



Sīmandhara Svāmī statue at the Mahāvideha Tīrthadhāma, Ahmedabad  
Photograph by P. Flügel.

# The Trimandiras of the Akrama Vijñāna Mārga

**Peter Flügel<sup>1</sup>**

The Akram Vijñān Mārg, or 'Stepless Path to Knowledge,' is a new religious movement that presently has approximately 300,000 followers amongst the Gujarātī-speaking diaspora in India, East Africa, Great Britain, Fiji, and the U.S.A. In recent years it also attracted adherents from a non-Indic background, particularly in Germany, Spain, Portugal, and South America.<sup>2</sup> The movement combines Hindu and Jaina elements in creative ways and describes itself as 'trans-sectarian.' It was started in Baroda in 1962 by the religious visionary Ambalāl Mūljībhāī Paṭel (7.11.1908–2.1.1988), a businessman with only basic formal education who belonged to a Vaiṣṇava Pāṭidār family from Tarasālī, a suburb of Baroda, modern Vaḍodarā. He spent most of his life as a married householder without children in Bombay. There he worked as a contractor for the company Paṭel & Co. which specialised in the construction and maintenance of the dry docks in the harbour. In 1958, while waiting for a train at the railway station of Surat, he had a 'forty-eight-minutes' long 'enlightenment' experience.<sup>3</sup> At the time, he said, that he was able to contact Sīmandhara Svāmī, one of the twenty Jaina tīrthaṃkaras, who are believed to live presently in the mythical continent Mahāvīdeha, and due to Sīmandhara's grace (*kṛpā*) was able to achieve the state of permanent 'self-realisation,' or 'self-awareness,' that is, experiential 'knowledge of the self' (*ātma-jñāna*).<sup>4</sup> Suddenly, he understood the solution to all spiritual conundrums: 'God is your real self,' 'Your real self is God';<sup>5</sup> 'All you need to know is to understand your real nature.'<sup>6</sup> He understood at once that through this insight he had gained *jīvanmukti*, or 'liberation while living,' since he was from now on able to discern and directly experience the difference between the inner 'real self' (*śuddhātma*), which he later called 'Dādā Bhagavān,' 'Grandfather Lord,' the 'reflective self' (*antarātma*) labeled 'Jñānī,' 'Knower,' or 'Jñānī Puruṣa,' 'Self-Realised Knower,' and the outer 'relative self' (*jīva*), that is, 'A.M. Paṭel,' whose actions now appeared to be nothing but *karman*, accumulated in previous lives, coming to fruition, *karma-phala*, without any involvement of the real self.<sup>7</sup>

From 1962 onwards, A. M. Paṭel, 'the *jñānī*,' or 'knower,'

taught his insights, first to family members and friends and later, on popular demand, in public meetings (*satsaṅga*) to anyone who was interested. Initially, his dialogical discourses were only orally transmitted. But from 1974 on Nīrubahen Amīn recorded them on tape.<sup>8</sup> He used the ontological categories of the Sāṃkhya tradition to describe the disjunction between pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) and the activities of the body-mind complex (*prakṛti*) which a self-realised being merely observes from the outside without identifying with them. However, most of the recognisable cosmological, soteriological, and ritual concepts of his idiosyncratic teachings stem from the Jaina tradition. Like Sāṃkhya ontology, Jaina ontology is dualistic. It distinguishes between soul (*jīva*), or pure consciousness, and non-soul (*ajīva*), a category comprising four non-sentient substances, including material objects (*pudgala*), but in contrast to Sāṃkhya characterises pure consciousness not as a passive but as an active substance. In addition to right knowledge classical Jainism stresses the soteriological importance of non-violent action because the bondage of the soul by *karman* is perceived to be real, not just an illusion based on ignorance.

The principal text of classical Jainism, Ācārya Umāsvāti/Umāsvāmī's 4th century *Tattvārtha-sūtra* 1.1 propagates a three-fold path to liberation: through right vision, right knowledge, and right conduct. According to this view, salvation can only be achieved by non-violent (non-) conduct, if it is informed by the knowledge of and the belief in the seven fundamental truths (*tattva*), describing both the mechanism of karmic bondage and the path of liberation through the stepwise purification of the soul through the renunciation of violence and austerities. The three aspects of the path of liberation are still regarded as the essential feature of what came to be known as *jaina dharma*, the doctrine of the Jinās, or victors, that is, the twenty-four ford-makers (*tīrthaṃkara*) who showed the way out of the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. However, in practice, many Jaina traditions have stressed one aspect more than others. Consequently,



contemporary Jainism presents at least three different Jaina paths to salvation often in combination:<sup>9</sup> asceticism (canonical and classical Jainism), self-knowledge (Digambara mysticism), and devotion (lay Jainism).<sup>10</sup>

It has been suggested<sup>11</sup> that the Akram Vijnān Mārg (AVM) is the only religious movement which developed the anti-ascetic implications of Kundakunda's Digambara mysticism, with its emphasis on self-realisation through knowledge, into a Mahāyāna-style alternative to the classical path of purification. The emphasis on knowledge combined with devotion and grace certainly proved to be of interest to many Gujarātī householders, because it offers the option of 'stepless' or 'instant enlightenment' (*akrama-vijñāna*) for everyone 'through the grace of Dādā Bhagavān,' that is, the self-realised soul of A. M. Paṭel. 'Instant enlightenment' is conveyed through a ritual for the evocation of the experience of *samyag-darśana* caused by the destruction of all the 'delusion producing' or *mohaniya karmas*. In classical Jaina *karman* theory this process is called *kṣāyaka samyaktva* and believed to be possible only in the presence of a Jina. It is 'through the grace of the Dādā,' that the spiritual energy required for the removal of delusion is channeled from Sīmandhara Svāmī, the *tīrthaṅkara* currently living in the mythical continent Mahāvīdeha, through the Dādā as a medium (*nimitta*) endowed with special powers via a ritual known as *jñāna vidhi*, or 'rite of knowledge,' which first publicly performed in Bombay in 1968.<sup>12</sup>

The ritual can only be conducted by a charismatically qualified or formally authorized person. It is believed to convey 'right perception' instantly in form of an experience of the difference of soul and body, designated as 'self-realisation.' This experience does not guarantee automatic instant salvation, but sets the seeker on the right path, which can only be completed, it is said, if the following five precepts (*ājñās*) are observed. The form of presentation of these precepts alludes to the Jaina lists of vows (*vrata*), but they are not treated as binding vows, but as soteriological knowledge. The precepts are taught immediately after the 48-minutes-long *jñāna vidhi*. Originally, they were considered esoteric knowledge and only orally transmitted to registered followers, called *mahātmās*, who had ritually experienced their self, but were subsequently published in the pamphlet literature of the AVM.

### Five Precepts<sup>13</sup>

- 1 From the 'relative' point of view 'I am Candulāl' (substitute 'Candulāl' with your own name).
- 2 From the 'real' point of view 'I am a pure soul'.
- 3 This world is ruled by scientific circumstantial evidence.
- 4 Clear your files with equanimity.
- 5 Enter credit into the account book of the pure soul.

The *ājñās* summarise in popular language mix of Gujarātī and English the teaching of A.M. Paṭel: that from the real point of view (*nīścaya-naya*) the pure self does not act, but only observes, and that from the conventional point of view disentanglement of the self from karman is possible through the cultivation of a state of continuous apperception of actions as effects only. Contrary to the common-sense perception that action is caused by agents, A.M. Paṭel holds that processes in the world are governed (*niyantrita*) by *vyavasthita śakti*, an expression that can be translated as 'the power of natural law' or, in the manner preferred by A. M. Paṭel, as that which appears to the observing pure soul as determined by the power of 'scientific circumstantial evidence.' It captures the idea that whatever actions are attributed to individual intentions,

thoughts, utterances, actions, are happening as the unintended consequence of inherited dispositions acquired in previous lives, and contextual factors. There is nothing that can be done about this, since human intentions, let alone habits, feelings, or the biological metabolism, are merely karmic effects: 'Everything that happens to you is destiny! [*prārabdha*].'<sup>14</sup> From the perspective of the pure soul, human actions, and life in general thus appear as a series of events or transformations which manifest through the unfolding of predetermined karmic dispositions, which can only be observed, but not be influenced or controlled by the pure self, because it is entirely distinct from the material and mental world, as *puruṣa* is from *prakṛti*, in Sāṃkhya philosophy. A.M. Paṭel does not conceive the soul as active, as in classical Jainism,<sup>15</sup> but as inactive, like Sāṃkhya philosophy. Therefore, the only choice that is left is to switch from the perspective of the 'relative self' to the perspective of the 'real self.' Once the embodied soul realises that it is not a doer and does not identify with the actions of the body and mind, then the 'charge' (Guj. *purāṇa*), or influx (*āsrava*) and bondage (*bandha*), of new karman is stopped (*saṃvara*), and an improved rebirth in the next life ensured, because the remaining karmas will automatically come to fruition without charging new karma if the real self has detached itself from the actions of the individual. At the surface the teaching does not differ much from the teachings of Kundakunda, Śrīmad Rājacandra and Kāñjī Svāmī. But there are subtle differences that need to be explored. Fact is that neither Rājacandra nor Kāñjī Svāmī used ritually induced spirit possession as a means of transmitting and freely disseminating soteriological energy and knowledge coming directly from the living *tīrthaṅkara* Sīmandhara Svāmī.

The movement, which crystallised around A. M. Paṭel from 1962 onwards, cannot be easily located within any pre-existing religious tradition, or academic classification, although it clearly draws upon ritual and doctrinal elements of Vaiṣṇavism and Jainism whose classical conception of *siddha-loka*, realm of the liberated souls, is regarded as the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey. It is argued in this essay that the process of formation of this new religious movement is typical for many similar movements, probably since time eternal, by not being a product of cultural diffusion through travel or conquest, but a creative synthesis of elements that are cumulatively selected from the universe of known ideas and practices under conditions of positive feedback. The resulting syncretism is difficult to classify because the Akram Vijnān movement explicitly rejects the conventional attributes 'religion,' 'sect,' 'cult,' 'movement,' 'scripture,' 'doctrine,' 'ritual,' 'guru' and 'disciple,' which it regards as worldly and particularistic. It favours a universal 'non-sectarian' path (*mārga*) to salvation through individual introspection and the transcendental experience of pure self-awareness (*śuddha-upayoga*) or self-knowledge (*svarūpa-jñāna*), which is beyond words and not accessible through the intellect. This direct personal experience of the transcendental truth – which provides a 'shortcut' to salvation<sup>17</sup> and marks the end of conventional institutionalized religion – is offered to the followers of all religions, including Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc., but particularly Hinduism. This essay investigates one of the methods which A.M. Paṭel devised for transmitting energy for 'instant salvation,' and cultivating the experience of the pure self at all times (*nirvikalpa-samādhi*), namely the construction of *tri-mandiras*, that is tri-partite temples, with separate shrines for the images of Sīmandhara Svāmī, and the Hindu gods Kṛṣṇa and Śiva for a new type of image-veneration (*pūjā*).

## Wordwide Mission

Although A. M. Paṭel rejected organised forms of religion, he invented ritual techniques for the 'transmission' of his *experience* of self-realisation to others. Many of those rituals were re-formatted and re-interpreted Jaina rites of purification, such as the Namaskāra Mantra, rites of meditation (*sāmāyika*), confession (*ālocanā*), and repentance (*pratikramaṇa*).<sup>18</sup> Later devotional forms of image worship, particularly *ārati*, the lamp waving ceremony, were introduced and in 1992 at Kāmareja (*Kāmrej*), near Surat, the first temple of the movement was consecrated by Kanubhāi Paṭal. Apparently, the site was selected by A.M. Paṭel himself. The *jñāna vidhi*, rite of knowledge, which functions as an initiation ritual, became the focus of a newly organised 'guru-cult' which spread quickly throughout the Gujarātī-speaking world, especially amongst urban working class and lower middle-class professionals with limited formal education from predominately Vaiṣṇava and Jaina families. In 1973, A. M. Paṭel gave his blessings to the creation of the first community organisation, the *Jay Sacchidānanda Saṅgha* in Mumbāi, which arranged financial and organisational support for his missionary tours in India and abroad and for publishing and construction projects. The instigator and first leader of this nation-wide organisation was the head of the *Dādā Bhagavān Vitarāga Trust* in Bombay, Khetsī Narsī Śāh, who after his death was succeeded by G. A. Śāh from Ahmedabad. In India, local *Sacchidānanda Saṅghas* now exist in many places. The most important ones are in Vaḍodarā, Surat, Amadāvād and Mumbāi. Amongst the Gujarātīs in East Africa, including several relatives of A. M. Paṭel, the community of Kampala (Uganda) has the greatest number of followers. In 1982, A. M. Paṭel was invited for the first time to the U.S.A. by the family of Vasant Paṭel in Oak Ridge Tennessee, the U.S. community leader, and returned to the U.S.A. every year until his death in Baroda on the 2.1.1988 (2044 pauṣa śuklā 14), which was mourned, amongst others, by more than 10,000 U.S. Gujarātīs. The number of devotees has continuously increased ever since.

## Routinisation of Charisma

In the last decade of his life A.M. Paṭel had become almost a full-time preacher, due to popular demand. Until 1978, when he had an accident which left him with a fractured leg, A. M. Paṭel and his wife lived together with the family of **Kanubhāi Paṭel** (1930–9.6.2020), known as 'Kanudādā,' a structural engineer who worked for his company and who became his most dedicated follower.<sup>19</sup> However, from 1978 onwards he severed his business connections with Kanubhāi and concentrated entirely on his religious work. He was accompanied on all his missionary tours by the late medical doctor **Nirubahen Amīn** (2.10.1944–19.3.2006) from Auraṅgābād, the widowed daughter of one of his earliest devotees, from the Pāṭidār Carotar Paṭel *jñātī* of the village Vāso in Gujarat,<sup>20</sup> and herself a devoted follower who committed herself entirely to his service (*sevā*).

After the death of A. M. Paṭel in 1988 a succession dispute flared up between Kanubhāi Paṭel and Nirubahen Amīn, which in 1993 – the year in which the first of three Trimandira shrines of the Akram Vijñān movement dedicated to Sīmandhara Svāmī, Kṛṣṇa and Śiva was completed in Surat under the auspices of Kanubhāi Paṭel – led to the split of the movement into two factions.

The dispute between the factions focused on the charismatic qualification of Nirubahen Amīn, the person which was closest to A. M. Paṭel during the last decade of his life, to act as a religious leader. Nirubahen Amīn claimed that, in 1987, A. M. Paṭel (who publicly did not determine any successor since he

rejected organised religion) had given her a secret *mantra* which allows her to temporarily invoke the spiritual power (*siddhi*) of the Dādā within herself and to act as a medium for the performance of the rite of knowledge, the principal focus of the Akram Vijñān movement, after his death. Kanubhāi Paṭel, on the other hand, points out that he was the person closest to A. M. Paṭel before 1978 and received from him the powers to perform the *jñāna vidhi* already in 1960. His followers preserve a clandestine tape recording of a private conversation between A. M. Paṭel and Nirubahen Amīn on the 19.9.1987 which seems to prove that he wanted Nirubahen to work together with Kanubhāi and to assist him in the performance of the *jñāna vidhi*. In contrast to Nirubahen Amīn who did not claim to be enlightened herself, insisting that she acted merely as a spirit medium (*nimitta*) of A. M. Paṭel, who in her view was the only *jñānī* of this age, Kanubhāi Paṭel asserts that he is a *jñānī* in his own right, and the only presently existing enlightened being (*pravartamāna pragaṭa jñānī puruṣa*). One of the main objections of the *Jaya Sacchidānanda Saṅgha* to Nirubahen's succession was apparently that she was a woman.<sup>21</sup>

At first, many local community organisations associated with the *Jaya Sacchidānanda Saṅgha* (JSS) supported Kanubhāi Paṭel. Later, after alleged financial mismanagement of K. Paṭel, most adepts shifted to Nirubahen Amīn, who became popular because she made her recordings freely available and published transcripts in different languages with the help of her future successor, Dīpakbhāi Desāi (born 9.5.1953). D. Desāi was a textile engineer from a Pāṭidār family of Vavāniyā, the hometown of Śrīmad Rājacandra. In 1971 he was attracted to A. M. Paṭel's teachings by Nirubahen, and 'given the *jñān*' by 'the Dādā' in 1977. Subsequently, Dīpakbhāi became initiated as the first so-called *āpta-putra*, or '(spiritual) son of the authoritative person', and in 2003 'through the Dādā's word' he was ordained by Nirubahen as her dedicated successor and authorized to perform the *jñāna vidhi*. After Nirubahen Amīn's death of cancer in 2006 he became the head of the Dada Bhagwan Foundation (DBF).

Because 'Pūjya' Dīpakbhāi Desāi does not claim to be a *jñānī*, like 'Kanudādā' Paṭel, nor the medium of a *jñānī*, like 'Nīru Mā' Amīn, his religious authority relies exclusively in his entitlement to conducting the ritual, which remains the sole conveyor of religious energy, and on the institutional charisma of his role as organisational head and teacher. Dīpakbhāi Desāi does not claim to be qualified as a medium. During a *satsaṅga* in North London in 2007, a few months after his succession, he shortened the *jñāna vidhi*, but otherwise conducted it in the same fashion as 'Nīru Mā,' 'Mother Nīru.' At the time, he did not suggest in his performance that he was acting as a spirit medium for the Dādā and was possessed by the attending gods during the rite, as Nirubahen did through ventriloquism. When he called upon the gods during the ritual, he did not invite them to enter his body, but instead made physical contact with a written text. Prior to this he had entered the room with a flower in his hand and bowed to the images of Sīmandhara Svāmī and A.M. Paṭel, but not to the image of Nirubahen Amīn. Nirubahen Amīn was not invoked in any form. All rituals focused on Sīmandhara Svāmī, the most well-known currently living Tīrthāṅkara, and his 'instrument' (*nimitta*) A.M. Paṭel, the Dādā Bhagavān. In contrast to Nirubahen, Dīpakbhāi did not sing during the *jñāna vidhi*. All music came from tapes. There was a studied lack of passion. The use of English was reduced to the bare minimum. He talked more in the direction of men than women. In contrast to Nirubahen, Dīpakbhāi himself was venerated with flowers and ritual food offerings which were returned by him as *prasāda* after taking a few bites.

The interaction between the godlike *jñānī* and his more mundane successors on the one hand and the *mahātmās* on the other is characterised by great intimacy – hugging, for instance, is quite common. The community feeling is couched in a discourse of love and transcendental unity, which is usually not found in Jainism, but more common in the Vaiṣṇava, especially Puṣṭimārgī, and the Śaiva Siddhānta traditions.<sup>22</sup> The closeness between religious leaders and their followers is one of the most attractive features of the Akram Vijiñān Mārg, which, like the Puṣṭimārgīs, makes no caste distinctions, and rejects Brāhmaṇical discourses of purity and pollution<sup>23</sup> in favour of a focus on the spiritual experience of the pure soul. Similarities are also manifest in the ritual practices.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in contrast to the Puṣṭimārgīs, the followers of the Akram Vijiñān Mārg do not perform elaborate material or *dravya pūjās* in their temples, only *āratī*, the ceremonial waving of lamps in front of the images of Śimandhara Svāmī, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, and to the photograph of Dādā Bhagavān. There is no concern about food transactions at all<sup>25</sup> – though *mahātmās* are habitually vegetarian – nor about charity<sup>26</sup> or asceticism, which are all perceived as preoccupations of ‘relative’ rather than ‘absolute religion.’

### Image Veneration

For a long time, the *jñāna vidhi* was the only ritual of this spiritual movement which focused entirely on transcendental self-realisation. Probably in view of his advancing age and the demands of his followers to perpetuate the movement after his death, at some stage A.M. Paṭel changed his mind on the role of external means of transmission of knowledge and increasingly promoted the veneration of images, especially those of the currently living *tīrthamkara* Śimandhara Svāmī, as a supplement or functional equivalent of the guru or line of gurus for the continuation of the movement. This can be read as his response to the classical ‘Weberian’ problem of the routinisation of charisma. In the literature published by the Akram Vijiñān Mārg a shift is notable in the representation of the views on temple worship and group organisation of A.M. Paṭel, who now offered a quasi-Platonic explanation why ‘for an awakened person’ not only the body of Śimandhara Svāmī appears to be alive, but also his image:

‘To the Gnani ... the idol is equally alive. This is because all that is visible and with form, whether it is in the idol or the physical body, all is form. There is nothing that is perceived through the five senses that is beyond form. There is therefore no external difference between the two. It is the senses that perceive this.’<sup>27</sup>

It is the stance of the observer that makes the difference. A.M. Paṭel was convinced that perspectives can be changed by a qualified and skilled person. In his view it is the power of the Jñānī who performs the consecration ceremony (*prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*), rather than the ritual itself, which renders the idols alive, not only in the view of those who are present, but also because he is able to activate his direct connection to the currently living omniscient *tīrthamkara* Śimandhara Svāmī: ‘The Gnani brings the idol to life. It all depends upon the strength of the installation of life force.’<sup>28</sup>

Why are temples and image veneration necessary if the real goal is the self-realisation of the soul? To this question, posed by a disciple, A.M. Paṭel replied that commemoration rites to images of those who have passed away should not be performed. Only a present Lord should be venerated:

‘The temples are very necessary. They should be built. But there is no point in building a temple of those who have departed. In the case of Simandhar Swami however, it is a different matter. He is present and people can benefit by worshipping the One who is present. He is the living Lord and salvation is achieved by doing his darshan. People can only be blessed if we build temples with his living idol. You need a medium to reach people, which is why this inner message received by me from Him is of critical importance. This will bring results. Even those who have not taken Gnan will benefit by doing darshan of Simandhar Swami. That is why we have to build all this; otherwise I would not get involved in it nor would I involve all of you.’<sup>28</sup>

Of course, salvation cannot be achieved unconditionally, simply by having the view (*darśana*) of an image. That would be too easy, even for the stepless path promising ‘instant *mokṣa*’, or as a Jaina critic said: ‘a pop-a-pill-moksha’ conjured up by ‘a Vaishnavite admixture of bhakti into conventional Jaina thinking’.<sup>30</sup>

‘Merely doing His darshan or seeing Him will not lead to liberation,’ A.M. Paṭel stated, ‘One has to receive His grace. One’s heart should become pure. As one’s heart becomes pure, His blessings are bestowed. People go to listen to Him and what they hear sounds wonderful to their ears but they do not make any progress. This is because they still have a desire to enjoy trivial worldly things.’<sup>31</sup>

Śimandhara Svāmī ‘does not have to “do” anything’ to bestow his grace, ‘the Dādā’ explains, as he is self-realised and omniscient, his self only observes, but does cause any physical act:

‘His actions are dependent on the unfolding of his karmas. His ego is completely gone and He remains in Gnan (absolute awareness) all day long, as did Lord Mahavir. He has a lot of followers and devotees around him.’<sup>32</sup>

### Trimandira Shrines

Apparently inspired by Śimandhara’s last communication to him, A.M. Paṭel decided in 1980 to inspire the construction of a tri-partite temple at Kāmrej near Surat, the place where he initially ‘received Śimandhara’s signal,’ to spread the message of universal religion and for the veneration of Śimandhara. After its completion in 1992 by the Jay Sacchidānanda Saṅgha (SCC), an organization supporting Kanubhāi Paṭel after A.M. Paṭel’s death, the competing Dādā Bhagavān Foundation (DBF),

founded by Nīrubahen Amīn in 1988 after A.M. Paṭel's demise, also began to construct *tri-mandiras*, most importantly its own Mahāvideha Tirthadhāma on the rooftop of its then administrative headquarters in Ahmedabad in 1999. With the loss of influence of Kanubhāi Paṭel, the building programme of the SCC came to a halt after the completion in 2001 of the *samādhi* for A.M. Paṭel, a funerary monument cum relic *stūpa*, with linked *tri-mandira*, the Kelanpurī Tirtha Kṣetra Dādā Bhagavān Samādhi Mandira: Sat-sthānaka & Trimandira. Thereafter, Nīrubahen Amīn and her successor Dīpakbhāi Desāi consecrated new tri-mandiras in Gujarat built under the auspices of the DBF and local organisations. Nīrubahen said<sup>33</sup> that she received inspiration for the new religious complex in Ahmedabad in 15 dreams about a Sīmandhara statue of 3000 feet height. Other than to the Dādā himself, who was in direct contact, Sīmandhara appeared only in dreams to her. The money for the increasingly ambitious building projects of the Akram Viññān Mārg is often given by publicly announcing: *dādā tana mana dhana ti sevā*, 'Dādā, I serve you with my body, mind, and money.' Surplus funds are also deposited with the Trust and may be removed again. The names of the donors are, however, not further publicized. Like 'the Dādā,' who was cremated in Kelanpurī near Baroda, Nīrubahen Amīn is now commemorated at her *samādhi* in Aḍālaj near Ahmedabad. The monument is located at the centre of Sīmandhara

City, a complex of retirement and holiday houses for *mumukṣus*, 'seekers of salvation,' or *mahātmās*, 'great souls,' that is, initiated followers of the Akram Viññān Mārg, which was built next a new Trimandira temple, which was inaugurated in 2002. Aḍālaj is a stronghold of the Pāṭidār caste, one of the main segments of the Gujarātī Paṭels,<sup>34</sup> and became the organisational centre of the DBF wing of the Dādā Bhagavān movement.

The temples are constructed in such a way as to set an example to demonstrate that god, that is, the pure soul, is the fundamental nature of every living being and should be at the centre of worship of all religions. A.M. Paṭel used to say: 'It is a sign of the welfare of India and the whole world that such temples which free people from all differences and disputes have come into existence.'<sup>35</sup> Anybody is invited to visit these temples and halls which, like the temporary shrines constructed for communal worship, house a Sīmandhara image at the central shrine, flanked by a Kṛṣṇa shrine, to the left from the point of view of the devotee, and a shrine for a Śiva Yoni to the right, each surrounded by guardian deities, such as in the case of Sīmandhara the Jaina goddesses Padmāvatī, Cakreśvarī, and Pāñcāgulī, and the god Cāndrāyaṇa. These so-called demi-gods are 'doers' and can be venerated for worldly boons, the most important of which is the ability to establish contact with Sīmandhara at the time of their veneration (*vandanā*) by their devotees.<sup>36</sup>

TriMandiras of the Akrama Viññāna Mārga		
Consecrated by Kanubhāi Paṭel (JSS)		
Mahāvideha Tirthadhāma	Kāmarej, Surat 1992	21.263809, 72.961045
Samyamadhāma	Sīngoḍa 30.4.1993	21.194610, 73.219564
Kelanpurī Tirtha Kṣetra	Kelanpurī 2001	22.251383, 73.261465
Consecrated by Nīrubahen Amīn & Dīpakbhāi Desāi (DBF)		
Trimandira	Boḍelī 2.1.1998	22.273235, 73.714943
Mahāvideha Tirthadhāma	Amadāvād 31.12.1999	23.043659, 72.571909
Trimandira	Bhādaraj 30.12.2001	22.359069, 72.894683
Trimandira	Aḍālaj 25.12.2002	23.178410, 72.571998
Trimandira	Vāsaṇā 8.2.2004	22.121280, 73.747737
Consecrated by Dīpakbhāi Desāi (DBF)		
Trimandira	Kuvāḍavā, Rājakoṭ 4.1.2006	22.342915, 70.905127
Trimandira	Bhūj 5.12.2009	23.245291, 69.640419
Trimandira	Godharā 2012	22.782981, 73.583363
Trimandira	Jepur, Morabī 2013	22.859115, 70.774160
Trimandira	Surendranagar 2014	22.711796, 71.594812
Trimandira	Amarelī 2015	21.592416, 71.231986
Trimandira	Sinugarā, Añjār 2016	23.093941, 69.977669
Trimandira	Vaḍodarā 2017	22.190331, 73.189568
Trimandira	Jāmanagar 2019	22.472364, 70.092926
Trimandira	Borivalī, Mumbāi 2019	19.237098, 72.872983
Trimandira	Junāgaḍh 2022	21.555492, 70.447605
Trimandira	Dhrāṅgadhrā 26.2.2023	22.996156, 71.435184



## The Mahāvideha Tīrthadhām in Surat

The first temple outside Surat served as a paradigm for all *tri-mandiras* of the AVM. This temple complex is called Trimandira because it comprises of three independent temples built next to each other on the same site: a Sīmandhara Svāmī temple at the center, a Kṛṣṇa temple on the right (from the point of view of the onlooker), and a Śiva temple on the left. All *tri-mandira* sites are constructed in this way. The extraordinary juxtaposition (*saṃkula*) of images of the principal venerable beings of three distinct Indic religious traditions underlines the ‘trans-sectarian’ character of the Akram Vijiñān Mārg. It also serves to attract members of Paṭels families of other groups who traditionally follow Hinduism. The unique opportunity offered to individuals who wish to transcend the institutional boundaries of existing religious traditions is advertised by adding the words *niṣpakṣapātī darśana*, ‘unbiased viewing,’ and *saṃkula*, ‘congregation,’ to the label *tri-mandira*, indicating that the assembly of three temples is intended for unbiased viewers who venerate the eternal qualities of the pure soul in every living being, disregarding institutionalised religious or social boundaries.

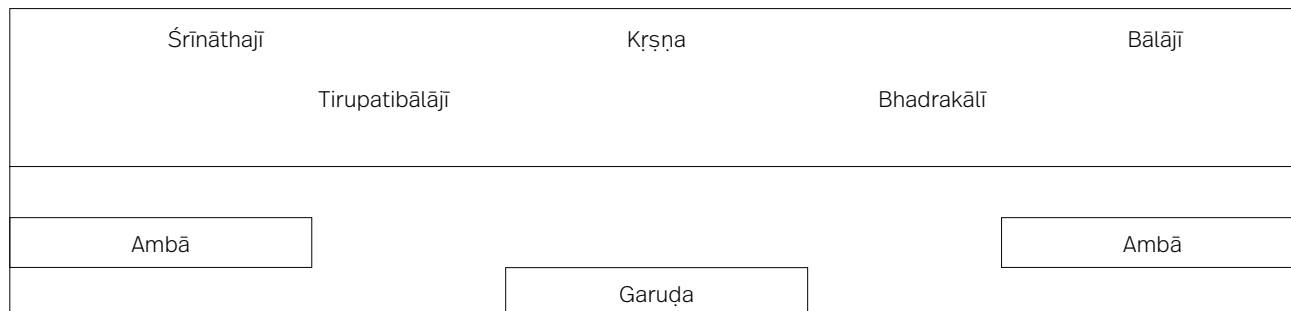
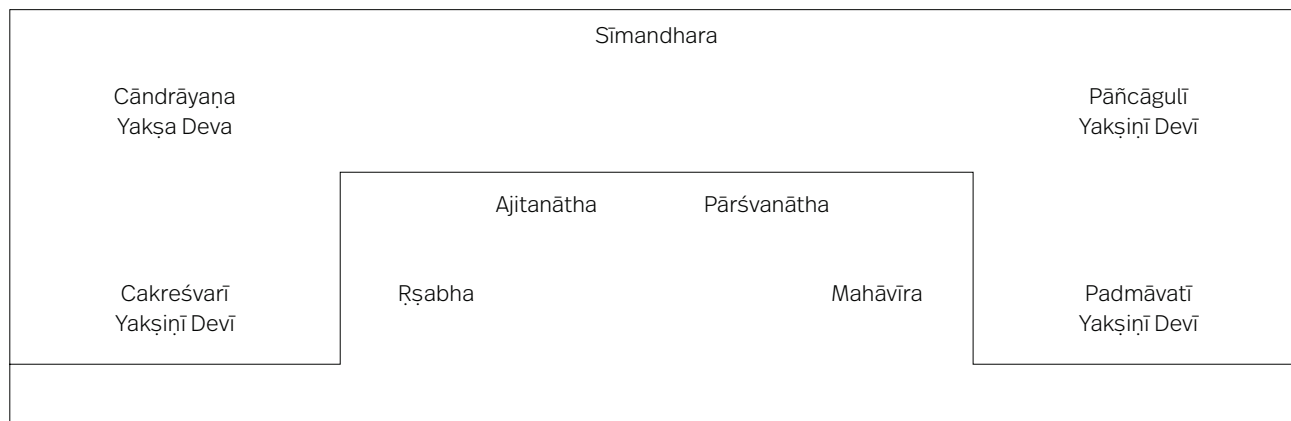
Each of the tree temples has two floors with the main images installed on the top floor and spaces for different types of use below. Large stairs in front of each temple and connecting bridges between the temples allow worshippers to step up to the main images and to walk from one shrine to the next, in any sequence they like. There are no inside stairways down to the rooms on the ground floor though, which can only be reached by going back down via the external flight of stairs. The ground floor rooms are also separate, but laterally connected in the same way as the chambers on the first floor with the room underneath the central temple being reserved for the veneration of Dādā Bhagavān.

A. The Sīmandhara Svāmī Mandira at the center is the biggest of the three temples. The main image of Sīmandhara in the centre is placed on a platform which is cordoned off by a small railing. It is flanked by two protector deities (*śāsana deva/devī*): on the left by Cāndrāyaṇa Yakṣa Deva and on the right by Pāñcāgulī Yakṣiṇī Devī. Placed in front of the railing are Ajitanātha on the left, and Pārśvanātha on the right. On the left side of the anteroom, where worshipers are standing, is a statue of Ādinātha (Rṣabha), behind the goddess Cakreśvarī, who protects the left side of the entrance. On the right side of the antechamber is a statue of Mahāvīra protected by the *śāsana devī* Padmāvatī (which usually is associated with Pārśva). The layout of the inner sanctum guides the worshiper away from past *tīrthaṃkaras* towards the present *tīrthaṃkara* Sīmandhara.

Underneath the Sīmandhara temple, on the ground floor, is a chamber with a large photograph of A.M. Paṭel, the Dādā Bhagavān, placed in the centre, right underneath the Sīmandhara statue on the first floor. To its right is a photograph of his successor Kanubhāi Paṭel, arranged under a photo of A.M. Paṭel’s feet (the hierarchy could not be expressed much clearer). There is no picture of Nīrubahen Amīn.

B. The four manifestations of Kṛṣṇa represented in the temple to the right of the Sīmandhara temple are Kṛṣṇa, flanked by Śrīnāthajī on the left and Bālājī on the right, and Tīrpatibālājī in front, juxtaposed to Bhadrakālī. On the left-hand side is a representation of Ambā and on the right-hand side one of Bhadrakālī again. Placed in front of the entrance is a statue of Garuḍa.

All *tri-mandiras* feature the same images of Kṛṣṇa’s incarnations with minor variations in their positioning. In the Adalāj Trimandira, Yogeśvakṛṣṇa, who is worshipped ‘all over the



world’ as the giver of the Gīta, is located at the centre, with Śrīnāthaji Bālakṛṣṇa, that is, Kṛṣṇa as an 11-year-old, who is widely worshipped in Gujarat by the followers of Vallabhācārya’s Puṣṭimārga, to the left (from the worshipper’s perspective), and Tīrupati Bālājī, who is predominantly worshipped in southern India, to his right. Different traditions of Kṛṣṇa worship, popular amongst the followers of the Dādā are joined together in this way, to facilitate religious and social integration.

Kṛṣṇa is worshipped under name of Vāsudeva or Nārāyaṇa,<sup>37</sup> that is, a category of humans who became gods. According to Śvetāmbara Jaina scriptures,<sup>38</sup> Kṛṣṇa himself was one of the sixty-three great men (*śalākā-puruṣa*) of Jaina universal history and a self-realised soul and will be a future *tīrthaṃkara* in the next cosmic cycle, and therefore also symbolises the human desire to transcend given conditions. A.M. Paṭel explains that it is important to worship all three categories of *tīrthaṃkaras*:

‘The Tirthankaras of the past – those who belong to the last cycle of “score-and-four.” We should worship them. For, their reigning gods and goddesses are still helpful and helping. And this, “Akram Marg” is just an evidence, an instrument. here, too, the reigning gods and goddesses are assisting us. I am just an evidence. There has to be some bride-groom, some leader, right? Shree Simandhar Swami is the present Tirthankar. No soul in India feels any repulsion for him. And that third category includes the Tirthankars who will be there in the next cycle of “score-and four.”’<sup>39</sup> (p. 36).

C. The Śiva Liṅga in the center of the Śiva temple to the left of the Sīmandhara temple is protected by Hanumān on the left and Gaṇapati (Ganeśa) on the right, placed in front of an image of Śiva’s wife Pārvatī. In addition, the bull Nāndī and the male tortoise (*kācabo*) are placed in front of the entrance.

A distinct characteristic of this threefold temple is that there is no rivalry between the gods and their worshipers. No name plaques (*taktī*) remembering donors are allowed, because of the dictum ‘I am not mine.’ Accordingly, worship itself is not directed towards the images but to the inner self.<sup>40</sup>

During my visit in 1999, the president of the *tīrtha* trust did not want to know Kanubhāi Paṭel. At the time, a Sāi Bābā temple was under construction, and a temple for the next *tīrthaṃkara* of our Bhārata Kṣetra, Śreṇikā, who is expected to be born at Kāmrej, was planned. The temple complex evidently attempts to embrace all Indian religions and successful guru cults in the past, present, and future.

The tri-partite temple, not tri-partite image, or *trimūrti*,<sup>41</sup> of Śiva-Sīmandhara-Kṛṣṇa symbolises for the adepts of the Akram Vijñān Mārg that potentially all religions could unite around the concept and experience of the pure soul. However, in contrast for instance to the classical *trikūta* temples, where three shrines

are arranged around a central hall, the images housed in different shrines of the *tri-mandiras* – sometimes connected with bridges or pathways – are worshipped separately, and not as aspects of one complex syncretic deity.<sup>42</sup> What holds the different aspects together is the shared focus on the abstract concept of the pure soul of the living god. In the words of A.M. Paṭel:

‘People may have separate temples, according to their faith and viewpoint but all the mantras must be recited, without leaving out any. There should be no hostility and animosity. If all the mantras are recited together, they yield the fruit. If we don’t nurse a feeling of ‘separateness’ in our mind, we won’t find anything separate. Difference in mind results in clashes and conflicts. That is why the construction of these temples will eradicate the viewpoints and peace shall reign!’<sup>43</sup>

The reason for building *tri-mandira* temples is ultimately social, to contribute to communal harmony through the spread of spirituality:

‘I want to reduce the level of conflicts due to differences of opinion in this word. Especially in religious matters. A person can only understand what I say when his prejudiced opinions leave. There is so much prejudice today that people have segregated their temples according to their religion and also have divided the mantras. They may keep the temples because of their beliefs. The mind, however, will have to be at peace, which is why I have combined the mantras and put them together. I will perform such a powerful pratishtha that these differences will slowly be forgotten. This is my wish; I do not have any other wish!

Hindus should not remain in this condition. The Jains should not continue to have this state of mind of separation. The temple of Simandhar Swami is not simply a temple of an idol; it is a temple of the formless One as well.’<sup>44</sup>

Effectively the imagery of these temples only combines elements of Jainism and Vaiṣṇavism, since Śiva is not worshipped as the creator god, like in Varanasi, but yet another example of a liberated soul. The about 200.000 followers (*mahātmā*) who have gained the knowledge that Me and the real I are different entities,<sup>45</sup> see themselves as open-minded users of a spiritual science. Because they try to see the pure soul in everyone, they can even worship in a mosque. But they do not incorporate Muslim or Christian symbols in their own temples, because, I was told, ‘someone from that background has to do this, otherwise no one will believe the new religion in these communities.’ Ultimately, the ritual of worship is regarded as secondary to a purely spiritual way of life.

	Śiva Liṅga	Pārvatī Devī
Hanumāna	Nāndī Kācabo	Gaṇapati



## Trimandira and Trimantra

The *Trimandiras* of the AKV are material expressions of the value-ideas articulated in the *Trimantra*, or Tripartite Mantra. It is the only religious text A.M. Paṭel ever composed in writing. He merely added a few lines regarding Kṛṣṇa and Śīva to the core text of the Jaina *Namaskāra Mantra* which is nowadays respected by all Jaina traditions and recited to praise the values represented by the hierarchy of living Jaina saints, past, present, and future. By adding Kṛṣṇa and Śīva to the list A.M. Paṭel wanted to emphasise that 'God is impartial,' and that his Trimantra is neither Vaiṣṇava, Śivaite or Jaina, but oriented toward the self-realised pure soul and hence universal. He was not interested in sectarianism, and divisions between 'yours' and 'mine,' only in the 'path of non-attachment' (*vītarāga mārga*), described as combining 'dualism and non-dualism' (*bhedābheda*), without taking recourse to the philosophy of Bhedābhedavedānta.<sup>46</sup> The syncretic formula of the *Trimantra* was intended to assure the avoidance of 'disputes and differences,' and to symbolise the trans-religious, non-sectarian approach of the Akram Vijñān movement: 'It is beyond all sects and unanimously beneficial to one and all (It is neither a Jain Mantra nor a Vaishnav Mantra). ... by reciting all these together it [the NM] becomes impartial and pleases Gods and Goddesses of all religions. So one can get help from all of them.'<sup>47</sup>

The text is tri-partite in form and content. It is made of three numbered sections, one Jaina (which can be subdivided into two textual layers), one Vaiṣṇava, one Śaivite, and the main objects of veneration are also three, the living Jina, Kṛṣṇa and Śīva, or rather their qualitatively identical pure souls.

## Saṃsāre Vidhana Nivāraka Trimantra

namo vītarāgāya

(1)

(a)

namo arihantāṇaṃ

namo siddhāṇaṃ

namo āyariyāṇaṃ

namo uvajjhāyāṇaṃ

namo loe savva-sāhūṇaṃ

(b)

eso paṃca ṇamokkāro savva-pāva-ppaṇāsano

maṃgalāṇaṃ ca savvesiṃ paḍhamāṇaṃ havai maṃgalaṃ

(2)

oṃ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya

(3)

oṃ namo śivāya

jaya saccidānanda

## Threefold Mantra that Removes all Obstacles in Mundane Existence

Homage to the unattached one

(1)

(a)

Homage to the worthy ones

Homage to the perfected ones

Homage to the teachers

Homage to the preceptors

Homage to all mendicants in the world

(b)

This five-fold homage, which destroys all evil, is preeminent as the most auspicious of all auspicious things.<sup>48</sup>

(2)

Oṃ Homage to Vāsudeva<sup>49</sup>

(3)

Oṃ Homage to Śīva

Victory to Being, Awareness and Bliss

[of the pure soul]

The preamble, *namo vītarāgāya*, 'homage to the unattached one,' which was added in the latest version of the Trimantra, could be regarded as redundant, because non-attachment is already implied in the first line of the Jaina *Pañca Namaskāra Mantra*. It was obviously added to create an audible difference to the standard Jaina version right at the beginning, focusing on the individual in the singular, not to members of different categories of mendicants in the plural. The use of this preamble is attested in the opening lines of many Jaina manuscripts.<sup>50</sup> It is, however, unusual as part of the mantra as a ritual formula, and not always included in the printed forms of the *Trimantra*.

(1) Part one of the core tri-partite text is identical with the Mūrtipūjaka Jaina version which, in contrast to the versions of the Amūrtipūjaka Jaina traditions and of Kāñjī Svāmī for instance,<sup>51</sup> adds a clause 'b' that underlines the auspicious effect of the recitation of this mantra. The unspoken provision of the *mumukṣus* is that actual representatives of the three contemporary Jaina monastic categories, the *ācāryas*, *upādhyāyas*, and *sādhus* are only venerated under the (unlikely) condition that they are living self-realised beings. This clause disqualifies the



Trimandira under construction, Kelanpurī 2000.  
Photograph by P. Flügel.

contemporary Jaina religious hierarchy, as emphasised in the commentary: 'In absence of self-realisation or right belief, one is not a real Acharya.'<sup>52</sup> Because the same conditionality applies to the *arhats*, the only venerable being that remains worthy of worship according to the *Trimantra* is Sīmandhara Svāmī:

'One has also to know who is Arihant at the moment. At present, in this sphere of ours (Bharat kshetra) there has been no Arihant since Mahavir Swami attained liberation. In Mahavideh kshetra (sphere) there are twenty Arihants out of which we can approach Shri Simandhar Swami. So while saying Namō Arihantanam, Shri Simandhar Swami should be kept in mind. – Again Arihants are physically existing in the universe, so one can see them. And only after seeing them one can attain the final stage of liberation.'<sup>53</sup>

The key for the 'stepless' approach is to be close to a *tīrthaṃkara*, because the Jaina scriptures promise that omniscience and therefore certain liberation can be gained by the mere sight of a *tīrthaṃkara*:

'To whom should one bow one's head in the first place? It is Tirthankar Bhagawan Shri Simandhar Swami. Tirthankar means one on whose account "Tirths" are created. ... they are so pious that wherever they move, later on places of pilgrimage come into existence at the site of their footsteps. Lacs and lacs of people (souls) attain liberation by the "darshan".'<sup>54</sup>

Because there is, at present, no *tīrthaṃkara* in our part of the world, one must worship the nearest *tīrthaṃkara* in Mahāvideha Kṣetra, the mythical pure land said to be located at a distance of 193.95 million kilometers north of our Bhārata Kṣetra, where at any time 20 *tīrthaṃkaras* live for 300.000 years each.

(2–3) The three lines at the end, the veneration of Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, plus the praise of Saccidānanda, that is, the pure soul, are a unique variant of the Namaskāra Mantra which convey a specific, dare one say: sectarian, ritual identity to the Akram Vijiñān Mārg, although their express purpose is to transcend sectarian divisions between Jaina, Vaiṣṇava and Śivaite traditions. A.M. Paṭel said:

'The egoistic principle built new cult-folds and divided even these "Mantras" among them. God said, "You may divide the temples for your convenience, but keep these 'mantras' together." But these people divided the "Mantras." They did not stop at that but when to the length of separating "Agiyarash" [sic] as "Shaivaite" and "Vaishnavas." Now look, how could God be pleased? Where quarrels and differences of opinions are, there God is not. The "Trimantra" given by us possesses great power. It is like the horn of plenty to shower rains of bliss on you. All the gods are pleased and you have no troubles in life.'<sup>55</sup>

Variations in Jaina versions of the Namaskāra Mantra are well-attested and demonstrate the pluralistic nature of the Jaina tradition. Variants were and still are deliberately introduced to emphasise sectarian differences. Even of the 'five-fold' core variant (1a), which is shared by most Digambara and Śvetāmbara



Prāṇa pratiṣṭhā of Śivaliṅga by Dīpakbhāi Desāi, Trimandira, Bhuja.

traditions, two different versions are attested.<sup>56</sup> Self-declared 'orthodox' Jains object to the inclusion of references to Hindu gods in the spiritualist 'trans-sectarian' variant introduced by A.M. Paṭel, who like most of his followers came from a Vaiṣṇava cultural background, and did not belong to a caste whose members are predominately Jain, like the Osavāla or the Śrīmālī castes to whom Kāñjī Svāmī and Rājacandra belonged. A.M. Paṭel's interpretation of 'god' as *śuddhātman* is however unambiguously Jain. He is never referring to a Vedāntic one god. The Hindu triad of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, is rejected, mainly with the argument, that Brahmā 'mixes one soul and many souls, and therefore cannot easily be used as a [unambiguous] symbol.' The main reason is of course, that Sīmādhara, the living god, and central focus of worship, is a Jain *tīrthaṃkara*. For 'the Dādā,' terminology was not important, only concepts. He explained to Chandulāl his understanding of 'Brahmā' as 'pure soul', but not as 'the one pure soul':

Dadashri: Is the word a reality or an illusion?

Chandulal: Illusion.

Dadashri: It is not like that. ... How can we say that it is illusion? We declare that both the world and Brahma are real. But the world is a relative 'Real' and Brahma is real 'Real.' This our speech is eternal Truth. This relative 'real' of the world when will it prove illusory nobody knows. All these are temporary adjustments and Brahma Pure Self is the only Reality, permanent and eternal.<sup>57</sup>

## Bhakti

The Akram Vijñān movement presents itself as a 'path of knowledge,' but effectively combines *jñāna-mārga* and the *bhakti-mārga*, by conveying the knowledge of salvation with the devotion to the liberated souls, as living examples of omniscient beings, who – in contrast to the liberated *siddhas* and *tīrthaṃkaras* of previous ages – can be approached to grant their help and spiritual energy to the dedicated believer. The emphasis on the veneration of embodied living beings, who can help, rather than deceased beings or liberated souls who cannot be reached anymore, is also reflected on the focus on birth rather than death days in the annual religious calendar. Dādā's birthday is celebrated at his Janma Jayantī Mahotsava with *darśana* and *āśīrvāda*. The festivities I witnessed were remarkable, because the birthday cake for the Dādā was decorated with the words 'Happy Birthday Dear Nīrubahen,' obviously in recognition of her spiritual closeness with the Dādā who's medium she was. After handing the cake over to Nīrubahen she blessed it and distributed portions as *prasāda*. All *āpta*putras and *āpta*putrīs that were present, including Nīrubahen, mutually worshipped their feet, and hugged each other with tears in their eyes. Truly, a scene of communal emotiveness that cannot be found amongst Jains, except maybe on the day of mutual forgiveness after *saṃvatsarī*. A similar emphasis on birth-days rather than death-days can be found among the Vaiṣṇavas, who celebrate the birthdays of Kṛṣṇa and Rāmā, and amongst the followers of Kāñjī Svāmī, which all seem to be intent on highlighting that the venerated being is still present in one form or another.

Besides the recitation of the *Trimantra*, *mahātmās* perform daily religious practices (*nitya-karma*) according to personal preference with the help of the ritual manuals of the AVM. Recommended are the daily meditation on the soul (*ātma-dhyāna*), the recitation of the *Niścaya Vyavahāra*, which is a slightly shortened and standardised version of the *Jñāna Vidhi* text, asking for the strength to maintain the awareness of the soul though the whole day, and the *Śuddhātma Pratye Prārthanā*, the 'Prayer to the Pure Self,' which involves a confession of all sins committed. During the early morning rites, between 4 and 6, visualisation of the Dādā is performed, sometimes in combination with a *caraṇa vidhi*, that is *pūjā* to a photograph of the Dādā or of his feet. As in individual daily worship, the images, or photos of the main deities of the Trimandira are worshipped at *tri-mandiras* by simple *pūjā* rites, mainly *ārati* combined with recitation of different standardized texts.

The main texts that are recited are presented in translation to show how the contents of the *Trimantra* are linked with the principal *Āratī* texts recited at Trimandiras, addressed to Sīmādhara, Kṛṣṇa, and Śiva, and how the relationship between them is conceived.



## Early Morning Ceremony

After the five-fold recitation of the *Namaskāra Mantra*, the first rite is the fivefold performance of the *Prātaḥ Vidhi*, or Early Morning Ceremony, which was composed by Nīrubahen in 1980.<sup>58</sup> All the verses are to be recited from the relative point of view, that is, through the body, according to A.M. Paṭel, except for the veneration of Dādā Bhagavān right at the end: 'Here is where you must do your obeisance with the real viewpoint.'<sup>59</sup>

### Prātaḥ Vidhi

[śuddhātmā lakṣa sahita bolavum]

śrī sīmandhara svāmī ne namaskāra karūṃ chuṃ. (5x)  
vātsalyamūrti 'dādā bhagavāna' ne namaskāra  
karūṃ chuṃ. (5x)  
prāpta mana-vacana-kāyāthi ā jagata nā koī paṇa jīva ne  
kiṃcita mātra paṇa duḥkha na ho, na ho, na ho. (5x)  
kevala śuddhātmānubhāva sivāya ā jagata nī koī paṇa vināśī  
cīja mane khapatī nathī. (5x)  
pragaṭa jñānī puruṣa 'dādā bhagavāna' nī ājñā māṃ ja nirantera  
rahevānī parama śakti prāpta ho, prāpta ho, prāpta ho. (5x)  
jñānī puruṣa 'dādā bhagavāna' nā vītarāga vijñāna nuṃ,  
yathārthatāe karī ne saṃpūrṇa,  
sarvāṅgapaṇe kevala jñāna, kevala darśana ne kevala cāritra  
māṃ, pariṇamana ho, pariṇamana ho, pariṇamana ho. (5x).

### Early Morning Ceremony

[speak with the mark of the pure soul]

Homage to Sīmandhara Svāmī. (5x)  
Homage to Dādā Bhagavān, incarnation of pure love. (5x)  
Let no living being in the world be hurt, even to the slightest  
extent, by this mind, speech, and body. (5x)  
Except for the experience of the pure self, I do not desire any  
temporary things in this world. (5x)  
May I acquire the extreme strength to live in accordance with  
the five principles of the manifest enlightened supreme being  
'Dādā Bhagavāna.' (5x)  
May the knowledge of the unattached enlightened supreme  
being 'Dādā Bhagavāna,' firmly manifest within me and express  
itself fully to the highest level of enlightened knowledge,  
enlightened vision, and enlightened conduct. (5x)

As a genre, this 'morning prayer'<sup>60</sup> represents a blend between a devotional hymn and a set of practical resolutions. It reminds the reciter of A.M. Paṭel's interpretation of the 'essence of religion,'<sup>61</sup> by expressing devotion to Sīmandhara and Dādā Bhagavān, dedication to the Jaina principle of ahiṃsā and the threefold

means of salvation (*tri-yoga sādhanā*), desire for experiencing the pure self (*śuddhātmānubhāva*), and mustering energy (*śakti*) for implementing A.M. Paṭel's five precepts (*ājñā*) for the accomplishment of enlightenment:

### Sīmandhara Svāmī Āratī

Nīrubahen has composed herself the *Śrī Sīmandhara Svāmī Nī Āratī (Nāmo Vitarāgāya)* in 1976 after her first emotional contact with him.<sup>62</sup>

### Sīmandhara Svāmī Āratī<sup>63</sup>

jaya 'sīmandhara svāmī,' prabhu tīrthaṃkara vartamāna,  
mahāvideha kṣetra vicaratā (2x), bharata ṛṇānubandha;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

'dādā bhagavāna' sāksṣī, pahocāṭuṃ namaskāra,  
svāmī pahocāṭuṃ namaskāra,  
pratyakṣa phaḷa pāmuṃ (2x), mādhyama jñāna avatāra;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

(1)  
pahelī āratī svāmī nī, oṃ parameṣṭi pāme,  
svāmī oṃ parameṣṭi pāme,  
udāsīna vṛtti vahe, (2x) kāraṇa mokṣa seve;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

(2)  
bjī āratī svāmī nī, pañca paramesti pāme,  
svāmī pañca paramesti pāme,  
paramahansa pada pāmī, (2x) jñāna ajñāna laṇe;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

(3)  
trījī āratī svāmī nī, gaṇadhara pada pāme, svāmī gaṇadhara  
pada pāme,  
nirāśrita bandhana chūṭe, (2x) āśrita jñānī thaye;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

(4)  
chothī āratī svāmī nī, tīrthaṃkara bhāvi,  
svāmī tīrthaṃkara bhāvi,  
svāmī sattā dādā kane, (2x) bharata kalyāṇa kare;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

(5)  
pañcamī āratī svāmī nī, kevala mokṣa lahe, svāmī kevala  
mokṣa lahe,  
parama jyoti bhagavanta 'huṃ', (2x) ayogī siddha pade;  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī.

eka samaya svāmī khoḷe je, māthuṃ dhālī namaśe, svāmī  
māthuṃ dhālī namaśe;  
ananya śaraṇuṃ svīkāri, (2x) mukti pada ne vare[śe];  
jaya sīmandhara svāmī. (3x)<sup>64</sup>

### Sīmandhara Svāmī Āratī

Hail to Sīmandhara Svāmī, the currently living Tīrthaṃkara Lord  
wandering in the Mahāvīdeha region (2x),  
with karmic connections to Bharata.<sup>65</sup>  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

With Dādā Bhagavān as my witness, I am sending my homage,  
Svāmī, I am sending my homage;  
I receive direct benefit (2x),  
through the medium of (Dādāśrī) the embodiment<sup>66</sup>  
of knowledge,  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

(1)

The first āratī of the Svāmī, reaches<sup>67</sup> the Oṃ Parameṣṭhins  
(the ones who have gained entry on the path of liberation),  
Svāmī, reaches the Oṃ Parameṣṭhins;  
who have no worldly interest (2x),  
and are intent on liberation,  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

(2)

The second āratī of the Svāmī, reaches the Pañca  
Parameṣṭhins  
(the sādhus, upādhyāyas, ācāryas, arihantas and siddhas),  
Svāmī, reaches the Pañca Parameṣṭhins;  
who attained the enlightened state<sup>68</sup> (2x),  
which separates knowledge and ignorance,  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

(3)

The third āratī of the Svāmī, reaches the Gaṇadharas  
(group leaders of the living Tīrthaṃkara);  
the bondage of having no one to take care of me is broken (2x),  
now the Jñānī has become my refuge,  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

(4)

The fourth āratī of the Svāmī, the future Tīrthaṃkara,  
Svāmī the future Tīrthaṃkara;  
Dādā holds the power of the Svāmī (2x),  
and produces well-being for Bharata,<sup>69</sup>  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

(5)

The fifth āratī of the Svāmī, seeks only the final liberation,  
Svāmī seeks only the final liberation;  
'I' am the absolute divine light (2x),  
on the path to the bodyless siddha state,<sup>70</sup>  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

Whoever unlocks the Svāmī, even for a fraction of a second,  
and bows his head down,  
(to this one) the Svāmī bows his head down;  
accepting exclusive protection (2x),  
he attains final liberation,  
Jaya Sīmandhara Svāmī.

To this āratī cum pūjā, devotees can variously add the *Vartamāna Tīrthaṃkara Śrī Sīmandhara Svāmī ne Prārthanā*, the 'Prayer to the Current Tīrthaṃkara Śrī Sīmandhara Svāmī,' The key line of this ritual text is the following:

'O universally revered fully enlightened Lord! Your real Self is my real Self. But because of ignorance I do not understand this full Self that I am. So let me see this real Self of mine continuously, as I behold you. Grant me this energy, grant me this energy, grant me this energy!'<sup>71</sup>

It is important to focus on Sīmandhara Svāmī, rather than on Mahāvīra, Śiva or Viṣṇu, because he (and by implication the other currently living Jinas) is the currently living Jina who can help anyone anywhere in this world. The obeisance 'Namo Arihan-tānaṃ' is therefore exclusively directed to Sīmandhara: 'Lord Mahāvīra would not listen to your prayers. ... He has nothing to do with us anymore. He is now a siddha, totally liberated and without a body.'<sup>72</sup> Although it seems intellectually incomprehensible, '[t]his fact is exact and clear in my Gnan, my absolute vision and knowledge. Mere darshan of the Lord will bring forth salvation for the people of this world.'<sup>73</sup> However:

'You need a medium through which you can make a connection with Sīmandhar Swami. The medium is 'Dada Bhagwan.' ... I have a connection with him and the whole world should benefit from this. I am just a mere go-between (nimitt-instrument). I make you do His darshan through 'Dada Bhagwan,' and it reaches Him.'<sup>74</sup>

Yet, a direct individual link is not possible: 'He sees in a general and total perspective, not specifically. These tirthankaras do not see specifics. It reaches him because it is said through the medium of 'Dada Bhagwan.' It is not possible without a medium'<sup>75</sup> (which excludes the possibility of establishing an *iṣṭā-devatā* relation).

### Śrī Kṛṣṇa Bhagavāna nī Āratī

je śrī Kṛṣṇa bhagavāna, jaya śrī Nāthajī;  
vijaya śrī Bālājī, ratnatraya āratī.

duniyā māṃ gavāyā, āpanā avatāra;  
hajī suṇo paḍadhāya, ghaṇṭārava ne raṇakāra.  
Balarāma bandhu, Lakṣamana jatijī;  
hare Rāmā, hare Kṛṣṇā, caturvidha āratī  
... je śrī Kṛṣṇa ....

āpanā je mūḷa rūpa, te ja māruṃ svarūpa;  
darśana thī oḷakhāvo, śuddha citta siddharūpa.  
sūrya-candra-tārā'dine, gamī gyā cho āja dī;  
sarvane uddhāre jo, nija ātma-bhagati.  
... je śrī Kṛṣṇa ....

ādhi-vyādhi-upādhi thī, nivāre trimūrti;  
Yogeśvara ne Bālājī, saṃgame śrīNāthajī.  
sompī dīdhā kāyā-ratha, he sārtha pyāra thī;  
mana-vaca-kāyā ne, ogāḷe ī virati.  
... je śrī Kṛṣṇa ....

### Kṛṣṇa Bhagavāna Āratī – Lamp Ceremony of Lord Kṛṣṇa

Victory to Lord Kṛṣṇa, Victory to Nāthajī;  
Victory to Bālājī, this is the lamp ceremony for these  
three-jewels.

Your incarnation in this world was praised;  
Still listen to the ringing of the bells and the clanks still echoe  
in this world.

Balarāma brother, Lakṣamana ascetic;  
Hare Rāma and Hare Kṛṣṇa, this is the fourfold lamp ceremony.  
Victory to Lord Kṛṣṇa!

Your fundamental form is indeed my true nature; help us  
recognize you with a glimpse of pure conscious form of the  
liberated soul through a vision of you. Since the origin of sun,  
moon, and the stars until today you are beloved by us all; and  
you redeem all, with devotion to one's own soul. Victory to  
Lord Kṛṣṇa!

Trimūrti Yogeśvara and Śrīnāthajī along with Bālājī (the three  
manifestations of Kṛṣṇa), prevent human pain, disease, tension  
and anxiety; if one surrenders the chariot of the body, with love  
to the charioteer, who dissolves all impurities of mind, speech,  
and body with detachment.  
Victory to Lord Kṛṣṇa!

Śiva is also only worshipped in the general sense of a self-realised  
soul or an absolute spirit who, having reached omniscience itself,  
aims at the welfare of others as well.<sup>76</sup>

### Śrī Śiva Bhagavāna nī Āratī

jaya Śiva-Śaṅkara, hari oṃ namaḥ Śivāya;  
āratī utārīne, amarata pivāya.

jhera pīnārā Nīlakaṇṭheśvara, ardhāṅgī nara-nārī naṭeśvara;  
viṣaya viṛecaka, kāma-bhasamakara, saba saṃkaṭa-hara,  
sat mauleśvara.

jaya bholeśvara, hari oṃ namaḥ Śivāya;  
tuma caraṇoṃ meṃ, trikaṇaṇa arpāya.  
... jaya Śiva-Śaṅkara ...

santa-puruṣa nāṃ joga jayobaḷa, jagakalyāṇo, mauna tapobaḷa;  
saba duḥkha-bhañjaka, trilocana-dhara,  
tri-liṅgonī bhrāṃti thī upara.  
jaya Jyotiṛ-liṅga, hari oṃ namaḥ Śivāya;  
mūḍha jīva kaṅkare, Śiva āliṅgāya.  
... jaya Śiva-Śaṅkara ...

kuṭumba-vatsala, Umā Śaṅkara, Gaurī Gajānana,  
sadbuddhīśvara;  
riddhi-siddhi dātā bhaya-hara, daiva pūjatā śrī sarpeśvara.  
jaya ho a-liṅga, hari oṃ namaḥ Śivāya;  
cakra anāhata, svayam khūlī jāya.  
... jaya Śiva-Śaṅkara ...

sacara svayambhū ahiṃthī vicare, a-cara prakāśe khūṇe  
khāñcare;

kāpe andhakāra āratī ṭāṇe, śiva-sat sukhiyā ātmā ramāḍe.  
jaya ho nirbheda, hari oṃ namaḥ Śivāya;  
kalyāṇeśvara, karuṇā varasāya  
... jaya Śiva-Śaṅkara ...

### Śiva Bhagavāna Āratī – Lamp Ceremony of Lord Śiva

Victory to Śiva-Śaṅkara,<sup>77</sup> Hari<sup>78</sup> oṃ homage to Śiva;  
performing the lamp ceremony, is like drinking the nectar  
of immortality.

The blue-necked lord (Śiva) can digest poison (without  
retaliation), lord of dancers in his form as half female and  
half male. He is a purgative for objects of desire and burns to  
ashes feelings of lust. He removes all difficulties, the enduring  
primordial lord. Victory to the innocent lord.<sup>79</sup> Hari oṃ homage  
to Śiva. I offer my mind, speech, and body to your feet. –  
Victory to Śiva-Śaṅkara!

For all the saints, he is the ultimate ideal, (source of) welfare  
of the world, silence, and strength of austerity; he destroys all  
sorrow, possesses three eyes, and is beyond the aberrations  
of the three genders. Victory to the pillar of light, Hari oṃ  
homage to Śiva; Where foolish souls squirm, Śiva embraces. –  
Victory to Śiva-Śaṅkara!

He is affectionate to (his) family, Ūmā (his wife Pārvatī), Śaṅkara  
(Śiva himself), Gaurī, and Gajānana (their children), he is the  
Lord of pure wisdom; he is the giver of prosperity and success,  
removes fear, Gods (Kṛṣṇa) worship him, Lord of the snakes.

Victory to the supreme being, Hari oṃ homage to Śiva; (by  
worship of him) the heart cakṛa opens oneself automatically. –  
Victory to Śiva-Śaṅkara!

From here all self-existing moving (living) and non-moving (non-  
living) entities are drawn into the light (of spiritual knowledge).  
Wherever the lamp ceremony is performed the darkness (of  
ignorance) is cut and disappears, happy souls find bliss in the  
eternal Śiva. Victory to the one who is undifferentiated (and  
does not divide), Hari oṃ homage to Śiva; Lord of well-being  
who showers compassion. – Victory to Śiva-Śaṅkara!

The question 'Who is Lord Shiva?' emerges from the difficulties  
of understanding this allegorical text about the benefits of  
worshipping the soul, has been addressed on an internet page  
of the AVM.<sup>80</sup> The answer is unambiguous: 'in true sense any  
human being who attains 'Self Realization' achieves the internal  
state of 'Shiva.' Śiva 'symbolizes the embodiment of salvation,'  
'i.e. the Gnani.' A.M. Patel said:

'So, in the ignorant state (Jiv dasha), since one  
considers himself separate from Shiva, one says 'Om  
Namah Shivay' (I bow to Shiva). But after attaining Self  
Realization, one attains the constant awareness of  
Soul, separate from the body, and then he experiences  
'Shivoham, Shivoham... (I am Shiva, I am Shiva). I am  
a Soul and not the body'. Thereafter, there remains  
no distinction between Lord Shiva and one's true  
self i.e. the Soul.'



From the absolute perspective (*niścaya-naya*), Śimandhara, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, and one's own soul are qualitatively identical. This realization is demanded from the worshipper who wants to understand the deeper meaning of his/her performance.

### 'Who Am I?'

The answer to the question how the Akram Vijñān Mārg as an organised religious movement succeeds in transcending reified Jaina, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva etc. identities may be found in a particular variant of the proverbial dance (*nāṭaka*) of the mind which serves as a metaphor for the relationship of the dancer *prakṛti* and the spectator *puruṣa* in the Sāṃkhya inspired religious movements. Because the inner self of the devotee and of the jñānī, the self-realised God, are essentially identical in the Akram Vijñān doctrine, paradoxical shifting identities are created:

'Basically, you should play two different roles. With your external eyes you see by relative view-point and with your internal eyes you are the soul (pure-self). ... We should also remember that we too are playing two roles; the human being and the soul.'<sup>81</sup>

The question of how the alternating of perspectives is practiced by the mahātmās who, at best, can only temporarily realise their pure self, can be answered through a comparison of the phenomenology of religious experience of the Puṣṭimārgīs, for instance, and of the Akram Vijñān Mārga. Bennett observed that the initiation into the Puṣṭimārga resembles a consecration (*prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*) of a statue, because in both cases the guru makes the identity of the divine qualities of both the image (*mūrti*) and the real nature or *svarūpa* of the soul of the devotee manifest.<sup>82</sup> The word *svarūpa* is similarly used by the Akram Vijñān Mārg to describe the manifestation of Śimandhara-Dādā's real form, as opposed to his outward appearance or figurative representation, in the inner experience (*bhāva*) of the mahātmā who is contemplating the Dādā by means of songs, *darśana* or *pūjā* to an image of Śimandhara or the Dādā, the pure soul (*śuddhātmā*) is ideally felt as being actually present. There are no rules for the performance of *darśana* by an initiated mahātmā, since the knowledge and the devotional attitude towards the pure self alone is crucial for the realisation of the God within through the medium of an image, be it a statue, a photograph, or a living manifestation, such as the Dādā himself, and his words.<sup>83</sup>

'These our mahatmas can perceive the god residing in you and have 'his' darshana, because 'we' have blessed them with divine eyes (divya chakshu). These eyes of yours are physical ones which can see only transient things. The indestructible Bhagavan can be perceived with divine eyes only. ... But (this) wonderful Gnana (knowledge) is naturally revealed. It is a natural adjustment and therefore divine eyes are so effortlessly available in an hour. This, our word, your soul must accept because I am seated within you; but you must not be intransigent. We do not find any difference either in you or in us.'<sup>84</sup>

The presence of Kṛṣṇa is experienced by the Puṣṭimārgīs as a momentary revelation in form of a sudden and brief change of consciousness, called *sākṣāta darśana*, or face-to-face vision.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, through the vision and voice of Dādā-Śimandhara, the mahātmās suddenly temporarily realise the presence of their own

pure soul, which is also characterised by the word *saccidānanda*, or truth, consciousness and bliss, which is used by Vaiṣṇavas to designate Viṣṇu and by the Śaivaitees to designate Śiva, who are identified with the ultimate self-existing spirit (*brahma*).<sup>86</sup> Śimandhara Svāmī, like Kṛṣṇa amongst the Puṣṭimārgī, 'is both mediated by and manifested in the figure of the guru.'<sup>87</sup> Although the soul of the worshipper is conceived in Jaina terms as an individual entity and not as a reflection of the one and only soul of God, during the veneration of the Dādā in the experience of the worshipper the soul of Dādā-Śimandhara and his/ her own soul almost unnoticeable tend to merge into one. Momentarily, at least, all souls seem to be an integral part of Śimandhara Svāmī and the Dādā as his medium, in the same way as Kṛṣṇa is worshipped by the Puṣṭimārgīs and Śiva by the Śaiva Siddhāntins as the only real self.<sup>88</sup>

It is an interesting question whether and how the doctrinally prescribed difference between the similarity and the identity of souls can be experienced in religious performances. The ritual texts of the Akram Vijñān Mārg are, it seems, at times deliberately ambiguous. They indistinctively use phrases such as "*āpa*' *ja cho mārā* 'śuddhātmā" – "you' only are my 'pure soul'"<sup>89</sup> or "*āpanuṃ svarūpa te ja mārūṃ svarūpa che*" – "only your natural form is my real form,"<sup>90</sup> instead of 'you are like my soul' as in the phrase '*hum* 'dādā bhagavāna' *jevo śuddhātmā chuṃ*' – 'I am a pure soul like 'Dādā Bhagavān'.<sup>91</sup> The semantic shift in expressions such as this, from comparison to identification, from 'your soul is like my soul' to 'you are my soul,' and back again, shows that the Jaina, Vaiṣṇavite, and Śaivaite perspectives are still discernible, and have not yet been melted completely into a new syncretic synthesis which the theology of the Akram Vijñān Mārg generally represents.<sup>92</sup> They present themselves rather mutual transformations of one into one another through subtle shifts in perspective produced both by the ritual dynamic itself and by the deliberately ambiguous composition of the ritual texts.<sup>93</sup>

If pressed, the *ātma-jñānīs* of the Akram Vijñān movement prove to be clearly aware of the difference between themselves and Śimandhara Svāmī, since they do not consistently claim to have already achieved complete omniscience themselves. Although they never cite any texts, they are also conscious of the differences between the Jaina and Sāṃkhya ontologies, which both in their non-theistic emphasis on *karman* and (internalised) renunciation share an individualistic orientation<sup>94</sup> which probably accounts for the 'trans-sectarian' outlook and the contextual adaptability of movements such as this. In future, the Akram Vijñān movement may gain even more influence well beyond the Indian or more specifically Gujarātī diaspora if only it could detach itself from the infrastructure of spiritual lineages and temples which it shares with other religious movements of Indian origin. Typically, most *gurus* of such modern devotional movements developed a 'Western' following,<sup>95</sup> and the Akram Vijñān Mārg is no exception, though there seems to be limited influence beyond the Indian diaspora in Africa or the Middle East.

### Spiritualism and Syncretism

The analysis of the standard practice of image-veneration in the Akram Vijñān Mārg enables us to answer one of the main questions this article tries to elucidate, namely the differences between the spiritual (*adhyātmika*) discourses of A.M. Paṭel, his elder contemporary Kanajī Svāmī and Śrīmad Rājacandra. The core teachings of these three non-monastic 20th century Gujarātī religious philosophers are in many respects indistinguishable, except for two fundamental differences: the role of the guru's



Balakṛṣṇa, Trimandira, Adalāj. Photograph: P. Flügel.

grace (*krpa*), emphasized by Rājacandra and A.M. Paṭel, but rejected by Kānājī Svāmī, and the preferred form of image worship (*mūrti-pūjā*). Though he rejected his poetic approach, Kānājī Svāmī was impressed by Rājacandra's spiritualism and included some of his ideas in his teaching. A.M. Paṭel never met Kānājī Svāmī, but his successor Nīrubahen Amīn did, who concluded that Kānājī Svāmī 'mainly taught that one should focus only on one's own ātmā and do nothing else. She thought that this is a very selfish doctrine, not to give anything to others. One must have a method that can be taught to people. This is what the Dādā offered.'<sup>96</sup>

The assessment of A.M. Paṭel's philosophy by Hukamchand Bharill (1934–2023),<sup>97</sup> the Terāpanth Digambara philosopher who was closely linked with Kānājī Svāmī, is representative for the standard criticism of his teaching from the point of view of spiritual seekers (*mumukṣu*) following Kānājī Svāmī. He took issue with A.M. Paṭel's promise of ritually conveyed instant enlightenment (*akrama-vijñāna*) within a period of only 48 minutes (*antar-muhūrta*), which implies the claim that his disciples experience self-realisa-

tion (*samyag-darśana*) at the level of the 12th *guṇasthāna*, not at the level of the 4th *guṇasthāna* as taught in classical Jaina philosophy, also by Kānājī Svāmī, and thereby to superiority. Kānājī Svāmī, by contrast, rejected the distinction between 'staged' (*kramik*) and 'stepless' (*akramik*) paths, and pointed to Samayasāra v. 186 as the authoritative description of the only path to liberation: 'The Self with the discriminative knowledge, by contemplating on the pure Self, becomes himself pure.'<sup>98</sup> In other words, a ritual cannot convey *samyag-darśana*, only intellectual understanding of the nature of the soul paired with practice of reflection and resulting self-experience. The world process follows a fixed sequence (*krama*), including the path of salvation.

The routine criticism of A.M. Paṭel and his followers (*mahātmā*) from the points of view of standard Jaina philosophy and of Kānājī Svāmī's is that they are not Jaina, because they venerate not only images of the Jinas, like Rājacandra and Kānājī Svāmī, etc., but also representations of Kṛṣṇa and Śiva. Moreover,





(top) Prāṇa pratiṣṭhā of Sīmandhara statue by Dīpakbhāī Desāī, Trimandira, Bhuja.

(above) Trimantra, Cover of book of interviews with A.M. Paṭel.

most of his followers such as the Paṭels come from traditionally Vaiṣṇava families. N. Amīn<sup>99</sup> insisted that A.M. Paṭel did not derive his knowledge from Rājacandra or any Jaina book, but by his unique spiritual experience in Surat, but agreed that all the fundamental categories of the Akram Vijñān Mārg are Jaina ones. Yet, like Śrīmad Rājacandra, A.M. Paṭel opposed religious or sectarian labels. Because he perceived the qualitatively identical pure soul in all living beings, conventional religious distinctions do not make sense anymore. The recently constructed uniform *tri-mandiras*, or tri-partite temples, of the movement are inspired by this vision. The temple-compounds do not only feature images of Sīmandhara Svāmī, at the central shrine, but also, on an – almost – equal footing, representations of Śiva and Kṛṣṇa respectively in the two adjacent shrines to the left and right of the Sīmandhara shrine. Photos of the Dādā and Nirumā are also displayed, but only in side-rooms. There are deliberately not put at the centre of these shrines, for which no historical precedent is known to the present speaker. Though expressing a trans-sectarian outlook in their architectural design, effectively – by excluding images of other conventional or ‘relative’ religions – the *tri-mandiras* are expressions of a new form of Hindu-Jaina syncretism. The actual potential for integration of wider social circles has proved to be low to date, within India, as the strong rejection of the AVM by its closest potential allies shows. This, despite the fact that teachings emphasise that from the absolute point of view of the pure soul there is no essential difference between Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jains etc.

### Conclusion

The analysis of ritual dynamic of the temple rituals of the Akram Vijñān Mārg casts some light on the ultimately dogmatic or political question whether this syncretic movement can be categorised as ‘Jaina’ or not. In his book *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture*, L. A. Babb identified the conundrum of the absence of the divine as the defining problematic of the Jaina tradition:

‘The ultimate locus of the sacred for the Jains, the Tirthaṅkar as a generic figure, is no longer present in the world. In the aftermath of their era, therefore, the task is to maintain some kind of contact with their presence as it once was.’<sup>100</sup>

P. S. Jaini,<sup>101</sup> on the other hand, emphasised the soteriological conundrum of self-liberation and criticised theistic interpretations of Jainism for ignoring the fact that orthodox Jainism locates the principle of sacrality not within a transcendent God but in man (*jīva*) itself: ‘It is the contention of the Jains that a person becomes an Arhat not by the grace of any Higher Being, but by dint of his own insights (*darsan*) and exertions (*caritra*).’ Jaini argues that these ‘core beliefs’ clearly demarcate ‘the Jainas’ from their theistic (Hindu) and fatalistic (*Ājīvika*) rivals.<sup>102</sup> I would argue that the Akram Vijñān Mārg can be regarded as a ‘Jaina’ tradition, although its leaders reject this label and claim to transcend all organised ‘religions,’ because it shares at least three of its key features. What is special about any self-consciously ‘Jaina’ movement is the principal emphasis on the soteriological importance of non-injury and the soteriological goal of liberation preached by the ‘Jinas.’ It is the orientation toward the Jinas as the sources of the soteriological knowledge which defines the movement as ‘Jaina.’

However, the real significance of the sudden insight of A. M. Paṭel at the railway station in Surat did not concern questions of group identity or philosophical doctrine, but the experience of





Trimandira, Adalāja. Photograph: P. Flügel.

the individual. It was that suffering is the consequence of one's own *karman*, and that every insult suffered from someone else without reaction causes the discharge of one's own *karman* (and simultaneously a charge of the other's *karman*). If one realises this, then the other is doing oneself a favour: 'the ego is melting away with every insult suffered happily.'<sup>103</sup> This theodicy seems perfectly suited for the lower classes, transforming social suffering and anger into an experience of bliss. But the sociological question remains, whether the control of anger, celebrated as a personal triumph rather than as a humiliation, is functioning predominantly as a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott), a device for the 'pacification of the powerless' (Weber), or indeed a universal answer to the experience of suffering.

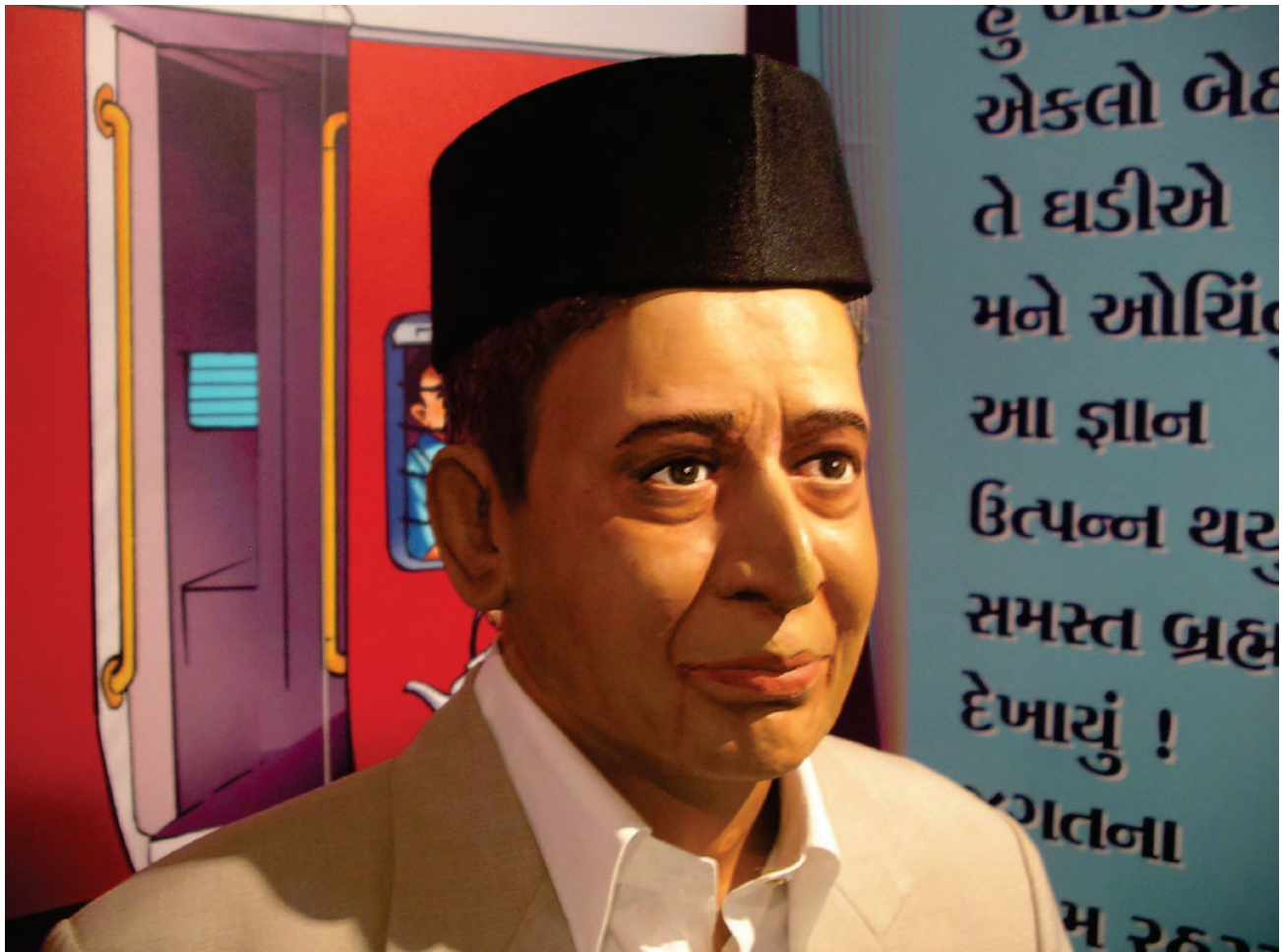
A.M. Paṭel's essential insight is that outward actions and reactions are all 'effect karma,' and cannot be changed in any way, whereas internal attitudes are 'cause karma.' Causing *karman* can be avoided only by assuming the dispassionate attitude of an observer not of an agent of one's own actions and reactions:

'[E]xternal action is overt effect karma, but during that time yje internal intent, whatever it is, is cause karma. – If you understand just this much, there is no binding in overt karma. ... Until now, people were brainwashed into believing that they were binding karmas because of their own overt karma. This is why people have been wandering endlessly. ... So take care of all your responsibilities ... But make sure that in this effect, you hold no opinions that will lead you to charge karma for the next life.'<sup>104</sup>

The renunciation of the fruits of one's actions is a major theme of the *Bhagavadgītā*. At the same time, there is arguably a link of this intention focused teaching to Ājīvika philosophy which accepts that *karman* cannot be changed and must come to fruition whatever happens. One can only prevent binding new *karman*. As J. Bronkhorst has shown, via a reflection on the *Bhagavadgītā*, this is the likely reason why the Ājīvikas performed rigorous asceticism while at the same time holding up their belief in the unchangeable predetermination of the manifest course of action.<sup>105</sup> The teaching of A.M. Paṭel is similar but focuses on the inner attitude rather than the need for asceticism for the prevention of causing new *karman*. Here he comes close to the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*, Sāṃkhya and Buddhism.<sup>106</sup>

Whatever their origins and functions in modern society, the spirit of the teachings of A.M. Paṭel echoes ancient Jaina aphorisms such as the last verse of the *Akalaṅkastotra* of the famous c. 8th Digambara philosopher Ācārya Akalaṅka.

'Whoever knows all that is to be known,  
And sees beyond the billowing ocean of births,  
Whose words, not marred by inconsistencies,  
Stand supreme in truthful purity,  
Such a man do I revere, beholding in him  
One worthy of exceeding reverence, vessel of virtues  
In whom the taint of hatred is effaced:  
Whether Buddha or Mahāvīra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, or Śiva.'<sup>107</sup>



Representation of A.M. Patel,  
Museum, Trimandira, Adalāja.

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- Viy Viyāhapannatti (Bhagavatīsūtra). Manuscript, Universitätsbibliothek Wien. Shelfmark: UB Wien: I 942, Location: MN 5.
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## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this article was presented as The Majewski Lecture, at Oriental Studies, Oxford University, 16.2.2010. Some introductory and concluding passages were published in Flügel 2005b/2020.
- 2 Fieldwork on *trimandiras* and *samādhis* of the Akrama Vijñāna Mārga was conducted in Surat December 1999, Surat and Vadodara November 2003, Adalaj and Ahmedabad in November 2005, Adalaj and Ahmedabad in December 2015, 2016, and in Adalaj and Ahmedabad in December 2017. Interviews were conducted with Nīrubahen Amīn in London 1997, 1998, with Kanu Paṭel in Vadodara 1999, and with Dipak Deśāi in London 2007 and Adalaj 2017.
- 3 48 minutes are ca.1 *muhūrta*, a traditional time period set for Jaina meditation, etc.
- 4 The Jaina terms *samyag-darśana* (right insight) or *kevala-jñāna* (omniscience) are rarely used in this context, presumably to avoid unnecessary debate about the popular translation of the former as 'self-realisation.' See A. M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1994: 77.
- 5 A. M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1994: 32. I reworked translations from the official English renditions of the original Gujarātī in the Pamphlet literature of the Akrama Vijñāna Mārga. I thank Kalpana Sheth and Ashik Shah for their help with translations of Gujarātī *ārātī* texts related to Kṛṣṇa and Śiva.
- 6 Ibid., p. 72.
- 7 "A.M. Patel," "Gnani Purush" And "Dada Bhagwan" Are Separate. ... The person you see in front of you is "A.M. Patel." I am a Gnani Purush and the One who is manifest within me is "Dada Bhagwan." He is the Lord of the fourteen worlds. ... I have never said that I am God. That would be madness' (A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2005: 15).
- 8 Orally transmitted practical philosophy of a similar style was disseminated in the same way by the Marāṭhī-speaking householder Guru Nisargadatta Mahārāja (1897–1981), and by the Digambara Jaina *brahmacārīn* Kānaji Svāmī (1890–1980), whose lectures were recorded from 1961 on initiative of his follower Navanīta Paṭel.
- 9 See Johnson 2000.
- 10 Devotion here means merit making through *pūjā*, *dāna*, *vandanā*, etc., usually combined with moderate asceticism.
- 11 For details, see Flügel 2005a: 195.
- 12 Flügel 2005a & 2005b/2020: 455–59, 469f., 494f., 500–32.
- 13 Pāñca Ājñāo; 1. 'rileṭiv' vyu poiñt thi 'hum Candulāla chum.' / 2. 'riyal' vyu poiñt thi 'hum śuddhātmā chum.' / 3. jagata niyantā-vyavasthita śakti. / 4. fāilo no samabhāva nikāla karavo. / 5. śuddhātmā nā com paḍā mām rakama jame karavi.
- 14 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1998. For an analysis, see Flügel 2005b/2020: 518–23.
- 15 A.M. Paṭel, in R.M. Paṭel 1994/1997: 50.
- 16 Cf. SS 332–344.
- 17 A. M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1994: 81f.
- 18 Flügel 2005b/2020.
- 19 According to Wikipedia, 'He claims succession and presents a recorded tape in which Dada Bhagwan had instructed about it (succession). He is seen as future Tirthankara by his many followers. His faction refers their teaching of Akram Vignan as Vitrag Vignan. He was accused of duping his followers of money. .... He moved to

- US where he died on 9 June 2020. His son Bhavesh Patel declared himself the successor.' [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akram\\_Vignan\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akram_Vignan_Movement). The JSS promoted as alternative leaders several *āpta*putras and Kavirāj Navanīta Saṅghavī (born in Mumbai 21.7.1934): <https://www.jssvitragvignan.org/kaviraj-sri-navneet-sanghvi>
- 20 On this caste division. see A. N. & N. D. Patel 2001.
  - 21 In an interview conducted by the author in London 1999, Nīrubahen Amīn claimed that Kānjī Svāmī, who she met in Sogaḍh, did not respect her, because she was a woman.
  - 22 Love 'that is constant is paramatma's love (God's love). It will subdue anyone. I for myself do not wish to subdue anyone, but they surrender to my love. It is revealed in the presence of *Gnani Purush*. This love is absolute and unconditional. The Gnani's love is God's love' (A. M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2000b: 25).
  - 23 Bennett 1993: 89.
  - 24 Ibid., p. 124.
  - 25 Ibid., p. 196ff.
  - 26 Ibid., p. 254.
  - 27 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2005: 20.
  - 28 Ibid.
  - 29 Ibid., p. 21.
  - 30 Rajib Doogar 9.3.1997, e-mail to the Jain-list.
  - 31 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2005: 12.
  - 32 Ibid., p. 6.
  - 33 Interview, London 1999.
  - 34 Cf. Pocock 1973, Patel & Patel 2001.
  - 35 In: Shah 1995: 35.
  - 36 This method, used by N. Amīn, is attested in Jaina literature for instance for the founder of the Añcalagaccha, Ācārya Vijayacandra. See Hastimāla 1971: 75f.
  - 37 On the identification of the originally non-Vedic syncretic god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu in the *Mahābhārata* see Jaiswal 1967: 45, 61ff., 64. Also: the 5 primary elements (*pañca-bhūtāḥ*) of the body or gifts (*rātra*) of Brahmā-Puruṣa mentioned in *Agni Purāṇa* 29.7: the subtle elements (*tanmātrāḥ*), individuation (*ahamkāra*), mind (*buddhi*), and unmanifest (*avyakta*), originally signifying human sacrifice (44) but later the fivefold forms of deity.
  - 38 AD, tr. Barnett pp. 81f.
  - 39 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1983: 36.
  - 40 NTSMT N.N.: 3.
  - 41 The contrast deserves another essay, because of the extensive literature on concept and iconography of *tri-mūrtis* in Hindu (and Christian) religious culture. Bollée 1977: 109 n. 17 notes that the proponents of the *trimūrti* concept, which emerged in the 4th c. under the Guptas, in practice concentrated on one of the three deities.
  - 42 Prasad 1980: 222 sees both designs covered by this label: 'three Vīmāna-s either arranged in a line or placed around a common hall.'
  - 43 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1983: 35f.
  - 44 Ibid., pp. 21f.
  - 45 Cf. G.H. Mead.
  - 46 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 1999: 1: bhagavāna niṣpakṣapātī hoyā che. bhagavānane vaiṣṇava sāthe ke śiva sāthe ke jaina sāthe kaṁī levādevā nathī. vītarāgone tyāṁ pakṣāpakṣī nā hoyā. ... vītarāgano mārga bhedābhedathī rahita hoyā.
  - 47 Ibid.
  - 48 Cf. the translations of the *Namaskāra* Mantra Part 1 by Roth 1974: 2 and Jaini 1979: 163.
  - 49 A translation of the AVM inserts in brackets: 'Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu),' which indicates the desire to build bridges and to adherents of the predominantly ascetic Gujarātī Svāmī Nārāyaṇa tradition.
  - 50 A 19th c. copy of the *Bhagavatisūtra* at the University Library of Vienna, shelfmark. UB Wien: I 942, Location: MN 5, begins: // om // namo vītarāgāya // namo [ ] / namo siddhāṇaṁ / [...]. See Utz Podzeit 1988: 1. Another easily accessible example is a *Kalpāsūtra* (KS2) manuscript at the BnF in Paris shelfmark Sanscrit 1453, presenting the late fivefold standard form the *Namaskāra Mantra* with the preamble: || bhale || om namo śrī-vītarāgāya. namo arihantāṇaṁ, namo siddhāṇaṁ, [...]. On its colophon, see Balbir 1984. The preamble is not in Jacobi's edition KS1, p. 33.
  - 51 DJSM 1992, p. 2.
  - 52 Shah 1995: 33.
  - 53 Ibid.
  - 54 Ibid., p. 35.
  - 55 Shah 1983: 30f.

- 56 The oldest known variant is found in the 1st c. BCE Hāthīgumphā inscription in Orissa: namo arahaṇtānaṃ, namo save sidhānaṃ. *Viñāḥapannatti* 1.1 has a six-fold salutation, including an additional salutation to the Brahmī script, evidently emphasising the importance of textual transmission: namo bambhīe livīe, but not 'instead of the *sādhus*' as Jaini 1979: 163 n. 12 writes. The *Āvassayasutta* adds a fourfold benediction, without specification of *ācāryas* and *upādhyāyas*, but including the *kevalins*: cattāri maṃgalaṃ arihaṃtamamaṃgalaṃ, siddhāmaṃgalaṃ, sāhū maṃgalaṃ, kevalipaṇṇatto dhammo maṃgalaṃ. See Vyākhyāprajñāptisūtra I: 7 n. 2, ed. Madhukarmuni. Following Schubring 1935 § 161: 178 n. 3, Roth 1974: 3 demonstrated that only one Śvetāmbara Āgama text contains the full five-fold or *Pañca-Namokkāra* Mantra: a passage in the c. 7th c. strictly speaking post-canonical *Māhānīsīha* (MN) 3.5-10, a text whose 'authenticity' is rejected by the *amūrtipūjaka* traditions. The earliest version of the *pañca-namokkāra* formula may well be the one at the beginning of Puṣ padanta's and Bhūtabali's Digambara text *Chakkaṇḍāgama* v. 1 with Virasena's lengthy *Dhavalā* commentary. See *ibid.* p. 11, and pp. 6 & 12 on the replacement of *ari-hanta*, 'the destroyer of enemies,' in the SKĀ, by *arahanta*, 'the deserving one,' in the MN. A version starting with *namo siddhānaṃ* is reported of the extinct Ekala Pātriyaṇth. See Bhikṣu 1960: 319-33. An influential precursor of this spiritualist variant may have been the opening verse of Kundakunda's 2nd-10th c. *Samayasāra*, starting with the words 'bowing to all siddhas': vaṃdittu savva-siddhe dhuvama'cala-maṇovamaṃ gadiṃ patte | vocchāmi samaya-pāhuḍ am-iṇamo suya-kevali-bhaṇiyam || 1 || A new version of the same was introduced by the Digambara 'spiritualist' (*adhyātmika*) and *brahmacārīn* Kānaji Svāmī (1890-1980), the so-called *Trikālavartī Namaskāra* mantra, the Namaskāra mantra which honours 'all the [true] *sādhus* in the world, at all three times [past-present-future],' using – instead of namo loe savva-sāhūṇam, eso pañca ṇamokkāro savva-pāva-ppaṇāsano, maṃ galāṇam ca savvesiṃ paḍhamam havai maṃgalaṃ – the words namo loe savva trikālavartī sāhūṇam, which cannot be found in any published source. The model for this may have been the *siddhānaṃ namokkāraṃ* performed by Mahāvīra at the time of his world-renunciation according to Āyāra 2.15.32. See Leumann 1934: 2, Flügel 2019a: 402, 2019b: 72.
- 57 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2004: 26f.
- 58 Text: Amīn 2005a, translation based on Amīn 2005b: 36. <https://www.dadabhagwan.fm/spiritualsongs/niruma+na+shrimukhe+vidhi/pratah+vidhi/>
- 59 Amīn 2005b: 26.
- 60 Translations by R.M. Paṭel 1994/1997: 67 (DBF), Mehta 1995: 36 (JSS) (whose text does not include the last verse), Amīn 2000: 46.
- 61 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2000.
- 62 Amīn 1983: 25, cf. 44f.
- 63 Amīn 1999: 45. Translations: Amīn 2005: 34f., <https://www.dadashri.org/ssarati.html>. Ritual: <https://www.dadabhagwan.tv/library/dada+bhagwan+aarti+and+simandhar+swami+aarti/>
- 64 This verse is missing in some text editions.
- 65 The popular term *ṛṇānubandha* which probably derived from astrology literally means 'connection due to indebtedness/debt' and here designates an ante-natal 'relationship due to past karmic deeds' between husband or wife for example, or 'destiny resulting from karma.' The term is not extant in Jaina scriptures but evident in vernacular Sanskrit, for which see Deshpande 1993: 48, and texts such as *Mahāsubhāṣitasamgraha* 7364. See also Peṭālīkara 1963, Jacobson 2012: 423.
- 66 *Avatāra*.
- 67 Cf. <https://www.dadashri.org/ssarati.html>. The alternative translation of *pāmavum* as 'obtain' in Amīn's 2005: 34 more ambitious interpretation 'makes one attain the state of' illustrates the intentional ambiguity of the construction.
- 68 *Parahamṣa*, 'supreme goose,' vehicle of Brahma, is an Vedāntic allegory for *paramātman*, 'supreme self.'
- 69 Amīn 2005: 35 renders the text as: 'the whole world benefits from the knowledge of ultimate salvation.'
- 70 Amīn 2005: 45. The expression *lave* in the first line and the last line could also refer to the already accomplished state of liberation which, however, is treated in the last verse.
- 71 A.M. Paṭel, in: Amīn 1999: 445f., 2005: 32f.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 12f.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 76 The word Śiva is interpreted as a synonym of *ātman*, the self. See Amin 1994: 124. For historical precedence for such intentional creation of ambivalence in the Jaina tradition, see Williams 1963/1983: xix.
- 77 The formless omnipresent divinity, and its human form.
- 78 Kṛṣṇa.
- 79 Prakrit *bhola*, 'straightforward,' Hindi *bholā*.
- 80 <https://www.dadabhagwan.org/about/trimandir/lord-shiva/>
- 81 A. M. Paṭel, in R. M. Paṭel 1994: 49.
- 82 Bennett 1993: 90.
- 83 Bennett 1980: 97, cf. 87 analysed similar processes amongst the Puṣṭimārgīs in psychological terms: 'Those who experience bhava are by definition divine souls (daivijiva) aware of their innate identity as fragments of Brahman. Their divinity is not a quality received from Krishna, rather this is through Krishna's grace that inner divine qualities are made manifest.'
- 84 A. M. Paṭel, in K. N. Shah 1983: 21f. In the original Gujarātī, the phrasing of the last sentence is: *ā amāri vāta to tamāro ātmā ja kalūba kare. Kāraṇa ke tamāri mahiṃ huṃ ja beṭhalo chuṃ, tame jo ā ā nahīṃ karo to! amane tamārā māṃ ne amārā māṃ bheda na hoyā* (AV I: 16f.).
- 85 Bennett 1993: 85.
- 86 Monier-Williams 1986: 1135. The meaning of *saccidānanda* is interpreted slightly different in various traditions. Vallabhācārya wrote: 'From the joy-form of God came out the in-dwelling spirits which have in them all the three attributes of God, being (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*) and joy (*anand*). The *jīva* (individual souls) are without joy, and matter is without joy and consciousness' (in Pocock 1973: 110f.). The classical Jaina tradition defines: *sat* = the six 'eternal' categories of being: *caitanya* (consciousness), *pudgala* (matter), *kāla* (time), *ākāśa* (space), *dharmāstikaya* (medium of movement), *adharmaśtikaya* (medium of rest); *citta* = *jñāna* (knowledge) + *darśana* (perception); *ānanda* = happiness or bliss. Cf. Jaini 1979: 97, 122.
- 87 Bennett 1993: 60, cf. 41. Another example of this dynamic of devotional worship is the following line from a poem of Devacandrasvāmī that was quoted by Rājacandra in letter 753: *jīna pūjā re te nijapūjana*. 'It means 'worshipping the Jina (the conqueror) is worshipping yourself (your own pure soul).' What he means is that by nature the soul of a Jina (or a siddha) and that of the aspirant are equal' (Pungaliya 1996: 290f.).
- 88 Cf. Bennett 1993: 67.
- 89 Amīn 1998: 7.
- 90 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 92 Cf. Dundas 1998: 43-6. On the conflation of *guru* and god in Jainism see Jaini 1979: 256, Cort 2001: 114.
- 93 Ultimately, a pure soul may only be conceived as a separate entity if the term *ātmasuddhi* figures prominently as well, as Richard Davis has argued in his study on the Śaiva Siddhānta (in Babb 1996: 182f.).
- 94 Dumont 1980: 282.
- 95 Nīrubahen Amīn first targeted this audience. Two hundred and fifty Europeans participated in a *satsaṅg* in Spain in May 2004.
- 96 Interview with the author, London 1998.
- 97 Interview with the author, Jaipur 28.12.2022.
- 98 Tr. Chakravarti 1989: 127.
- 99 Interview with the author, London 1998.
- 100 Babb 1996: 44.
- 101 Jaini 1985: 104.
- 102 Jaini 1979: 88ff., 134-41, 312.
- 103 A. M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2003/2004: iii, 32.
- 104 A.M. Paṭel, in Amīn 2003/2004: 32.
- 105 Bronkhorst 2003: 164: 'The self is here looked upon as being totally different from all that acts in a person. Knowing the true nature of the self implies: knowing that in reality one never acts.' Here is the difference to Kundakunda's philosophy which posits that the soul is active in a self-referential sense.
- 106 The late H.C. Bharill (Interview by the author, Jaipur 29.12.2022) pointed out that, according to Jaina teaching, all events are determined by five causes, of which *niyati*, a fixed order of things, is just one. On multiple causalities, see also Flügel 2012: 163-66.
- 107 AS v. 9.

# Contributors

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**Samani Pratibha Pragya** is scholar of Jain Studies. Her expertise includes the Terapantha lineage, to which she belongs herself as a Samani (saint). She is a senior disciple of Acharya Mahashraman. Her current research focuses on the history and methods of modern Jain meditation and yoga. She received her PhD on 'Prekṣā Meditation: History and Methods' from SOAS. At present, she works as a Research Assistant at SOAS with Prof. Peter Flügel on Terapantha data pertaining to the Jaina-Prosopography project. She has established the JVB Jain World Peace Centre in London, of which she is the spiritual head. She is an authorised Prekṣā yoga and meditation teacher. She initiated a rural development project at Tamkore, Rajasthan, and established the Mahapragya International School there. She worked for underprivileged girls' education in the Jhunjhunu district.

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**Kalpana K. Sheth** has over 25 years of research experience in projects focused on medieval Indian languages such as Prakrit, Sanskrit, and Pali. Her expertise extends to manuscriptology, descriptive cataloguing, and manuscript editing. She has worked on numerous international projects with institutions such as the British Library, the Wellcome Trust, and several Indian organisations, conducting research, cataloguing, and editing of manuscripts.

Dr. Sheth has also made significant contributions to scholarship through her independent research, publishing several books and research articles on Indological subjects. She has conducted and attended numerous workshops and seminars related to Medieval and Indological research, including over twenty-five manuscriptology workshops held in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, London (British Library), School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and others. In addition, Dr. Sheth has also been involved in managing institutions and working with universities and government agencies for accreditation, compliance, and collaboration. She has been part of a literary group named Samgoshti, engaging in group discussions with late Dr. H. C. Bhayani.

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