when they have had a longer religious life, they may be subordinate to monks who have been initiated only a few years. Moreover, nuns require more years than their male counterparts to attain high positions in the religious hierarchy. To judge from the literary tradition, nuns probably never reached the same positions as monks. I can find no record of such high titles as *ācārya* and *sūri* being used for nuns. They have their own titles such as *gaṇinī*, "head of a *gaṇa*," of a small unit of nuns, *pravartinī*, and *mahattarā*, which appears to be a special designation conferred on a restricted number of very learned nuns. In the chronicles that record the lives of Śvetāmbara orders in the middle ages (thirteenth to fifteenth century), it is evident that both the decision and the act of conferring titles upon nuns always fell to male dignitaries.

Theoretical literature does not really provide any argument against equality between monks and nuns as far as learning and teaching are concerned. The only passage often quoted in the secondary literature as proving that nuns (and women in general) were forbidden to study the texts included under the heading Dṛṣṭivāda, because they are "empty, given to haughtiness, sensual and inconstant," cannot be relied upon. It has been convincingly shown that these commonplaces about feminine nature and other statements:

> Merely testify to a firmly established if somewhat naïve belief that "the Dṛṣṭivāda contains *everything*—a belief obviously betraying complete ignorance of the real contents of the long-lost text and, on the other hand, conveniently permitting to derive from 'the Dṛṣṭivāda' or 'the Pūrvas' any text or subject which it was desired to invest with canonical dignity." (Alsdorf 1974, 256)

From the literary evidence it is not possible to draw any conclusion about the general educational level of nuns in the past. Compared with the large number of monks who are known to us as scholars or writers from the often very detailed colophons of Jaina manuscripts, the number of nuns who did not remain anonymous is quite small: the most famous one is probably Yākinī Mahattarā, whom Haribhadrasūri recognized as his "(spiritual) mother." Very few are those who have signed a work, or even who have collabo-

rated with monks in the writing of a book, or who have inspired them (Shāntā 1985, 140–42). However, as testimony that intellectual life could be brilliant among nuns, we can refer to the so-called *Kuratti Aḍigaḷ*, a teaching institution managed by female ascetics in Tamil Nadu (ninth to eleventh century: Shāntā 1985, 171ff.).

In spite of the rise of a fairly large number of sects and subsects in the course of history, the picture offered by the *contemporary* Jain nuns' order is fundamentally the same as the one described above. Except among the Digambaras, nuns are more numerous than monks in the three major sects:

	Nuns	*Monks*
Śvetāmbaras	3,400	1,200
Sthānakvāsins	522	325
Terāpanthins (1981)	531	164
Digambaras	50	125

(Jaini 1979, 247; Balbir 1983,41)

Although the question should be examined further, factors related to social environment and restraints imposed upon women (such as the impossibility for a widow to remarry or the prospect of a very hard life in less developed areas of Rajasthan) play an important part in their decision to become nuns. The fact that religious life is an opportunity to develop one's own personality through study is also often adduced as a strong motivation.

In most sects nuns live in small groups under the leadership of one of them and conform to well-defined seniority rules. They are not allowed to wander alone (Misra 1972, 37ff.). However, an interesting example of the way the nuns' order is structured is provided by the vigorously organized Terāpantha sect, which originated in the eighteenth century in Rajasthan, as a reaction to the "lax" discipline of the time. In the beginning the patriarchal structure was centered around a single *ācārya*. He was the head of monks and nuns who were almost equally proportionate. But the regular increase of nuns led to the institution of a so-called *pramukhā*, "a (female) head" who became the religious superior of the smaller units. She is, however, by no means the equal of the *Ācārya*, who makes all the important decisions, but is rather a kind of coordinator, also subordinate to him.

A crucial debate centers around the nuns' education. Today there appears to be sectarian differentiation with regard to the canonical texts accessible to them. While the Sthānakvāsins and the

Terāpanthins make no distinction between monks and nuns, and profess that everybody can learn everything if he or she has the capacity for it, the Tapāgaccha school of the Mūrtipūjaks spreads among its female followers the idea that their abilities are less than those of men. As a result they study a very small number of the canonical texts and are in any case forbidden to have access to the Chedasūtras where faults and their punishments are recorded, lest it would give them bad ideas (Shāntā 1985, 377).

Even if today there are some prominent nuns such as Āryikā Jñānamati (Digambara), who actively contributes to the propagation of Jain law by her translations and educational pamphlets (Shāntā 1985, 513ff.), or Mahattarā Mṛgāvatī (Śvetāmbara, 1926–1986) who acted as an incentive for the establishment of some institutions, they are exceptional cases. The late Mṛgāvatī for instance (1989, 51) clearly articulated the importance of nuns being learned, lest an important potential be wasted, and recommended that before young nuns are initiated, they pass through a five-year curriculum where they would study Jaina basic texts as well as grammar, literature, and the like, with some learned pandits.

In this respect the steps taken by the Terāpanthins are probably a distinctive feature of this movement. Before initiation the girls have to undergo a period of probation during which they attend a full course in a boarding school and become familiar with religious scriptures. The daily routine of the nuns probably includes more time effectively devoted to the study or the copying of texts. Finally, for about ten years, the Terāpanthins have initiated within the order a particular category exclusively consisting of women who are released from certain rules (such as that of going exclusively on foot) and whose main function is to read and write (*samaṇa śreṇi:* Balbir 1983, 42–43). This innovation is a part of the claimed objective of the sect to improve women's conditions.

THE JAIN LAYWOMEN

The importance given to the laity was always an essential element of Jainism and is often said to partly explain the survival of the movement in India into contemporary times. As a matter of fact the laity is the economic foundation of the religious mendicant order, which it supports by its gifts, receiving in exchange the teaching of the law. Laywomen contribute to the sustaining of the community no less than the laymen do.

Jainism developed an immense corpus of texts devoted to the code of conduct of the laity (*śrāvakācāra:* Williams 1963). In these treatises, however, "the male is invariably taken as the paradigm" (Leslie 1989, 43) as can be seen from the wording of the fourth minor vow, which prescribes "contentment with one's own wife" and "avoidance of the wives of others" (Williams 1963, 85). No discussion is found on the question of whether the term *śrāvaka* also implies the feminine. Such information must be sought in the rare places where particular rules connected with womanhood are discussed. Other evidence is provided by the rich narrative literature of the Jains, the aim of which is to illustrate religious virtues through exemplary lives or by modern observation (Stevenson 1915; Mahias 1985; Reynell 1987).

I shall not deal here with the general duties of Jain women, which are obviously largely dependent on the Indian environment and much similar to Hindu rules (Leslie 1989). To put the matter in a nutshell, their dharma is summed up by the word *śīla*, which designates a perfect wife, such as Sītā or Draupadī (whom the Jains also recognize) or others who remained faithful to their husbands (Shāntā 1985, 181) and are glorified as *satīs*. As has been shown by Reynell (1987, 340), "physical chastity is believed equivalent to spiritual purity," and to some extent removes the boundary between a woman in the world and a woman outside the world.

The present section will try to analyze a few areas of religiosity that seem to concern women more than men. The distribution and complementarity of religious roles between men and women is obviously due to "the social construction of gender" (Reynell 1987, 313). As a general rule, men work outside to earn money, while women remain at home. Men manifest their prestige by giving money to the temple. Women are best fit to master all that is connected with food and, provided rather serious limitations, with the field of worship. On the other hand, they insure "the reproduction of the Jain community" through marriage and religious teaching imparted to their children (Reynell 1991, 59ff.).

Food

In a doctrine such as Jainism, which lays so much stress on dietary rules (Williams 1963, 50ff., 110ff.; Mahias 1985, 100ff.), the part played by women is obviously of primary importance (Reynell, 1991, 54). Since they are the ones who cook, they are in a good position to obey the rules or transgress them, as well as to make others do the same.

The first and foremost responsibility of a laywoman is to prepare food that is acceptable to monks and nuns though not specially meant for them. This is no easy task considering the number of prescriptions to be observed. When the canonical texts describe the donor, they use the feminine gender, because, as a commentator remarks, "she is the one who mostly offers alms" and is the donor par excellence:

> If a woman of the house wastes the food when distributing it, [the monk] should refuse [it, saying to] the [alms-]giver: "I may not accept such [alms]." [When he notices that] she crushes living beings, seeds [and] plants with her foot, he should avoid such [a house], knowing that she performs that which is not suitable to [his] self-control. . . . She brings food and drink having put her hand into the vessel and poured out [that which was inside]. [In all these cases] he should refuse. . . . If she brings food and drink having put down her crying boy or girl to whom she is giving the breast, that food and drink is not allowed. (*Daśavaikālikasūtra* 5.1.28–29, 31, 42–43: trans. Schubring 1977, 208–9)

One of the most popular stories in Jain literature relates how a woman caused the death of a *sādhu* because she had offered him some rotten vegetable, which he was obliged to eat in order to avoid the death of numerous ants attracted by its foul smell (*Nāyādhammakahāo* 16 etc.). On the other hand, among the most famous positive heroines is Candanabālā, a young girl who alone knew what type of food the twenty-fourth Jina Mahāvīra needed to break his fast. Instances of male donors are, however, also easy to find.

Even if normative literature prescribes the avoidance of eating or drinking at night for all, whether men or women, a perusal of narrative literature seems to show that it is actually observed mostly (if not only) by women, for they are the sole protagonists of stories devoted to this topic. Moreover, a common story-pattern stages a couple where the woman strictly keeps to this vow while her husband or her in-laws (sometimes non-Jain) first laugh at her and refuse to act similarly, then are later convinced of the need to follow her behavior under the pressure of events. It is remarkable that, while no specification is generally given about women in the case of other religious themes, some texts include a separate account listing the miseries or happiness awaiting any girl who would break this vow or keep it. Modern evidence shows the same trend (Misra 1972, 44, 54).

and, as has been argued by Mahias (1985, 108–11), it may result in inverting the normal sequence of the meals, since the wife would then take food *before* her husband.

As constituting the penance (*tapas*) par excellence because it also implies sexual purity, abstaining from food in the form of fasts is indeed "one of the most important expressions of female religiosity" and "one of the key ways through which women demonstrate family honour" (Reynell 1987, 322; 1991, 56ff.). There is a large variety of fasts (Mahias 1985, 111ff.; Reynell 1987, 320–21), either implying total restriction (water but no food) or partial restriction regarding the type of food or the frequency of meals. Some types of fasts, such as the *ravivār vrat* ("Sundays' fast") among Digambaras, are specific to women (Mahias 1985, 116). The more fasts they perform during their life, the higher their reputation of religiosity is. Fasting women always arouse great respect among their relatives and are surrounded by great care (Misra 1972, 49). To quote Reynell (1987, 347), "through her fasting a woman makes a public statement about herself. Fasting becomes a statement of a woman's inner purity and by extension becomes a statement about the honour of her family." As a matter of fact, the breaking of a fast always involves a group celebration or a feast of some kind, which contributes to social cohesion (Misra 1972, 50; Reynell 1987, 348–51).

Worship

The question of worship is rather intricate with regard to the position of women. Except for the followers of the nonidolatrous sect of the Sthānakvāsins who pray or meditate privately in their houses, all Jains must go to the temples daily and worship the Jinas as "human beings who have achieved omniscience and final liberation and who teach the path of liberation to others" (Babb 1988, 67). The doctrine prescribes it for all and actual observation shows that women do it more regularly and more at leisure, adding to it the performance of other rituals at home (Reynell 1987, 319).

Nevertheless sporadic statements also imply that their rights possibly differ from those of men as far as the performance of rituals is concerned, or that women are submitted to more restrictions. Whatever its divisions, daily worship generally implies two categories of rituals: the first takes place in the cella of the temple and requires a perfect physical and mental purity from the worshiper since it implies direct contact with the image, which has to be washed or anointed with paste of sandalwood and flowers. The second ritual

requires less purity since it takes place in the main hall, in front of the image but at a distance from it (e.g., Babb 1988, 70ff.). Woman being the paradigmatic "impure" creature, it happens that among Śvetāmbaras she may be excluded altogether from the first category of rituals (Stevenson 1915, 251). The followers of the Kharataragaccha Śvetāmbara school do not allow women to worship images of the Jinas (Deo 1950, 25).

In front of a recently built temple dedicated to the god Ghaṇṭākarṇa Mahāvīra, a board says that no woman should enter the cella, and that no menstruating woman should enter the main hall (Lodurva, Rajasthan; see also Babb 1988, 69). Among Digambaras she may not be allowed to wash the image (Mahias 1985, 254). To quote one of their treatises: "If a woman performs worship to the Jinas, she should follow the same injunctions (as men), but she is not entitled to touch the image. Thus do the knowledgeable people say" (Kiśansimha, *Kriyākośa* [18th century] vs. 1457).

Such details are important insofar as they represent an undercurrent tendency rather than a general line. They embody the conflict between the fundamentally egalitarian religious doctrine of Jainism and the pan-Indian beliefs about womanhood.

On the other hand, it is well known that in Śvetāmbara temples the right to perform different sorts of *pūjās* first is determined by a system of auction. Though nothing theoretically prevents women from raising bids, there seems to be a kind of consensus that they can do it only *along* with their husbands (Reynell 1987, 327–28).

THE JAIN IMAGE OF WOMAN AND ITS THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

The pan-Indian prejudices against women, who are said to be weak-minded, fickle, treacherous, and impure, are shared by the Jains (see extract p. 134). Except harsh criticisms against the woman's body, said to host innumerable subtle beings in constant danger of being crushed, which are obviously due to the specific importance ascribed to ahimsa by the Jains, they are not of much interest as such.

What is relevant, however, is the way these prejudices are exploited by a religion that advocates renunciation as the highest value, the way they are inserted in religious debates and used as arguments therein, and their consequences, which for the sake of convenience I would term "mythology." Hence an overall impression

prevails that the Jains have followed their own ideas through to their logical conclusions.

Woman as a Symbol of Attachment

In a religion like Jainism where asceticism is the central value and the quickest path to salvation, the woman is bound to be represented negatively: as connected with sexuality she is a living and insidious threat to the monk's fourth "major vow," the vow of chastity, which among the five "great vows" taken by mendicants is said to be very difficult to comply with. Therefore it is even prohibited to talk to her, as is expressed in the Prakrit term *itthīkahā*, "talks with/about women," one of the four forms of "bad talks" (*vikahā*). On the other hand, because it is emphasized that there exists a fundamental interconnection between the different vows, not observing chastity would mean going against the resolution to renounce possessions and against the vow of ahimsa, sexual intercourse implying injury to many living beings.

Hence the vehement outbursts against women as temptresses one comes across from the oldest texts onward:

> (A monk) who leaves mother and father (and his) former (family) connection, (resolving:) "I will live alone, without companion, as one for whom sexual pleasure has ceased, seeking solitary places"—him approach, with crafty, stealthy step, sweet-spoken women; they know how to contrive that some monks will suffer a (moral) breakdown. They sit down closely at his side, they frequently put on holiday dress, they show him even the lower part of their body and the armpit when lifting their arm. . . . He should not fix his eye on those (women), nor should he consent to (women's) inconsiderate acts, nor should he walk together with them: thus his soul is well-guarded. (*Sūyagaḍanga* 1.4.1,1–3; 1.4.1,5: trans. Alsdorf 1974, 202–3; see also *Mahānisīhasutta* 2.10–16)

Schuster Barnes has observed that in Buddhism "most of the time the texts correctly direct their denunciation against a man's . . . attitude" (1987, 113) more than against external causes. This does not seem to hold true for Jainism where such statements are quite exceptional and where the account of the fourth vow generally forms a starting point for lengthy reflections on women's innate wickedness (Williams 1963, 176). At the same time, however,

some writers probably felt that these were overstatements that should not be understood literally, since they indicate that their purpose is only to warn monks against danger and help them (see extract p. 134; Śubhacandra's *Jñānārṇava* 12:56–59).

Religious Debates about Woman

Woman and Emancipation. It has been argued that the period between 300 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. witnessed the eruption of "a doctrinal crisis wherein the spiritual capacities of women were challenged and a real effort was made to prove theologically that women are inferior to men" (Schuster Barnes 1987, 114). This had an impact on Jainism (as it had on Mahayana Buddhism) at a similar time. As a matter of fact the first evidence in support of men's and women's spiritual inequality is found in one of the religious poems ascribed to Kundakunda, one of the most revered Digambara teachers said to have worked toward the beginning of the Christian era. 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 (*Sutta pāhuḍa* vs. 22ff.; Jaini 1991, 34ff.) put forward the central argument of a debate that subsequently became a *locus communis* of the Digambara/Śvetāmbara doctrinal rivalry, which has continued to the present day. While the Digambaras advocate that a woman cannot attain emancipation, implying that rebirth as a man is a prerequisite, the Śvetāmbaras say that this transitory stage is not necessary.

Copious primary literature on the topic comes from both schools and, interestingly enough, is often inserted in treatises devoted to the discussion of philosophical or logical matters (Jambūvijaya 1974; Bhattacharya 1967; Jaini 1986, 204; 1991, 41–108) as if the need was felt to lead the debate beyond mere postulates with the help of closely argued reasoning. The first complete book is apparently the *Strīnirvāṇaprakaraṇa*, composed in the ninth century by Śākaṭāyana, a member of the now extinct Yāpanīya sect who sides with the Śvetāmbaras (Jambūvijaya 1974, Shāntā 1985, 490ff.), whereas most other texts date from the eleventh century onward (references in Jambūvijaya 1974 and Jaini 1991). Let me summarize the main stages of the discussion.

Among the arguments expressed by Digambaras in favor of their position, a first group is based on pan-Indian beliefs (or prejudices) against women whose inborn nature is supposed to be bad. Birth as a woman can be due only to a great sin and to preeminence of wrong

belief. Women's nature is weak. Treacherousness is a woman's prerogative. Women are inferior to men with respect to glory and they are not shown respect by men. In such cases the Śvetāmbaras answer by referring to counterexamples that invalidate the general value of the thesis, quoting, for instance, names of women who proved their energy, or saying that some of the criticisms leveled at them could be leveled at men as well (*Strīnirvāṇaprakaraṇa* vss. 27ff.; Jaini 1991, 72ff.; Bhattacharya 1967, 610–13). In order to reply to the Digambaras who contend that the inability of women to be reborn in the lowest hell is a sign of their general lack of excellency (*prakarṣa*), the Śvetāmbaras reply that since there is no adequation (*avyāpti*) between this well-admitted inability and the inability for emancipation, it cannot hold as a cause (*Strī°* vss. 5–6; Jaini 1991, 51ff.; Bhattacharya 1967, 607).

However, as stated earlier, the major discussion centers around the question of clothing. According to the Digambaras, emancipation means total rejection of all belongings and giving up the satisfaction of physical needs (such as eating). But wearing clothes would mean transgressing the fifth vow of nonattachment and an inaptitude to observe self-control (*saṁyama*). Because of her innate physical impurity, a woman needs clothes in any case. Hence, since she cannot fulfill the precondition, she is not fit for emancipation. The Śvetāmbaras say:

> If clothes are a reason for the impossibility of Emancipation, let them be given up. But it would not be conform to the rule to give them up. They are a component of Emancipation (for women) as a whisk broom is. Otherwise the Teacher would have erred. The Teacher thought that giving up clothes (would mean) giving up of all (good conduct), and that there was very little harm in accepting clothes. Therefore he prescribed them. As for attachment it can exist with respect to food and so on (viz. not only with the respect to clothes). . . . If implements are a tie for the nun, (they would be one also for a man). In that case a man could not be a *nirgrantha* either. Even somebody who is adorned with clothes, jewellery, etc., can be without attachment, provided he has no acquisitive egotism. If he has, he will be tied, even though he is naked. . . . Non attachment is absence of acquisitive egotism, nothing else. (*Strī°* vss. 10–16; see Jaini 1991, 56ff.)

Thus they seem to favor a spiritual interpretation of the concept of nonattachment rather than a literal understanding of the term.

This appears to be a general feature of theirs in the present debate, as can be seen by their clear statement that the only way toward emancipation is the combination of "right faith, right knowledge and right conduct" (the three *ratnas*), that nothing shows women's inability to behave accordingly and annihilate karmic matter (*Strī°* vss. 2ff.; Jaini 1991, 49; Bhattacharya 1967, 603): "(Suppose that) a karman leading to femininity is acquired. As a matter of fact both women and men are Emancipated when their individual karmans are destroyed. Since the ātman is exactly the same in both women and men, woman is fit for Emancipation." (*Pramāṇasāra* [15th century]: *Jaina Philosophical Tracts* [Ahmedabad 1973], 119).

Laywomen and Laymen. It has been seen above that the fundamental debate about woman's ability to gain salvation probably reached its climax in the middle ages. Once the question of man's and woman's inequality on the religious level was put through this specific application, it could be easily extended. Thus even those who always supported the equality of women (the Śvetāmbaras) could not just state it as self-evident. They had to try to *prove* it. This takes place for instance in the *śrāvakācāras*, starting with Hemacandra (twelfth century) onward when the concept of the "seven fields" in which a Jain should sow wealth is adduced: two of them are the laymen and the laywomen, but the fact that the two groups should be treated identically has to be discussed in the form of a fictitious logical argument.

Interestingly enough, the solution lies in refusing absoluteness (*ekānta*) and recognizing the manifoldness of reality (*anekānta*) as the Jains fundamentally do. Thus even if there are "two opposing poles of prejudice: the reverence shown to a few individual idealized women . . . and the contempt shown to women in general" (Leslie 1989, 272), the Śvetāmbaras at least consider the existence of a positive pole more important and sufficient to support extension to laywomanhood as a general concept:

> Affection to be shown to laywomen should be inferred as being exactly the same as the one shown to laymen, not more and not less. Since they too are endowed with right knowledge, right faith and right conduct, since their chief characteristic is to be satisfied with chastity (*śīla*) whether they are widows or not, since their hearts are devoted to the Jain doctrine, they must be considered as co-religionists too.
>
> Objection: But in the world as well as in the Teaching women are well known to be receptacles of bad points. They

are indeed poisonous flowers without earth, Indra's thunderbolts without being produced from the sky, diseases without remedy, death without cause, prodigies without signs, female snakes without hoods, tigresses without a cave, real ogresses, destroyers of affection between relatives and elders, full of untruth and deceit (*māyā*). As it is said: "Untruth, violence, deceit, stupidity, excessive greed, impurity and cruelty are the innate negative points of women." "When heaps of infinite sins arise comes womanhood, know that well, Gotama." In all treatises, almost at every step, they are criticized. Hence they should be avoided from far. How then can the fact that they should be objects of charity, respect and consideration be justified?

Answer: There is no invariability (*ekānta*) in the fact that women only are full of bad points: the same is true of men too. They also are very often seen to be cruel, full of bad points, unbelievers, ungrateful, perfidious against their masters, destroyers of trust, liars, attracted by women or others' wealth, without pity, deceivers of their kings or their elders. And all that does not justify that great men be despised. Similarly in the case of women. Even if some of them are found to be full of bad points, there are also some who are full of good points. As a matter of fact, even though they are women, the Tīrthaṁkaras' mothers are worshipped even by the highest gods and praised by the best sages because of the importance of their qualities. . . . Thanks to the power of their chastity, some of them change fire into water, water into earth, wildcats into jackals, a serpent into a rope, poison into nectar. In the fourfold sangha, the fourth part is the laywoman indeed. The fact that women are very often criticized in the treatises is only meant for the Liberation of those who are strongly attached to them.

In the treatises we hear about (the following things): the qualities of laywomen such as Sulasā and others are praised even by Tīrthaṁkaras. In heavens they are eulogised even by the best of gods as able to teach the Law. The right faith they have cannot even be shaken by strong holders of wrong faith. Some of them are in their last incarnation. Some others will come to Emancipation after two-three births.

Thus, as mothers, sisters, or daughters, laywomen are absolutely entitled to affection. That's all. (Ratnaśekhara's *Śrāddhavidhiprakaraṇa* [14th century], fifth section, p. 21)

Women and Mythology. Now some instances can be considered which show how the views about women are echoed in the mythology of the two main Jain sects. In an atheistic movement like Jainism, the mythology mainly centers around the twenty-four Tīrthaṁkaras ("Ford-makers"), whose teaching enables everybody to know and practise the path, and around events connected with their biographies. However, partly under the influence of the general Indian context (the rise of bhakti, etc.), Jainism progressively developed a pantheon where female deities play an outstanding role.

The Twenty-fourth Jina, Mahāvīra. Representation of woman as a threat to the monk's chastity and complete renunciation of the world accounts for a discrepancy between Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras as far as the life of the twenty-fourth Jina, Mahāvīra, is concerned. According to the generally more rigorous tradition of the Digambaras, when reaching the age of thirty, he renounced the world, and, as some texts insist, though his physical structure was that of a handsome and strong young man, he overcame love. On the contrary, it is quite clear that women play a central part in this Jina's biography as told by the Śvetāmbaras. As far back as their canonical scriptures they state that Vardhamāna was married. But whereas the *Kalpasūtra* merely gives the information, the later biographies try to justify it, and, one must admit, they are obviously quite embarrassed. Therefore they feel the need to advocate instances taken from the past, saying that the first Jina Ṛṣabha married, or insistingly indicate that the would-be Jina accepted marriage reluctantly after many negotiations and only to comply with his parents' wishes, which when in his mother's womb he had already pledged never to disobey. Here the attitude toward women might symbolically serve to highlight a fundamental difference in the importance ascribed to the layman's and the mendicant's path by the two sects: renunciation (implying perfect chastity) is the only way to salvation and can be reached *directly* according to the Digambaras, whereas a passage through the state of a perfect householder is a preliminary condition for the Śvetāmbaras.

Other questions are raised by the place of women in Mahāvīra's genealogy. How to explain in the Indian context that Śvetāmbara literary sources *unanimously* show him as the father of a *girl*, and mention her name as well as the name of his granddaughter? Or was this meant specifically as symbolic since it was known that the Buddha had fathered a *son*! The question is of some importance if we consider that this girl married a certain Jamāli who in turn was

Mahāvīra's nephew through his (elder) *sister* and that the couple was responsible for the first schism in the church. Whatever the interpretation may be, I cannot imagine that this stress on feminine lineage was a matter of chance. Apart from depending on legal matters, it might also aim at emphasizing a sectarian individuality (Śvetāmbara versus Digambara; Mahāvīra versus Buddha). The problem should at any rate be examined more thoroughly than it has been until now.

The Nineteenth Jina, Malli. The debate about women's ability to gain salvation and the answers given by both sects are best evidenced by the narrative literature relating the human existence of the nineteenth Jina. According to the Śvetāmbaras who narrate this Jina's biography already in their canon (Roth 1983), Malli is the feminine rebirth of the ascetic Mahābala, who, in spite of the agreement made with six of his companions to observe fasts of identical lengths, observed longer fasts. This had a double effect: it explained the rebirth as a woman (because the ascetic resorted to perfidy and lie) *but also* the destiny as a future Jina since asceticism is recorded among the twenty causes leading to Jinahood.

According to the Digambara versions (Jaini 1979, 40 n. 93; Roth 1983, 49–57), Malli is born as a boy and thereafter lives the ordinary career of a Jina. Except for a perhaps doubtful and apparently unique gloss, which could lead us to think that even among them Malli could have been a woman before the time that salvation was denied to this sex (Roth 1983, 53–54), this represents a unanimous tradition.

The interesting question about Malli's femininity is raised for the first time by Bhāvasena, a Digambara writer of the fourteenth century (Jaini 1986) who cleverly adduces (indisputable) iconographic observations as support for his position that Malli could not have been female:

> For example, no one in the world has ever perceived the (alleged) femininity of the images of the Lord Malli; on the contrary, those images are always depicted in masculine gender. . . . The Lord under debate must be a man, because he is never portrayed as female in his images. This is like the images of Vardhamāna (Mahāvīra), which are well known to be male in the traditions of both parties. (Bhāvasena's *Muktivicāra* §20: trans. Jaini 1986, 217)

I have not had access to later Śvetāmbara answers to such an argument, but one could wonder whether discussing the depiction of sexual characteristics in Tīrthaṁkaras' images is of any meaning, since these stereotyped standing or sitting images are conceived as material aids for meditation, basically supposed to show emancipated souls and not their physical features.

The Mothers. The ambivalence of the Jain image of woman is best seen in the fairly high status ascribed to women as mothers or protective entities, and the development of a specific worship in connection with them *among both sects.*

A first instance of this trend is provided by the rather ancient respect shown to the parents of the Tīrthaṁkaras, and especially to their mothers (Shah 1987, 47ff.; *Śrāddhavidhi*° quoted above) as iconography proves. In the Śvetāmbara literary tradition a particular place is given to Marudevī, the mother of the first (legendary) Jina, Ṛṣabha, since she is said to have been the "first emancipated soul of the current descending era."

Canonical evidence is available to show that already at an early period learning could be identified with womanhood. Sarasvatī is revered as an embodiment of the Jinas' teaching that she protects (Cort 1987, 236). Thus her name is often quoted at the end of the fivefold homage-formula to the masters (*pancanamaskāra*). The same is true of the sixteen *vidyādevīs* (depicted in Mt. Abu) who were first seen as magical powers, the acquisition of which was disapproved, and then held in rather high esteem. I wonder if what the Jains name "the eight mothers of the teaching," an expression that includes basic terms of the doctrine (the five *samitis* and the three *guptis*), is not a conceptualization at an ethical level of the Hindu *māṭṛkās.*

Even more important are the female attendants (*yakṣiṇī*) of the major Jinas (Cakreśvarī/Nemi; Padmāvatī/Pārśva; Ambikā (=mother)/Mahāvīra) who after a long process (described in Cort 1987, 241ff.) undoubtedly became the main Jain goddesses. Their worship does not yield the same results as the Jinas' worship. While the Jinas help the devotee along the path of emancipation, the goddesses are mostly "approached to assist [him] in worldly affairs" (Cort 1987, 248), on given occasions when a specific problem arises (illness, need to protect a pilgrimage place, need of assistance in a religious debate, etc.). Thus they appear as benevolent maternal figures connected with fertility.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the way we consider the problem of womanhood in Jainism, we see *two* irreconcilable theologies at work. The "theology of subordination" (Radford Ruether 1987, 207f.), based on the idea that woman is ontologically, intellectually, and morally inferior to man, which contends that she will never be able to reach emancipation—the main goal for which the teaching of the law is meant—is supported by the Digambaras. The "theology of equivalence," admitting that man and woman are human persons of equal value even if they are *different*, and thus that both are equally entitled to reach the final goal, is supported by the Śvetāmbaras.

There are, however, two types of limitation to this bipolarization.

The first one is the law of karma. If one's birth depends on one's own conduct, womanhood (which is due to specific karmic matters) will never be a permanent feature of the individual through the cycle of rebirths. Thus no one is excluded from emancipation for good. The "failure" will last as long as womanhood lasts.

Secondly, even if the theology of equivalence advocates *theoretical* equality of men and women, it in fact also shares the postulate of the theology of subordination regarding the inferiority of women, although it is expressed through insinuations and not given the same extension. This contradiction probably translates difficulties in solving the conflict between the general Indian environment, including the negative ideas it conveys about womanhood, and the attempt to go beyond them through religion. Thus whatever the theology espoused, nuns have had a less important position than monks in the religious hierarchy and have been mostly denied leadership roles in spite of their large numbers.

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