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THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE JAINS
TWO ESSAYS

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Edited by John E. Cort

Editor's Introduction

Lawrence A. "Alan" Babb (1941-2023) was one of the leading anthropologists of South Asian religion of the past half-century.[1] He also played an important role in Jain Studies. After two decades of studying Hindu rituals, in the mid-1980s he turned his attention to the Jains. He was one of a generation of anthropologists whose fieldwork on the Jains helped propel the study of the Jains into the mainstream of the academic study of religion in South Asia.

His first book, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (1975) was one of the first book-length anthropological studies devoted exclusively to religious practice in South Asia, and paved the way for what by now has become a standard academic approach to the study of religious belief and practice in South Asia.[2] The book was based on his dissertation fieldwork in Chhattisgarh in 1966-67. In the book he "sought to uncover certain basic conceptions in Chhattisgarhi Hinduism that are emergent in ritual activity as seen in selected contexts of observation" (Babb 1975: viii). He characterized his subject as "popular religion," the study of which involved looking at ritual activity "from the bottom up rather than the top down" (Babb 2006: 26).

He conducted extensive fieldwork on Hinduism again in 1973-74 in Singapore and in 1978-79 in the Delhi-New Delhi region. The Singapore research revolved around how the Tamil immigrants to Singapore, most of whom came from small villages, adapted their rural religious practices to their new highly urbanized environment. The Delhi research resulted in his 1986 *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*. He continued to

[1] This short introduction is based in part on two memorial articles on Babb: Cort 2024a and 2024b. These articles provide fuller bibliographies of Babb's works. The introduction is also based in part upon a paper delivered at the 2024 meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Cort 2024c), as part of a panel organized by Miki Chase entitled "Anthropological Perspectives on the Jains." I thank Miki for inviting me to participate.

[2] I borrow these terms from another pioneering anthropological study of Indian religion, D. F. Pocock's (1973) *Mind, Body and Wealth: A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village*. I have no evidence that either of the two books, which appeared within a year of each other, had any influence upon the other, although Babb clearly knew Pocock's collaborative publications with Louis Dumont, as he cited three of them in *Divine Hierarchy*.

investigate how Hinduism is changing in its urban contexts. He concluded that such a study revealed significant continuities with earlier Hindu practices. The three guru-based movements he studied - the Radhasoamis, the Brahma Kumaris and followers of Sathya Sai Baba -"each, in its own highly distinctive manner, seemed to exemplify enduring Hindu motifs" (Babb 1986: ix). The three movements are significantly different, yet each revealed an "underlying coherence" to Hinduism. He chose to characterize the situation as one in which each of the movements demonstrated a distinctive *style* of being Hindu. He would later adapt this vocabulary when he characterized Jain ritual cultures as being a distinctive style of larger South Asian ritual patterns.

As he says in the second of the two short essays reprinted here, the interest in ritual transactions that ran through all three of his earlier research projects led him almost ineluctably to the study of the Jains, beginning with fieldwork in Ahmedabad during the summer of 1986, and then a full year of fieldwork in Jaipur in 1990-91. This first foray into Jain studies resulted in his 1998 *Absent Lord*, his classic investigation of ritual transactions between Jain worshipers and both non-responsive Jinas and responsive Dādāgurus, deified mendicants of the past. His interests continued to focus on western India, with subsequent fieldwork in Jaipur in 1996-97, 2000, 2002, and 2005-06, and in Jodhpur in 1998. The topics he explored moved beyond a specifically Jain framework to include trading caste mytho-history and identity (*Alchemies of Violence*, 2004), the historical connections between caste groups and temples (*Desert Temples*, with John E. Cort and Michael W. Meister, 2008), and the gemstone industry in Jaipur (*Emerald City*, 2013).

While Babb's scholarship consistently demonstrated an ability to ask questions that were central to the study of South Asian religion, and to bring to bear a wide range of scholarly literature upon those questions, he was not inclined to write essays devoted extensively to matters of method and theory. Two exceptions to that generalization are the essays presented here. Both of them appeared in small journals published by Jains and intended for an audience of Jains who were interested in scholarly approaches to their own tradition.[3] The first essay, "The Study of Jain Traditions" (1997), emerged from a presentation Babb made entitled "Popular Jainism: An Anthropological Perspective" at a symposium on Jainism organized by the Department of Anthropology, University of Rajasthan, in January 1997, while he was conducting fieldwork in Jaipur. To Babb's surprise, his presentation received strong criticism from some of the other participants. Babb used the term "popular" in a sociological sense, to indicate practices and beliefs "of the people," in contrast to "elite" practices and beliefs. Attendees of the symposium, however, understood "popular" to refer to a judgment, i.e.,

[3] Two other exceptions to this generalization are his 1990 article on McKim Marriott's ethnosociology, and his 2020 article on Max Weber's studies of the Jains.

something that is preferred or admired, in contrast to something that is disliked. One of those in attendance, Gyanchand Biltiwala, asked Babb to contribute an article on the subject to the Jaipur Jain annual journal *Mahāvīr Jayantī Smārikā*. Biltiwala was a highly respected Digambar lay intellectual of Jaipur, who lent his support and guidance to many scholars who conducted research in Jaipur, and for many years was editor of the *Smārikā*.[4] Babb took advantage of the invitation to write a new essay that directly addressed the response of his audience, and to defend the anthropological approach to Jain Studies as a necessary compliment to more textually and doctrinally oriented studies. Biltiwala added to the article a short summary of the original presentation and the subsequent discussion. He also added a prefatory note, in which he gently took issue with Babb's argument. He based his disagreement on passages in two foundational works of Digambar doctrine, Kundakunda's *Samayasāra* and Samantabhadra's *Ratnakaraṇḍa Śrāvakācāra*.

It is illuminating to read Babb's use of the concept of "popular Jainism" in juxtaposition to an essay from about the same time by Padmanabh S. Jaini, entitled "Is there a Popular Jainism?" (1991). Jaini, like Biltiwala, was a Digambar intellectual who focused on Jain texts. The very title of his article indicated his doubts in contrast to Babb's theoretical starting point. In Jaini's (1991: 187) view, "popular Jainism" consisted of "practices within Jaina society that can be considered inconsistent with the main teachings of the religion, but [are] so thoroughly assimilated with them now that they are no longer perceived as alien". He further said that by "popular Jainism" he referred to "the many practices engaged in by lay people that can be traced to brahmanical elements introduced in ancient times" (ibid.). He pointed to lay practices such as the worship of non-liberated deities, the performance of mortuary rituals, and the worship of images of the Jinas (*mūrti-pūjā*). He criticized much of contemporary Jain practice, saying "the popular Jainism of our time is little more than indulgence in the most expensive and spectacular forms of image-worship" (ibid.: 199). The adoption of such non-Jain practices by the laity "hastened the degeneration of their monastic institutions" (ibid.: 198). He was able to point to instances in which Jain mendicants and intellectuals condemned such practices. These active efforts at reform have resulted in the gap between the great tradition of rigorous asceticism and the little tradition of devotion and deity-worship being less than in other traditions such as Theravada Buddhism, and so the Jains "were able to preserve the purity of their tradition" (ibid.). We thus see that "popular Jainism" can mean quite different things to different scholars. We also see how different scholars, given their own intellectual locations, can have strikingly

[4] Biltiwala (also Bilṭīvālā; 1932-2007) was a student of Cainsukhdās Nyāyatīrth (1900-1969), one of the leading Digambar intellectuals of twentieth-century Jaipur who was for many years principal of the Digambar Jain Sanskrit College. Biltiwala was a teacher of English in Jaipur. Two examples of Biltiwala's scholarship are his editions and Hindi translation-commentaries of Amṛtacandra's ca. tenth century Sanskrit *Laghutattvasphota* (1993) and Daulatrām Kāslīvāl's eighteenth century Dhundhari *Adhyātma Bārahkhaḍī* (2002).

different judgments concerning whether the study of "popular Jainism" is properly a part of the study of Jainism.

The second essay, "From Hinduism to Jainism (and Back Again)" (2006), was first published in *Jinamañjari*. This was a biannual journal published by the Brāmhi Jain Society of Toronto between 1990 and 2009. The goal of the journal, as stated in the first issue, was "to make a contribution, in a contemporary environment, to the study and promotion of Jaina reflections in the West." The editor of and main force behind the journal was Bhuvanendra Kumar.[5] He had been the first editor of *Jain Digest*, the monthly publication of the Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), starting in September 1985. His efforts to reach out to the academic community, and the response of that community to his efforts, are seen in the list of international scholars he recruited to serve as editorial advisors.[6] The very first issue of *Jinamañjari*, in October 1990, included short contributions from scholars such as Padmanabh S. Jaini, Bhagchandra Bhaskar Jain, Piotr Balcerowicz, Phyllis Granoff, Bansidhar Bhatt and Vilas A. Sangave. He also invited scholars to edit special editions of the journal.[7] It was in this context that he invited me to edit a special issue with the title "American Studies of the Jains," published in October 2006. I invited seven other scholars to contribute to the issue: M. Whitney Kelting, Christopher Key Chapple, Lawrence A. Babb, Lisa Nadine Owen, Alexander Keefe, Catherine B. Asher and James Ryan. Babb again took the opportunity to write a more methodological article, in which he reflected upon his scholarly trajectory before he undertook the study of the Jains, and how the questions he asked in those previous two decades directly informed his decision to study the Jains. He also reflected on how his studies of the Jains had shaped his larger understanding of South Asian religions.

These two short essays are little known, either by anthropologists of South Asian religion or scholars in Jain Studies. Nor are they easy to access: neither journal issue is included in the online Jain eLibrary, and the journals in which the articles appeared are not covered by standard academic indices and bibliographies. The editor of these essays, and the editor of *IJJS*, present them here in the hope that they will stir a renewed interest in the anthropological study of the Jains, as well as broader reflections on questions of theory and method in the study of the Jains and the study of Jainism.[8]

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[5] See Salgia (2024) for a short memorial note on Bhuvanendra Kumar (1939-2024).

[6] These included Nalini Balbir, Piotr Balcerowicz, Christopher Key Chapple, John E. Cort, Paul Dundas, Sin Fujinaga, Olle Qvarnström, Jayandra Soni and Leslie Orr.

[7] He also compiled articles from the journal into an edited book, and wrote other studies of Jainism in North America and Karnataka. For examples of his scholarship see Kumar 1996, 2012 and 2013.

[8] These essays have been lightly edited, to correct several typos and misspellings, to unify their style in terms of spellings and the use of diacritical marks, and to conform to the *IJJS* house style.

THE STUDY OF JAIN TRADITIONS

In January of this year [1997] I had the pleasure and privilege of speaking at a symposium on Jainism sponsored by the Department of Anthropology, University of Rajasthan. The title of my talk was "Popular Jainism: An Anthropological Perspective." I had thought the title and the theme were innocuous, but somewhat to my surprise they turned out to be rather controversial. That being so, I thought I would utilize the present kind invitation to contribute to the *Mahāvīr Jayantī Smārikā* as an opportunity to expand somewhat on the issues involved in hopes of achieving a degree of clarification. The point I want to stress, now as then, is the importance of supplementing conventional studies of Jainism with studies that give due attention to lay practice.

To begin with, I now see that the English term "popular" was a rather poorly chosen word, for much of the controversy seemed to stem from it alone. The term is, in fact, often used in the disciplines of religious studies, sociology, and social anthropology as a modifier of the term "religion" ("popular religion") or any particular religion ("popular Hinduism"). When it is so used, it refers to the religion as it is actually put into practice by ordinary people. Religious practice often - indeed usually - has different emphases from the philosophical or theological aspects of a religious tradition. How could it be otherwise? Most people are not philosophers or theologians. Thus, the study of popular religion is a somewhat different sort of endeavor from the study of a religion as it is manifested in sacred texts and other writings.

Now, when used this way (that is, the social scientific way), the meaning of the term "popular" is not quite congruent with another sense of the word, namely "preferred" or "beloved." This is the sense carried by the Hindi term *lokpriyā*, which is generally (and mostly, but not always, correctly) thought to be equivalent to the English "popular." Therefore, one misunderstanding that arose was that auditors believed that I was saying that aspects of Jainism that I had not specifically designated as "popular" were in some way "unpopular" in the sense of being unloved or unrevered by Jains. This was not my meaning, but I think the misunderstanding (itself perfectly understandable) suggests that the expression "popular Jainism" has outlived its usefulness.

But the concept denoted by the expression has, in my opinion, most definitely not outlived its usefulness, and this is the theme upon which I would like to expand here. Let it be said at the outset that, in referring to and focusing on the practices prevalent in a religious tradition (that is, practices as opposed to abstract philosophical or theological conceptions), one is in no way suggesting disrespect for the tradition in question. To take this stance, rather, is simply to acknowledge an important reality: that theory and practice often have different emphases. Further, in acknowledging this, one is not necessarily suggesting that there are antagonisms between theory and practice, although in some cases there might indeed be

tensions of one kind or another. In any case, I think most people would agree that a complete study of any religious tradition - be it Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, or any other great tradition - must include an examination of both the ideas contained in texts and the practices of ordinary men and women. Whether the relationship between them is one of harmony or not is something to be discovered by actual investigations.

The relationship between text and practice ("text and context," as this idea was once put) differs greatly between different religious traditions. I believe that, in the particular case of Jainism, one has to begin with an important and obvious fact, namely that Jainism is - at the level of its highest and most generally esteemed values - in profound tension with worldly life. This is true in two senses. First, the extraordinary emphasis that Jainism places on *ahiṃsā* means that a life that fully realizes Jain values must necessarily severely restrict contact and interaction between the individual and the surrounding physical world, teeming as it does with forms of life vulnerable to deliberate or accidental harm. Second, the extremely great stress that Jainism places on asceticism (a stress that is deeply consistent with *ahiṃsā*) likewise restricts and shrinks the aperture of interaction between the individual and the surrounding world and its various activities and endeavors. Asceticism is the rejection of the world and the shedding of worldly attachments.

And yet Jainism is - as are all religions - a socially transmitted tradition that exists in the world. Thus, even as it rejects the world, the tradition must, at some level, work out structures and procedures for dealing with certain exigencies of worldly existence. There is nothing astonishing in this, nor anything dismissive or disrespectful about pointing it out. Indeed, this fact about the Jain tradition is embodied in one of its most fundamental institutions. This is the *caturvidh sangh*, which defines the Jain social cosmos as including (not just descriptively, but normatively) not only world-renouncing monks and nuns, but also laymen and laywomen.

In fact, one might go even further and suggest that this fourfold order (or something closely resembling it) is the only possible rational response to the problem of maintaining a world-rejecting religious tradition in the world. Monks and nuns, after all, are incapable of supplying themselves with the things required to meet their ordinary physical needs. Laity - and by this term we mean men and women who remain in worldly life - are thus a necessary part of the institution of monastic world-renunciation. In turn, monks and nuns are the teachers of the laity, and thus the system is complete and perfectly balanced. Of course to say that there is a division between laity and initiated ascetics (which is in fact the basis of the *caturvidh sangh*) is not to suggest that there is no common ground between them. Far from it. Jainism is not only justly renowned for the asceticism of its monks and nuns, but also for the ascetic practices of laypersons, which indeed are a daily reality of lay Jain life.

But lay life also has certain characteristics and inflections of its own. These certainly embody the commitment to *ahiṃsā* and asceticism that is so central a feature of Jainism.

However, in the lay context these ideals must be modulated in certain ways so as to be consistent with the requirements of the life led by ordinary men and women. This is not a question of compromise; it is a matter of adjustment, a matter of how the principles and ideals of Jainism are put into practice at the grassroots level. The nature of such adjustment is naturally of great interest to those who study religion from the historical or socio-cultural point of view.

Given this, what is surprising is how little attention has been paid to lay religious practice in Jainism by those who have written on Indian religions. Such scholars (from both inside and outside the Jain tradition) have tended to focus primarily on Jainism's founding principles. Of course there is absolutely nothing wrong with this. Indeed, Jainism cannot be understood at any level or in any respect without taking its fundamental ideas and values, as manifested in textual traditions, into account. However, the emphasis has been too one-sided, at least in my view. Books on Jainism often restrict consideration of one of the most significant areas of lay practice to a final chapter on "rites of worship" (or something of the sort). This relegates the actual day-to-day religious life of many lay Jains to the status of a kind of afterthought.

In concluding this brief essay, the point I want to emphasize is that the standard approach, while valuable in itself, needs to be supplemented by more serious attention to Jainism as - if you will - a "way of life" as well as a path to liberation. There is great richness, and great accumulated wisdom too, in the vast and complex world of lay Jain practice. This world, I submit, has a serious claim on the attention of scholars.

A Short Report on the Symposium (by Gyanchand Biltiwala)

In his talk on "Popular Jainism" at the symposium the writer chose to speak on the worship of Dādāgurus at Dādābāṛīs. He related the life of Śrī Chagansāgarjī, born in 1839 in an Osvāl family and named Chogmal. Sukhsāgarjī Mahārāj initiated him as Chagansāgar. He had supernatural powers. He passed away in 1909. At his shrine at Lohavat, and elsewhere, people observe ceremonies on the bright sixth of every month and believe thereby to get prosperous.

The speaker explained that with the liberated Tīrthaṅkaras a posthumous relationship cannot be had, but with unliberated Chagansāgarjī it could be. He further said that when Tīrthaṅkaras are worshiped *prasād* is not taken, but in the case of Dādāgurus it is a different story. Again, he said that the liberated Tīrthaṅkaras are worshipped for having a beneficial influence. Dādāguru's worship is for power. He concluded that the adjustment is natural in the otherworldly religions for the people who have to make their way in the world.

Views of Other Participants in Short (by Gyanchand Biltiwala)

Prof. C. S. Barla of the University asked whether Jains are living up to the tenets of Jainism.

Dr. N. K. Singhvi of the University was of the opinion that Jains are not very different from others. Jain Tantra has *mantra*s as can be found in other religions. *Bhaṭṭāraka*s were a mundane dimension in the Muslim period. *Dāna* is received back as *puṇya*. *Dāna* and virtuous living increase one's market value. There are 134 disputes among Jains. Every section is engaged in power polemics. However, he was of the view that if there were no religion, then, with weak instrumentality of state and law, life would have been more miserable.

Dr. Kamalchand Sogani of Jain Vidya Sansthan of Shri Mahavirji took a strong objection to Prof. Babb's views and asked him to study Jains' kitchens if he wanted to understand what popular Jainism is and how it is practiced by Jains. He further said that there are two aspects of Jainism: *vītrāg* and *sarāg*. On the *sarāg* side miracles are a necessary part of Jainism. By the worship of Tīrthaṅkaras the devotee earns *puṇya*, which is as good as worldly power. Worship of Kṣetrapāl, Padmāvatī, Dādāguru, etc., are of a lower order fitting in the framework of Jains.

Shri Srichand Golecha, a reputed jeweler, said that Jains have no particular social set-up. To adjust with the environment is their social life. There is no difference regarding the theory among Jains. How to overcome sensual urges and mental tensions is everyone's theory (*siddhānta*) whether he is Vedic or anyone else. Apart from this the differences (between *sādhu*s and laymen) are narrow groupism.

R. S. Kumbhat, a retired I. A. S. officer, said that abstract philosophy does not give anything to the common man to follow. He does not want *mokṣa*. As Vivekananda said, his bread is his religion. Whoever does not want anything does not go to the temple, he goes to the jungle. From miracles, he said, they earned state favor. Whoever could not earn this was wiped out.

Replying to the discussion Prof. Babb said that anthropology studies different aspects of a community - social, religious, historical, etc. But an anthropologist cannot swallow everything at one time.

The chairperson Prof. Rameshwar Sharma at the end said that those who talk of high abstract philosophy are hypocrites. How one behaves with others and with Nature is his religion. The entrance of consumerism in religion is a departure from religion. In the name of religion tyranny was done, and image-worship and caste became predominant. When he was a child he was not permitted to go to a Jain temple by his guardians. He pointed at the number of Jains who go to Gaṇeśjī and who worship Lakṣmī. He concluded with the remark that practice is guided by history.

Editorial Comment (by Gyanchand Biltiwala)[9]

The present article of the writer and the symposium held at Rajasthan University on "Popular Jainism" raise some important questions requiring an exercise in thinking and clarification.

In paragraph 5 of this article the writer says that Jainism is in profound tension with worldly life by laying extraordinary emphasis on *ahiṃsā* and asceticism which, according to him is the rejection of the world. For *ahiṃsā* he says, "A life that fully realizes Jain values must necessarily severely restrict contact and interaction between the individual and the surrounding world, teeming as it does with forms of life vulnerable to deliberate or accidental harm." A Jain considers intentional *hiṃsā* as *hiṃsā*. That which is unavoidable creates no tension in him. He ignores that as he knows that "Jinendra has said that *jīva*s die due to the destruction of their *āyu* (age) karma. I do not take away their *āyu* karma, then how have I killed them?" (*Samayasāra* 248) In Jainism nothing is absolute, not even *ahiṃsā* and asceticism. Before a Jain's staunch faith/determination for his spiritual growth/progress every tenet/value in Jainism is meek/adjustable and never a hurdle to his spiritual progress. The limbs of right faith, viz. *stithikāraṇ*, *vātsalya* and *prabhāvnā*, require of him not to shrink his contact with the surrounding world but to expand, and that is why Jain ascetics do not stay at a place for more than three or four days and move from place to place sermonizing people to come out of the narrow world of their passions, sensual cravings and sinful activities which create tensions in the otherwise beautiful world (*Samayasāra* 3).

In the symposium it was the hereditarily Jain that predominantly figured in the discussion. He is a Jain in name only, Jain by birth. By birth no one is taken as a real Jain. To become a real (*bhāva*) Jain one has first to become a prospective (*dravya*) Jain by studying scriptures, understanding Jain tenets and putting them into his conduct as much as he can. He has to earn right faith for becoming a real Jain. As real Jainhood is earned and not hereditary, even a Chandala and a dog can become a real Jain, and then they become nobler than even a *deva* who has wrong faith. (*Ratnakaraṇḍa Śrāvakācāra* 28, 29)

[9] [Editor's note] The editor of the journal prefaced the article with this observation.

FROM HINDUISM TO JAINISM (AND BACK AGAIN)

My shift in focus from Hinduism to Jainism has been both an intellectual and personal journey. It began long ago in central India, and has taken me (so far) to Gujarat and Rajasthan. I travelled at first in the intellectual company of one great social theorist: Marcel Mauss. By journey's end, I had rediscovered another: Émile Durkheim.

My first contact with Jainism, and the inception of my desire to find out more about it, occurred during my initial stay in India in 1966-67. I was then doing fieldwork on Hindu ritualism in Raipur District (now in the new state of Chhattisgarh) for my Ph.D. dissertation, and my wife, infant daughter, and I lived in Raipur city. My first glimpse of the interior of a Jain temple came when Raipur friends took me to one. Because the context was friendship and neighborliness, not fieldwork, I did not actually study what I saw there, but I was much intrigued, and I remember thinking that someday I might want to take a closer look at Jain religious life.

That impulse, however, had to be relegated to a back burner, where it remained for many years. In the interim, I explored some of the implications of my doctoral work, and it was these same implications that drew me back to Jainism. My attention had been drawn to ritual transactions from the very beginning, an interest sparked by studies of asymmetrical food transactions and caste hierarchy (Babb 1975). In fits and starts, and not without blunders along the way, I had tried to grapple with the question of what *prasād*-like transactions might signify about relations between deities and worshipers in Hindu traditions. This, of course, was just one of a range of issues that Marriott (1976, 1990), Parry (1986, 1994), Raheja (1988) and others ultimately elevated to the status of a major focus of debate in the anthropology of South Asia. My own specific interest remained that of the meaning of transactions in worship, an issue I continued to worry at in my study of modern sectarian movements (Babb 1986). Drawing inspiration especially from the work of George Herbert Mead, I tried to develop the idea that transactions in worship can possess what one might call "soteriological efficacy." Such transactions, I attempted to show, can provide a context in which a subject can develop a reconfigured sense of self by engaging in interactions, seen and felt as personally significant, with a divine transactional alter.[10]

[10] [Editor's note] George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) was an American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist. He was among the founders of Pragmatism. For most of his career he taught at the University of Chicago. After his death, his students published four volumes of his writings compiled from stenographic notes of his lectures, his own lecture notes and his unpublished writings. The best known of these is *Mind, Self and Society* (2015/1934). In it he argued that the individual, and the individual's sense of identity, are the products of social processes. As described by Babb (1986: 219), at the heart of Mead's argument is a "peculiar paradox of self . . . that it is at once both subject and object to itself." If the sense of self arises "only when an ego makes an object of itself by learning to enter into the reactions of social others to itself" (ibid.), then interactions with divine others - deities and gurus - can play a transformative role in a devotee's sense of self and identity. Mead's theories have received renewed attention in recent years; see Joas and Huebner 2016 and Huebner 2022.

At this point, I think, readers can see where matters are headed. Sooner or later an analytical trajectory such as mine was bound to raise the question of the meaning of ritual transactions in which the divine "other" or "alter" is seen as non-interactive. Or rather, to refine the matter somewhat, when a devotee worships Kṛṣṇa, let us say, and makes an offering of some kind, the deity is "present" to the worshiper (although an outside observer might regard the deity as present only in the worshiper's imagination). When the Jains worship the Jina, however, the worshiper understands - or is supposed to understand - that the object of worship is not and cannot be present in any sense at all. The Jina is a liberated being and completely disengaged from the world of exchanges of any kind, a transactional nullity. What, then, is the meaning of the worship of such an entity and of offerings made in his name? What happens, to put it somewhat differently, when the imaginary alter (as the observer might say) is imagined as imagined?

This was the frame of reference - a comparative frame of reference, that is, with my previous work with Hindu institutions always in the background - within which I started my Jain investigations in Ahmedabad in the summer of 1986. I tried to approach the matter as an anthropologist, which is to say from the bottom up rather than the top down. As a practical matter, what this meant was a primary concern with Jainism's ritual cultures, and, given my longstanding interest in ritual transactions, the question of the meaning of offerings. Jain *pūjā* was my main focus at first. This, however, was not the end of the story. Transactions were still in the foreground when I continued my Jain studies in Jaipur in 1990-91, but (as will be seen below) the materials I encountered there expanded my horizons considerably. Marcel Mauss, one could say, led me to the doorstep of his uncle, Émile Durkheim, for I came to see that among the many other things that it is, Jainism is a social identity.

Mauss

We best remember Marcel Mauss, of course, for his notion that a gift (or at least a gift of a certain type) carries a "spirit" - that is, that a gift carries something of the giver with it - and that the spirit of the gift compels reciprocity (Mauss 2000/1924). Because of Mauss's own stress on the Maori idea of the *hau* as a paradigm, it would be easy to conclude that the spirit of the gift is a metaphysical concept. It is no such thing. We all recognize that something of the giver is carried by gifts in the sense that a gift becomes a symbol of the giver's desire to maintain or form a social relationship. Even as simple a gift as a greeting card carries a spirit of this sort, especially when it has been personalized by the addition of a handwritten note. The personalization, to the extent that it is there, provides the impetus for a response in kind, and we all recognize that failing to reciprocate is a rejection of an existing or proffered relationship.

A searching examination of Mauss's applicability to South Asian materials is to be found in the work of Jonathan Parry (esp. 1986). He argues that, in the Hindu tradition, some ritual gifting does indeed carry a Maussian "spirit," but that the spirit of the gift does not (as he shows in the case of *dān* given to funeral priests) compel its return. The gift, rather, is seen as a vehicle for the donor's sins. This vindicates Mauss in the sense that sin is indeed something of the donor adhering to the gift. Contra Mauss, however, the donor gives in the expectation of no return. As Parry himself says, this principle is not applicable to all forms of South Asian ritual gifting, but in my work with the Jains, I came to see it as highly relevant to comparisons between Hindu and Jain ritual cultures.

As an example, let us take the case of the Puṣṭimārg (which I discuss in more detail in 1996: 177-81). Jainism and the Puṣṭimārg seem to be total opposites in both soteriological and ritual-cultural terms. The Puṣṭimārg portrays the devotee's salvation as dependent on an intensely interactive relationship with Kṛṣṇa, a deity whose engagement with the world and its doings is rich in activity and content. The Jain tradition, by contrast, portrays the liberation-seeker as on his own, unaided by a savior deity. This contrast is echoed in the ritual sphere. The Puṣṭimārg encourages abundance in the mutual giving and taking between Kṛṣṇa and his devotees in *pūjā*, with a particular emphasis on food offerings - "mountains" of food, according to one sectarian image - that, having been blessed by Kṛṣṇa, return to devotees as embodiments of the overflowingness of his saving grace (Bennett 1993: 123-47). In radical contrast, and in consistency with the image of the non-interactive Jina, the Jains do not understand offerings made in the Jina's worship as offerings "to" a deity that return to the offerer as vehicles of his blessing or grace. Instead, as I have endeavored to show (Babb 1996: 64-101), these offerings are emblematic of the worshiper's renunciation of the world; thus, they cannot return to the offerers, and are therefore disposed of by being given to non-Jains.

These are big differences that cannot be analytically boiled away. The Jain vision of liberation does find partial parallels in some Hindu traditions (such as Śaiva Siddhānta [ibid.: 181-84]), thus rendering the boundary between Jainism and the bundle of traditions we call "Hinduism" less clear than is commonly supposed. But such cases as these notwithstanding, Jainism and the Puṣṭimārg - the latter considered in its own terms and not as representative of Hinduism - are deeply different at the level of soteriology and ritual alike.

There is, however, more to the story than this, because if we concentrate on ritual exchanges and adopt a Maussian perspective, there does appear to be common ground between the two traditions. The offerings made by worshipers in both Jain and Puṣṭimārg traditions carry a Maussian spirit of the gift—that is, they carry something of the offerers themselves. Moreover, in both cases (and following Parry), that "something" is undesirable. In the symbolism of Jain worship, the offerings stand for the world itself, the worshiper's attachment to which they symbolically bear away. In the case of the Puṣṭimārg, ritual offerings partake of the more general

idea that the devotee sacrifices to Kṛṣṇa his or her "mind, body and wealth." That is, the offerings stand for the devotee's everything, renounced and given to the deity. Both offerings, therefore, embody the idea of world-renunciation. A crucial difference, however, is that Kṛṣṇa accepts the offering, which the Jina does not. And not only that, he gives it back. Except that he does not *really* give it back, because the devotee's "mind, body and wealth" have become Kṛṣṇa's, and are returned to the giver only in trust. Because they no longer belong to the donor, they are spiritually innocuous: the donor has, in effect, renounced the world.

Now there is an additional wrinkle in this comparison that recalls another Maussian theme. There is obviously something potlatch-like in the Puṣṭimārg's emphasis on abundance and generosity in the give and take between Kṛṣṇa and his devotees. "Mountains" of food are offered as "enjoyment" (*bhog*) to Kṛṣṇa and then return to the worshipers. This is a chiefly or kingly Kṛṣṇa, acting as the center of a redistributive network (Bennett 1993: 148-78), a Melanesian "Big Man" in western India. Because the offering cannot return, nothing of the sort occurs in Jina-worship, but there are certainly parallels elsewhere in Jain tradition. The most obvious example is the myth-image of the third *kalyāṇak*, which is the point in his life when the Jina-to-be, a wealthy prince, renounces the world and becomes a homeless mendicant. His potlatch-like relinquishment of all his worldly possessions, a gigantic giveaway in which he showers all his wealth on others, echoes the totality of Kṛṣṇa's generosity. This image functions as a paradigm for potlatches undertaken by Jain laymen of stature and renown, who burnish their high status by means of spectacular expenditures on such things as rituals, temples, and the sponsorship of pilgrimages.

In the final analysis, however, there is something quite special about the Jina-to-be's generosity that distinguishes his from all other forms of regal gifting. By contrast with both Kṛṣṇa and rich lay Jains, the *propertyless* condition into which the Jina-to-be's giving propels him means that he cannot become the center of a sustained network of redistribution. And we must therefore say that if, as gift-giver, he is a spiritual counterpart of the Tlingit chieftain or the Melanesian "Big Man," the status into which his gifting propels him is more "other" than "higher," for it is the first step of a journey that will take him beyond the reach of all social relationships.

Durkheim

Among the theoretical foundations of the social anthropology of religion, the most fruitful of all has been the insight that sacred symbols embody the identities of social groups, an approach articulated first in the writings of Émile Durkheim (1995/1912) and pioneered in South Asian studies by M. N. Srinivas (1952) under the influence of his mentor, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. On the whole, however, the Durkheimian approach, at least in the strictest sense, has not been very

conspicuous in the anthropology of South Asia, although there are exceptions, such as Sax's study of Nandādevī's pilgrimage in Garhwal (1991). Whether this is because of the vast complexity of the South Asian social landscape, or perhaps the inherent interestingness of South Asian belief systems considered in their own terms, or for some other reason, is hard to say.

My Maussian predilections were something I carried over into Jainism directly from my previous work with Hinduism. The advent of Durkheim, however, can be said to have been a result of my residential situation in Jaipur. I lived in the city's Raja Park section, and my frequent trips into the old city took me by a Dādābāṛī on Motidungri Road that I soon began to frequent. Owned by the local Śrīmāl community, this was a shrine dedicated to the worship of the Dādāgurus, four distinguished mendicants of centuries back who belonged to the mendicant lineage known as the Khartar Gacch. They are worshiped by image-worshiping Śvetāmbar Jains, especially those associated with the Khartar Gacch, and this includes most of the image-worshiping Śvetāmbar Jains of Jaipur. The Dādāgurus were great miracle workers when they lived, and their worshipers believe that they continue to use these same powers to assist their worshipers today. They are able to do so because, unlike the Jinas, they are unliberated, and therefore can respond with boons to the requests of their worshipers. This belief, as I soon learned, is linked with the notion that worshipers can, as do Hindus, legitimately recover ritual offerings made to the Dādāgurus, something that does not occur (as we know) in the case of offerings made in the worship of the Jinas.

Decorating the exterior walls of the Dādābāṛī's main shrine were a number of paintings depicting the Dādāguru's lives and their most famous miracles. One in particular caught my eye, and this proved to be a genuine turning point in my research (figure 1). The painting showed the first Dādāguru, Jindattsūri (1075-1154 CE), pointing to a list of *gotra*s - exogamous patriclans - of the Osvāl caste that he is said to have created. (It was a copy, I later discovered, of a similar wall illustration at a more famous Dādābāṛī in Ajmer). The picture illustrated an important fact, one that I had not adequately appreciated before, which is that Jainism is deeply implicated in the social identities of Jain social groups. Subsequent inquiries revealed the existence of a large body of mythology dealing with the origins of Jain castes and their constituent *gotra*s (especially in the case of the large and heterogenous Osvāl caste). Fortunately, much of this mythology has found its way into print in one way or another, and the analysis of these materials became a major preoccupation of my subsequent work with the Jains and, later, with other trading communities of Rajasthan (Babb 2004).

A distinguishing feature of Jain origin myths, as opposed to similar myths of non-Jain communities, is their focus on "conversion." The underlying assumption is that Jain groups are not natural formations, but rather come into existence only when some individual or group is converted to Jainism. The convert or converts then become ancestral to a specific Jain group. A theme in all these tales is the key role of Jain mendicants in bringing about the conversions,

although sometimes goddesses are involved as well. The *gotra* origin myths tend to focus on the mendicant's magical power; typically, he uses it to extricate some Rājpūt chieftain from a tight situation, after which the Rājpūt converts to Jainism and his descendants become a Jain *gotra*. The origin myths of Jain castes - as opposed to the *gotra* myths - have a somewhat different focus, one more in harmony with Jain teachings. In these myths, too, a mendicant proselytizer plays the central role, but the focus is less on magical power and more on the ancestors' rejection, under the guidance of the mendicant, of violent sacrifice.

Although the system is largely vestigial nowadays, these origin myths clearly once linked specific mendicant lineages or sublineages to particular lay Jain groups, probably mainly *gotra*s. The underlying idea was that the lineage of the mendicant who converted the ancestor had a perpetual tutelary relationship with the lay group. In a sense, lay lineages were visualized as secondary offshoots of mendicant lineages. The mendicant lineages socially reproduced themselves by means of disciplic descent, but of course they were dependent on lay lineages for physical reproduction. Not only were lay lineages the source of material support, but also lay followers supplied (if not always from their own ranks) the initiates who made disciplic descent possible. For their part, the lay lineages could physically reproduce themselves, but were dependent on the mendicants for social reproduction, because Jain teachings - adherence to which was and is central to the social identity of any social group as "Jain" - were, at least in theory, preserved and imparted to the laity by Jain mendicants.

At this point, Durkheim enters the picture. These associations between social groups and mendicant founders are strongly reminiscent of the relationship between social groups and sacred symbols that lay at the foundation of Durkheim's theory of religion. In the case of those Śvetāmbar Jains who venerate the Khartar Gacch, this principle is exemplified especially by the Dādāgurus, but not just by them. For example, the Dādābāṛī on Motidungri Road serves as a ritual epicenter for the Śrīmāl community of Jaipur (along with a caste-owned temple in the old city). As it happens, however, the local Śrīmāl community has a specific historical relationship with a sublineage of the Khartar Gacch known as the Rangsūri branch after its seventeenth-century founder. They celebrate their relationship with Rangsūri in an annual festival held in his name at the Dādābāṛī. The social-ritual links are not so sharply defined for the Osvāls. But the picture of Jindattsūri pointing to the Osvāl patriclans is a reminder of the fact that once, before the erosion and frictions of history destroyed the older pattern, the worship of the Dādāgurus was, for many Osvāls, a celebration of their nature as social as well as religious beings.

The moral of the story is certainly not that Dādāgurus are "just like" Durkheim's Australian totems. The point, rather, is that the ritual culture of the Śvetāmbar Jains of Jaipur vindicates Durkheim's truly fundamental insight, which is that religion is, at its heart, a social phenomenon, something that is easy to forget in the case of a religion such as Jainism, to which

the liberation of the individual is so central. Yes, among many other things to be sure, Jainism turns out to be a focus of social identity and a dimension of the social sense of self of Jain castes and their subdivisions. And these realities are indeed reflected in relationships between objects of worship and social groupings.

That said, however, it must also be acknowledged that serious limitations in the generic Durkheimian approach are exposed when it is taken to western India. It must be remembered that Durkheim believed that the association between sacred symbols and social groups is completely arbitrary. Because sacredness originates in the social group itself, "any object" can play the role of sacred symbol (Durkheim 1995: 230). Indeed, by extension, all religions are fundamentally the same religion, which is everywhere the veneration of group life - society "becoming conscious of itself" as he famously said (ibid.: 233) - and apparent differences between religions are really but a kind of cultural froth, unrelated to this fundamental reality.

But the ritual cultures of the Indic world cannot be reduced to mere social symbolism. This is because the symbols in question are far from arbitrary, or at least this is certainly true of the ritual culture of the Jains. The Jain mendicants credited with the creation of Jain castes and patrilineages and venerated in Dādābāṛīs are not just any sacred symbols: they are Jain mendicants, whose divine personae express Jain imagery of asceticism and non-violence. As such, they represent what we might call the "civilizational" values of Jain tradition, which they inject into the social identity of Jain communities. Indeed, even when goddesses are involved in the origin of Jain groups, as they often are, they project a specifically Jain personality. For instance, in a well-known version of the origin of the Osvāl caste, the conversion is not complete until the goddess Cāmuṇḍā, the bloodthirsty clan goddess of the Rājpūt Jains-to-be, gives up her meat-eating ways under the influence of the mendicant who converted the new Jains. She then becomes the goddess Sacciyā, regarded by some as a caste goddess of the Osvāls. As a goddess of the Osvāls, she cannot be just any goddess, but must be a goddess who brings Jain values into the social equation.

From Hinduism to Jainism

My journey from Hinduism to Jainism turns out to have been a round trip, for it brought me back to Hinduism and had led me to what I believe to be a much enhanced understanding of the place of Hindu traditions in a wider Indic world. At the same time, the fact that I came to Jainism from a Hindu perspective has helped me understand what is distinctive and not distinctive about Jain ritual culture. Ritual transactions in Jainism exemplify, if in a deeply Jain manner, a universal Maussian logic of gifting. And to the extent that this is so, we have a foundation for systematic comparison of Jain and non-Jain ritual patterns, including non-Indic patterns. Likewise, it is clear that the principal objects of Jain worship are (with exceptions, for the ritual

lives of Jains can be eclectic) profoundly Jain in character. Still, in Jain ritual culture we find ourselves, if only partly, in a Durkheimian world in which sacred symbols serve to embody the collective sense of self of social groups. To the extent that this is so, the ritual lives of Jains can be seen as congruent with other South Asian patterns, and indeed as reiterating social themes common to religious life everywhere.

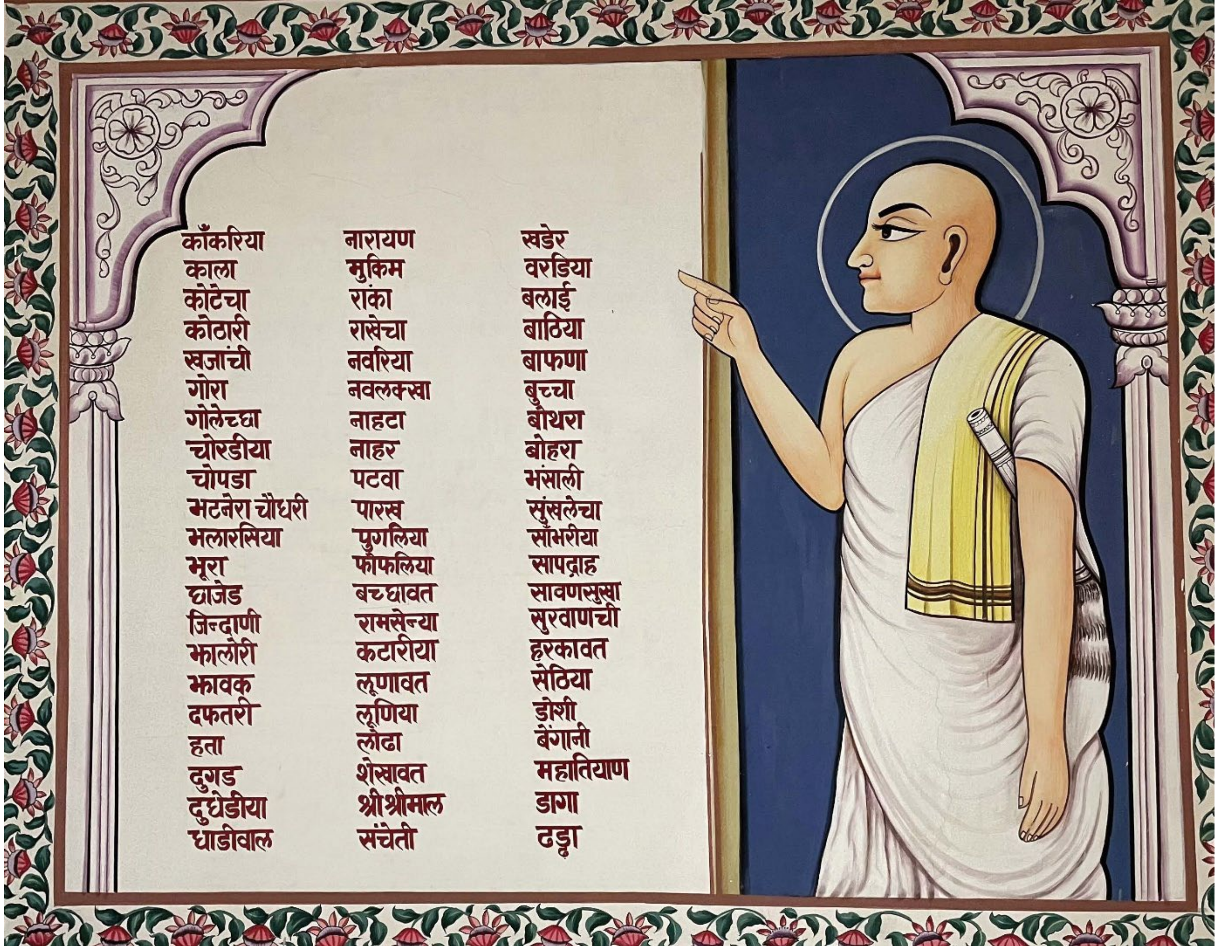

Figure 1: Jindattsūri pointing to the names of the clans (*gotra*) created by him.[11]
Picture on the wall of the Dādābāṛī in Jaipur. Photo © Shivani Bothra.

[11] This recent painting is at the Dādābāṛī at Mohanbari in Jaipur, not the one on Motidungri Road. It appears that the painting at the latter site, which Babb reproduced in his 2006 article, has been painted over. The quality of the 2006 illustration is too poor to reproduce, so we are using a photograph of the recent painting at the Mohanbari Dādābāṛī instead. The newer painting includes five *gotra*s not listed in the older painting. The editors thank Shivani Bothra for this photograph.

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