

## Present Lord: Simandhar Svami and the Akram Vijnan Movement\*

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### Introduction

Most textbooks present Jainism as a religion which survives in a pristine state virtually unchanged from the time of its last prophet, Mahavira, some two thousand and five hundred years ago. Walther Schubring, for instance, wrote in his classic work, *The Doctrine of the Jainas: Described after the Old Sources*, that the 'teaching proper' of Jainism, which propagates monastic asceticism as the principal means of salvation, was 'scarcely affected' by exterior changes: 'The new formations which developed to remain,' he writes, 'are nearly exclusively concerned with formalities.'<sup>1</sup> This view was reiterated by Robert Williams, in his book *Jaina Yoga*, which describes the textual prescriptions for the traditional rituals of lay Jainism, though he emphasised that the 'changelessness of Jainism is no more than a myth'.

Admittedly there have been no spectacular changes in basic assumptions such as there were, for example, in Mahayana Buddhism. At most there have been variations in emphasis. Had Jainism, as at one time must have seemed possible, become a majority religion in southern India something akin to a Digambara Mahayana might, with continuing favourable circumstances, have emerged. But all that can be detected today are the traces of aborted developments.<sup>2</sup>

In his influential work *The Jaina Path of Purification*, P.S. Jaini detailed examples of the continual 'erosive' influence of Hindu devotionism on almost every aspect of popular Jainism from the fifth century onwards, but restated Williams' view:

No movement towards a more catholic viewpoint or liberalised discipline, no 'Jaina Mahayana' was ever allowed to develop among either the Digambaras or the Shvetambaras.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay I will present at least one case not only of a doctrine or isolated features but of a syncretistic religious movement which, I would argue, can legitimately be called 'Jaina Mahayana',<sup>4</sup> i.e. a primarily devotional form of Jainism, visibly different from the ascetic path outlined in the canonical and classical Jaina scriptures,<sup>5</sup> which congenially combines Kundakunda's 'Digambara Mahayana' soteriology (which is in many ways closer to Shankara's Advaita Vedanta),<sup>6</sup> Samkhya ontology and classical Jaina cosmology with a ritual idiom that is largely derived from popular Vaishnava devotionism and Tantric miracle cults.<sup>7</sup>

For practical purposes, I follow Heinz Bechert in defining Mahayana in the broadest sense through the concept of 'salvation through others',<sup>8</sup> which is equally important in devotional Hinduism. In Buddhism, the concept has gained particular prominence in the so-called Pure Land (*Sukhavati*) school in East Asia and informs popular devotional practices which answer the religious needs of the Buddhist laity. The *Sukhavati* and similar schools offer temporary respites prepared by a *bodhisattva*, a Buddha-to-be, where the devotee prepares for one final rebirth in the presence of a Buddha after which *nirvana* will be attained. In popular religion, these 'Buddha fields' (*Buddha kshetra*) became soteriological ends in themselves, because they offer an easy and essentially non-monastic path to salvation which merely demands the recognition of the 'Buddha nature' within (*tathagatagarbha*), that is, the true knowledge of the real self (*atman*). In other words, 'we are already fully enlightened Buddhas if we but recognise the face.'<sup>9</sup>

### Instant Knowledge (Akram Vijnan)

The case I wish to present in favour of the argument that Mahayana-style forms of Jainism do exist – at least, on the margins of the five major traditions of the Bisapanthi and Terapanthi Digambara, on the one hand; and the Murtipujaka and the Sthanakavasi and Terapanthi Shvetambara, on the other – is the Akram Vijnan Marg in western India, literally the path of the stepless or instant acquisition of the knowledge (necessary for salvation). Because of its recent emergence, its lack of a scriptural ‘great tradition’ and its small size (quantity is not really an issue) the Akram Vijnan Marg has not yet been studied, although it is highly interesting from a comparative perspective; not only because it combines Jaina and Vaishnavite features in a unique way, but mainly because it offers its followers a method of purification which does not demand renunciation or difficult religious practices, such as asceticism (*tapas*), material offerings (*pūja*) and gift-giving (*dāna*), or other ritual observances to annihilate *karma*. It therefore presents itself as an attractive option for anyone who seeks easy access to religious purity without the desire to renounce the world or to spend much money on such ‘useless’<sup>10</sup> rituals. Moreover, the promise of instant access to salvific knowledge poses a fundamental threat to the traditional establishment of Hindu and Jaina religious functionaries, which are both dismissed as obsolete.

The Akram Vijnan Marg is a lay movement which teaches that there are two paths in Jainism. The dominant *kramik*, step-by-step, Jaina path of purification is predicated on the cosmologically derived assumption that due to the current absence of the conditions for the existence of enlightened beings in our world, enlightenment and therefore final liberation is, at present, not possible anymore. By contrast, the *akramik*, stepless, path, offers a direct route to *moksha* through the grace (*kriṇa*), of the presently existing lord (*varṭamaṇa tirthaṅkara*), Simandhar Svami, one of twenty Jaina *tirthaṅkaras* who according to classical Jaina mythology

and cosmography presently lives in the mythical pure land of Mahavideha Kshetra, some 193,950,000 kilometres north of our continent Bharata.<sup>11</sup> The Akram Vijnan movement offers 'instant salvation' to its followers by claiming that Simandhar can be accessed through magical means—that is, through direct contact with a medium (*nimitta*). The principal medium, the late A.M. Patel, became a *bodhisattva*-like figure for his disciples by acting as an interlocutor between humans and the presently existing *tirthankaras* in the pure land of Mahavideha.<sup>12</sup> The cosmological assumptions of this new method are not controversial, although they emerged relatively late in the history of Jainism,<sup>13</sup> and neither is the use of magical means of contact which, in this case, is probably inspired by the example of Kundakunda's yogic travels to these regions in search of inspiration from Simandhar.<sup>14</sup> However, nowhere has a separate path to salvation been offered explicitly in the Jaina tradition to date, though A.M. Patel claimed to follow the unique example of King Bharata, the son of the first *tirthankara*, Rishabha, and who, according to the Akram Vijnan version of the legend, was granted omniscience by an act of grace of Rishabha.<sup>15</sup>

There are two paths to liberation or freedom from all bondage. One is the royal road climbing the steps of [spiritual evolution] slowly [step by step]....It is a very arduous path. You have to climb up [rise] performing penance (*tap*), renunciation, incantation of god's name (*jap*); and even then the sword of Damocles is dangling over your head. The second is the Akram Marg—the lift path. Here you have not to climb steps; you are to get into the lift—with wife and children, after getting sons and daughters happily married, after performing the worldly duties—for freedom from bondage. Performing all these mundane duties you do not lose your 'freedom' even for a second. This Akram Marg is also called an exceptionally 'rare' path. Once in a million years it manifests itself. Only king Bharat had got this 'knowledge' from his father, for Rishabadevji—

Dada Bhagawan—bestowed this ‘knowledge’ only on Bharat out of his 100 sons.<sup>16</sup>

The principal doctrinal feature of the Akram Vijnan Marg is the belief in the efficacy of the practice of *jnana bhakti*, the magical acquisition of salvific knowledge through the devotional surrender (*samarpana*) to its source—Simandhar Svami and his medium A.M. Patel. The main differences to traditional Jainism are: (a) indifference toward or rejection of scriptural knowledge (*shrutajnana*) in favour of the direct experience of the soul (*atmajnana*), (b) rejection of physical asceticism (*tapas*) in favour of spiritual knowledge (*atmajnana*) as the principal means of salvation, (c) rejection of monasticism and other institutionalised forms of religious practice, (d) the possibility of salvation for all through the grace (*kripa*) of Simandhar Svami, and (e) the acquisition of direct insight into the true nature of the self through devotion to a knower (*guru bhakti*).

### Self-enlightenment: A.M. Patel

The Akram Vijnan Marg is a highly innovative religious movement. It originated in the 1960s in Bombay and is slowly spreading throughout western India and the Gujarati diaspora in East Africa, North America and the United Kingdom. The founder of the Akram Vijnan Marg was Ambalal Muljibhai Patel (7 November 1908–2 January 1988). His disciples called him *jnani* or *jnani purusha*—the enlightened being; *pratyaksha atmajnani*—the presently living knower of the self; or simply *dada bhagavan*—grandfather lord, because they recognised in him one who has realised his own inner ultimate self (*paramatma*). A.M. Patel was a contractor by profession. He was born into a Vaishnava Patidar family in Tarasali, a village near Baroda (Vadodara), and grew up in the village Bhadaran in the district of Kheda in central Gujarat. It is reported that when he was thirteen he once served a saint (*sant*) visiting his

village, who blessed him with the words: 'May God gift you with liberation', whereupon he replied:

I don't want that liberation, if God is to give it to me. 'Given by him' means that 'he is my boss and he can take it back when he desires to do so.' Liberation itself means 'a state where there is no boss, no underhand'.<sup>17</sup>

In one of his published discourses he said, 'The lid of ignorance in my case was so thin (light) that at the age of thirteen, I had intimations of immortality' (ibid.: 8). In 1923, when he was fifteen, he married Hiraba. Because she lost an eye at a young age, he was once asked whether he was interested in remarriage. But he stated that he had a happy marriage and would keep his marital vows. The couple remained childless, because both of their two young children (born in 1928 and 1931) died a few months after their birth. At this time A.M. Patel encountered the writings of Shrimad Rajachandra and, through them, became interested in Jaina philosophy. Shrimad Rajachandra (1867–1901) was a Gujarati Jaina householder and religious visionary who inspired new religious lay movements which represent the first predominantly devotional form of Jainism. A.M. Patel was particularly impressed by Rajachandra's teaching of *atmadharma* and his rejection of *gurus* and of sectarianism.<sup>18</sup> He also began to practice temporary celibacy, or *brahmacharya*, and at the age of thirty, together with his wife, he took the vow of lifelong *brahmacharya*.

Ambalal Muljibhai Patel had only basic formal education and did not speak any English, except a few words, which he regularly interjected into his discourse. He moved to Bombay, where he stayed for most of his working life, and operated successfully as a contractor for the company Patel & Co. which was engaged in the construction and maintenance of the dry docks in the harbour of Bombay. It is said that notwithstanding his occupational commitments, throughout his life he was primarily interested in *moksha*, liberation and *jagat kalyan*, welfare of the world, which for

him, as for Rajachandra, meant offering salvation for the suffering humanity through freedom from passion, or *vitaraga*—detachment from the actions of mind, speech and body.<sup>19</sup> In July 1958, when he was fifty years old, he had what he later described as an experience of direct spontaneous enlightenment (*pratyaksha jnana*), which he attributed to the natural fruition of his good *karma*. The experience occurred suddenly while he was waiting for a train on a bench on the busy platform 3 of the railway station in Surat at about six o'clock in the evening and lasted '48 minutes'. The extraordinary feeling, which A.M. Patel himself called 'indescribable' and never put into words,<sup>20</sup> was characterised by his disciple Nirubahen Amin as follows:

He had just finished his supper, and was waiting for a train. He was sitting on a railway platform bench in Surat, India, when the extraordinary event happened. The Lord became manifest in him. In one hour all the secrets of the world, life and universe opened up to him. He said later, that there are no words to describe what he experienced. Each and every *anu-paramanu* [atom] revealed his vision. He maintained that the external body of A.M. Patel is not God. The Lord who is manifest inside is revered by A.M. Patel. The experience of the Absolute established itself in him permanently. He became the Enlightened One. He became the first *Jnani Purush* to represent Akram Vijñan for modern times.<sup>21</sup>

Another description by Nirubahen, which is corroborated by similar statements from other disciples, makes it clear that A.M. Patel had experienced what he believed to be the revelation or manifestation (*gnan pragat*) of the god within, that is the pure self (*shuddhatma*), the vehicle of the fully realised supreme self (*paramatma*), which he called 'Dada Bhagavan':<sup>22</sup>

In the 'shrine' of the name of Ambalal Muljibhai Patel, after infinite births, was manifested naturally: 'Dada Bhagavan' in the

form of Akram!<sup>23</sup> In the span of one hour he had an experience of the entire universe! 'Who are we? Who is God? Who runs the world? What is karma? What is liberation? etc. All the world's spiritual questions were answered! In this way nature offered an unparalleled absolute vision to the world through the medium of Shree Ambalal Muljibhai Patel, a Patidar of the village of Bhadran, Charotar. Although a contractor by profession, he remained a *Vitarag Purush*!<sup>24</sup>

Such an 'enlightenment' experience which reveals 'each and every atom of the world' is in Jainism technically known as *kevala jnana*, or omniscience (*sarvajna*),<sup>25</sup> though it is also held that A.M. Patel experienced only *samyak darshana* or *samyaktva*, right view—that is, spiritual insight into the true nature of the self being entirely separate from the *karmik* body (as described by Jaina and Samkhya doctrines).<sup>26</sup> The ambiguity is the result of Patel's attempt to quantify omniscience and to define *samyaktva*, which he calls *jnana* or *prajna*, as 'partial omniscience'.<sup>27</sup> The words most frequently used by him in this respect were *svarupajnana*, self-realisation, and *atmajnana*, self-knowledge (as opposed to *jagatjnana*, knowledge of the world, and *shastrajnana*, scriptural knowledge). The two terms refer to two processes which he, following Kundakunda,<sup>28</sup> regarded as intrinsically connected. Because he experienced his true self without the help of others, in Jaina technical terms, the event transformed him into a *svayam sambuddha*, a being enlightened by itself. According to Nirubahen Amin, A.M. Patel explained that the revelation occurred after an experience of insult and humiliation, involving feelings based on great egotism. At the time of self-realisation, he became aware that it was not 'I', the pure self, or *shuddhatma*, who experienced worldly insult, but only 'me', that is the relative self, or *pratishthit atma*,<sup>29</sup> which is a superimposed, rather alien 'outward packing' in the form of Ambalal Muljibhai Patel:

What you see is Ambalal Muljibhai Patel, a patidar of Bhadran, contractor by profession. But 'he' who is revealed within is a



great wonder. He is 'Dada Bhagwan'....We haven't identified our 'self' with this Ambalal Muljibhai even for a second. And ever since my self-realisation, I have been living with him as my first neighbour.<sup>30</sup>

After his enlightenment experience, A.M. Patel stopped working full time in order to concentrate fully on the permanent cultivation of this spiritual insight and left his contractor business to his partners, while living on the dividends of his company shares. However, he remained a householder and never stopped looking after his business throughout his life, because his soteriology demanded neither renunciation of the world nor asceticism. His followers proudly report that he 'never borrowed money from anyone in his life', and lived by the principle: 'In business dharma will decrease, but in dharma, business will not decrease.'<sup>31</sup>

### Insight through Grace: Kanu Patel

At first, A.M. Patel did not make his inner experience publicly known, except for a few relatives and close friends who noticed some changes in his demeanour and started asking questions. But already in 1962, he evoked for the first time the experience of *samyak darshana* in another person in his own rented house in Baroda. In the language of the Akram Vijnan Marg this procedure is called 'transmitting the knowledge'. Why he thought this might be possible is not entirely clear, since he left few documents which could serve as a basis for a reconstruction of the development of his religious ideas. His brother's, now deceased, son Chandrakant Patel from Uganda (originally from Bhadaran, Gujarat), who called him reverently *dada*, or grandfather, was very interested in his vision. Chandrakant was the first individual to experience a sudden insight into his own pure self in the presence of 'the Dada'. The experience was triggered by a conversation. Chandrakant asked his

*dada*: 'Dada are you a Jnani? How does one recognise a Jnani?' A.M. Patel's answer opened his eyes. He said,

Just slap me in my face, and look into my eyes, whether you see anything....Beat me up any way you like to make me human.<sup>32</sup>

This event, which involved nothing but the knower's words of truth (*aptavani*)<sup>33</sup> and an informal blessing (*ashirvada*) is remembered as the first performance of the *jnana vidhi*, or rite of knowledge, the ritual for the evocation of the experience of *samyak darshana* through the destruction of all the obstructive *mohaniya*, or delusion producing *karmas*. In classical Jaina doctrine this is technically called *kshayaka samyaktva*<sup>34</sup> and is believed to be possible only in the presence of a Jina.<sup>35</sup>

The second person to be given the *jnana* was Kanubhai K. Patel (born 1930) who became one of the two principal spiritual successors of A.M. Patel. He was the son of Kantilal Patel, A.M. Patel's business partner, and worked until recently as a structural engineer. For fifteen years he lived together with A.M. Patel in the same house in Bombay. Later he married, but continued to work in the company Patel & Co. He prides himself that during these fifteen years he stayed with A.M. Patel round the clock and looked after his physical and mental well-being. This practice is called *seva*, service, to the Dada. In the late 1970s Kanubhai took some business decisions against A.M. Patel's advice and lost a lot of money for the joint company. Thereupon, A.M. Patel left the partnership. Kanu Patel told me in 1999 about his experience of receiving 'the *jnana*', that is *samyak darshana*, from the Dada. In 1963 he underwent a major crisis, which he characterised with the words 'to be or not to be'. One of his problems was that he could not sleep. However, one night the Dada appeared in his dreams and after this he was able to sleep for the first time in a long while. The next day he went to A.M. Patel, put his head at his feet and asked: 'Who am I?' The Dada then gave him the knowledge. As in Chandrakant's case, no special ceremony was

performed, just an informal conversation lasting five to ten minutes, which, Kanu Patel stressed, had changed his entire life. Everything turned 'upside down' for him during these few minutes.

### The Rite of Knowledge (*Jnana Vidhi*)

The once informal procedure of passing on spiritual energy for the separation of soul and non-soul in another person soon became more formalised. Between 1962 and 1968, A.M. Patel transmitted his spiritual powers only to select members of his circle of family and friends, but from 1968 onwards he offered to bestow with *samyak darshana* (*paramartha samakit*) anyone who bowed to him and requested to be blessed by the *bheda jnana*, the knowledge of separation. This was the origin of the devotional Dada Bhagavan cult at the heart of the Akram Vijnan movement. In his discourses, A.M. Patel often said that the attribute '*Dada Bhagavan*' was originally not of his own making, but introduced by his followers. Out of fear of public opinion, he said, he was initially not even sure whether he wanted to publicise his teaching beyond a small circle of friends, as had been the case with Shrimad Rajachandra. But in response to public demand, he went to the Rishabha temple in Khambhat near Vadodara, where Rajachandra had stayed in 1893, to ask for Rishabha's advice. Apparently, he was able to contact Rishabha in *siddhaloka*, the realm of the liberated souls,<sup>36</sup> and to sit at his feet to receive the advice that he should convey 'the knowledge' to all strata of society, not merely to the select few. On request, the first public performance of the *jnana vidhi* was held in 1968 in Bombay. In subsequent years the rite was performed at regular intervals and the procedure became more and more elaborate, until it attained its present form in 1983.<sup>37</sup>

Originally, A.M. Patel performed what was later called the *jnana vidhi*, the rite of knowledge, only for individuals and under the seal of secrecy. Often, the rite was performed on remote mountain tops, because intense shouting came to be seen as a key ingredient for

the removal of the obstructive *karmas*, as was the blessing (*prasadi*) performed by laying hands on the head of the bowing devotee (A.M. Patel did not like the term 'disciple') at the feet of the Dada. With time, the *vidhi* became more elaborate and was performed in small groups. On request, the blessing was accompanied by a few firm knocks on the devotee's back with one of A.M. Patel's shoes or with a coconut, a symbol of auspiciousness which offered, as it were, a tangible equivalent to the imperceptible inner process of separation of self and non-self. All aspirants I interviewed insisted that they 'felt absolutely nothing' even at the severest blows. This divine blessing cum thrashing was called *alaukika prasadi*, otherworldly blessing, and apparently introduced 'only reluctantly' by A.M. Patel on 'request of the aspirants'. Additional blessings were sometimes given by showering the aspirants with rose petals.

In the beginning, the ritual was not informed by any explicit doctrine. However, from 1968 onwards A.M. Patel also started to teach his vision to others. On request, he held *satsangs* or meetings for religious discourse in private houses, not unlike Shrimad Rajachandra before him, and performed the *jnana vidhi* regularly for groups of aspirants.<sup>38</sup> He now referred to himself as the *jnani*, the self-realised knower who had directly experienced the difference between self (*purusha*) and non-self (*prakriti*), and was thus qualified to act as a *sadguru* or a *satpurusha*, a good teacher or self-realised being, for the spiritual well-being of others, not unlike a *bodhisattva* in Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>39</sup>

A.M. Patel's religious terminology indicates that his teachings were strongly influenced by the Samkhya view, both echoed and criticised by Kundakunda,<sup>40</sup> that all forms of action in mind, speech and body are merely material; that is, natural processes and thus entirely unconnected with the true self which is in essence a passive observer, not a doer.<sup>41</sup> For him, the illusion of a real connection between the essentially pure self and the action of mind, body and speech is a product of the conventional point of view (*vyavahara*

*naya*), whereas from the real point of view (*nishchaya naya*) the pure self is essentially free and unbound.<sup>42</sup> Liberation can therefore be achieved through the mere acquisition of self-knowledge—the intuitive and strictly non-intellectual (*abudha*) immediate experience of the true nature of the self which exists in qualitatively identical form in all living beings.<sup>43</sup> A.M. Patel illustrated this fundamental insight for his audience with reference to the difference between the empirical self, the ego and the pure self:

What you see here is not 'Dada Bhagavan'. What you see is 'A.M. Patel'. I am *Jnani Purush* and He that is manifested within, is 'Dada Bhagavan'. He is the Lord of the fourteen *lokas* (regions of the universe) and He is within you and everyone else. He is residing in an unmanifested form within you, whereas here (within me) he has completely manifested (manifested in an absolute form)! I myself am not the Dada Bhagavan. I bow down to the Dada Bhagavan that is manifested within me.<sup>44</sup>

In his later years, A.M. Patel explained his method of inducing liberating insight in others in his discourses. He described himself as a 'doctor of the mind' who uses his own miraculous powers (*siddhi*)<sup>45</sup> for performing painful surgery on the self of others<sup>46</sup> by squeezing their ego,<sup>47</sup> burning to ashes their sins from infinite cycles of births,<sup>48</sup> and finally separating their pure self (*shuddhatma*) from their ego-centred mind (*mana*) in order to eliminate all sense of possessiveness and to make them understand the nature of *prakriti*. He stated:

'We' are the exorcist [*bhava*] of the three ghosts of mind, speech and body that have possessed you. We can get you released from these three attachments.<sup>49</sup>

All that is needed is the blessing of the *jnani*, who puts his hand on the head of the aspirant<sup>50</sup> and uses his faculty of speech in order

to transmit his divine powers of intuitive knowledge to separate self and non-self:

Suppose metals like copper, brass, silver got mixed up with gold, cannot a scientist separate them, examining their different qualities? He can do it easily. In the same way he who knows the qualities of the soul and the non-soul and who as an omniscient *Jnani* possesses infinite power, can separate these two substances after analysing them. 'We' are the greatest scientist of the world. Analysing every atom of the soul and the non-soul, separating both of them, 'We' give you the pure soul (*shuddhatma*) in your hand in an hour.<sup>51</sup>

The destruction of the *mohaniya karmas* is thought to be achieved simply through the miraculous power of grace (*siddhi kripa*) of the god within, that is the all-compassionate Dada Bhagavan as manifested within his 'boss' A.M. Patel:

Ay, we are god's boss. Perfectly non-attached. God himself has given us the position of his superior.<sup>52</sup> He told us: 'We are in search of a worthy instrument and we discovered it in you. We are perfectly non-attached sitting in pure self-liberation. We cannot help anybody now. So you are the omnipotent manifest form. Though you live in a clay mould, you are perfectly non-attached. So we give you our superior power and accept you as our boss. And you do good to the world.' And therefore we have become even god's boss. We are the boss of the Lord of the fourteen worlds. With all his spiritual power has the incarnation of *Jnana* manifested itself.<sup>53</sup>

Like Shrimad Rajachandra, A.M. Patel emphasised the impotence of scriptural or ritual knowledge for the liberation of the soul and pointed instead to the significance of direct contact with a living *jnani*, since, in his view, the spiritual power (*siddhi*) that is necessary to separate self and non-self can only be transmitted through the direct speech (*pratyaksha vani*) and blessing of a true

*jnani*,<sup>54</sup> not through the indirect speech (*paroksha vani*) of the scriptures or an un-self-realised mendicant.<sup>55</sup> For him, the *jnani* was the living embodiment of knowledge (*pratyaksha sarasvatī*). He therefore never tired of emphasizing the unique opportunity of meeting a *jnani* such as the Dada Bhagavan:

You ignoramus, a *Jnani* rarely visits the earth; and the *Jnani* of the Akram path (instant-liberation path) is born once in ten million years and that, too, in this present age of strange happenings, like the *kalīyug*. He lifts you up in a lift. You are not to gasp for breath after climbing the steps....Only *vitaraṅga vāṇī* (speech free from any attachment) can lead to liberation. Our speech is sweet, melodious and unprecedented, unheard of before, direct. That speech [which is] contained in the scriptures is indirect. If one listens to the 'direct speech' one will have 'samakīrti'. Our speech is *syādvāda*—not hurting anybody's view or standard—but acceptable to all views. It accepts all points of view because we are sitting at the centre. Our speech is impartial....*Vitarāṅga vāṇī* is that which is replete with the feeling of complete spiritual well-being of others. Only *vitaraṅga vāṇī* can do good to a person and lead him to liberation.<sup>56</sup>

### Simandhar Svami

Although the matter is not entirely clear, it seems that at the beginning of his career as a religious virtuoso A.M. Patel did not refer much to Simandhar Svami, the Jaina *tirthankara* who is believed to be currently living in the mythical continent Mahāvīdeha. However, from the 1970s onwards, probably after a sustained reading of Jaina cosmological literature, he regularly invoked a special link to Simandhar Svami and distinguished three categories of enlightened beings: (a) the *siddhas*, or liberated beings living in *siddhaloka*, who do not speak and cannot be reached anymore; (b) the currently living *tirthankara* or *arhat* Simandhar

Svami in Mahavideha, who speaks to the Dada within A.M. Patel, who contacts him through his 'astral body', but does not instruct his followers; and (c) the Dada, who speaks through A.M. Patel and instructs his disciples in this world. A.M. Patel claimed that he himself had not only experienced *samyak darshana*, but also '356 degrees' of total omniscience (*kevala jnana*). There was only a difference of '4 degrees' between himself and the *arhats* and the *siddhas*. Because of likeness of his own soul and the souls of the fully omniscient, he said, he was able to contact Simandhar Svami directly.<sup>57</sup> During the *jnana vidhi*, he claimed, the voice of the Dada, and through the Dada, the voice of Simandhar Svami spoke directly through A.M. Patel, who acted as his medium in order to transmit 'the knowledge' to his devotees. Because he was accepted as a partially enlightened and passionless being, and was able to mediate in this way between his followers and Simandhar Svami, A.M. Patel was called *khatpat vitaraga* by his followers, the passionless one who uses tricks to get things done.

In contrast to Rajachandra and the 'elitist' and 'decadent' Jaina mendicant traditions which follow the path of Mahavira, A.M. Patel held that the worship of past or future *tirthankaras* on the basis of scriptures and images can only function as a reminder of a distant ideal, whereas he himself has given his followers the opportunity to gain liberation themselves through direct contact with the present *tirthankara*, Simandhar. Unlike Rajachandra, who occasionally considered himself to be 'the second Mahavira',<sup>58</sup> he did not present himself to be the source of possible liberation, but only an instrument, or *nimitta*, of Simandhar, although the distinction is often blurred in popular perception and sometimes Simandhar and the Dada Bhagavan are deliberately identified.

This overview of the key differences between the teachings of Rajachandra and A.M. Patel points to an important shift of emphasis. The Akram Vijnan movement highlights the present possibility of salvation. It stresses the doctrinal fact that no past or future Jaina god (*tirthankara*) can grant any practical help to his



present devotees, only a god living in the present (*pratyaksha*) who is directly accessible to everyone – like Simandhar through his medium A.M. Patel – can do so. The followers of the Akram Vijnan Marg believe that the fact that A.M. Patel has made his personal link to Simandhar available to his followers singles him out from the two other ‘omniscient’ *jnanis*, Kundakunda and Rajachandra, as well as Kanji Svami, the *brahmachari* who is technically a Jaina layman, who provided vivid descriptions of their personal spiritual journeys to Simandhar without offering a direct link for everyone, as the Dada did.

A comparison of the ways in which these three Gujarati Jaina laymen cognised the possibility of establishing contact with a living *tirthankara* under the conditions of the present time cycle shows variations along the dimensions of time, place and medium of communication. Rajachandra said he gained salvific knowledge through the memory (*jatisamarana jnana*) of an encounter with a Jina of the same continent (Bharata) in a previous life. Kanji Svami achieved this apparently through the memory of the encounter with a Jina of a different continent (Mahavideha) in a previous life, while A.M. Patel maintained that he was in continuous contact with a Jina of a different continent in his present life. He was the only one who made this unique link available for everyone, while Rajachandra and Kanji Svami projected themselves as *tirthankaras* of the future.<sup>59</sup>

### Devotion and Self-effort

The mere participation in the rite of knowledge itself does, of course, not secure final *moksha*. But it is believed that it offers the possibility of achieving so-called living *moksha*,<sup>60</sup> and the prospect of being reborn ‘at the feet’ of the currently living *tirthankara*, Simandhar Svami in Mahavideha Kshetra, within not more than two lifetimes. According to Jaina doctrine, everyone has the opportunity of being enlightened in the presence of a living

*tirthankara*, a process called *buddha-bodhita* that is attributed to his great compassion.<sup>61</sup> The question is how to get to Mahavideha Kshetra.<sup>62</sup> Classical Jainism teaches that a better rebirth can only be secured by reducing and purifying the *karmik* burden of an individual.<sup>63</sup> A.M. Patel and his successors agree with this, but have a different opinion about the way in which this is achieved. Because they believe, like the Bhagavad Gita,<sup>64</sup> that the soul is passive, not active, and that there is no real bondage between soul and body, and therefore there is no need for physical asceticism, their main concern is the continuous application of the liberating perspective of the pure soul to all aspects of life. The resulting non-attachment towards one's own actions secures both that no new *karmas* are accumulated and that old *karmas* come to fruition naturally. In addition, they also preach the principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and the abstinence from all intentional action in order to prevent the influx of new *karma*. If an act of violence nevertheless occurs and the ego is involved, fresh *karma* is produced. However, A.M. Patel taught how, through the technique of *anamnesis* of concrete violent actions from the point of view of the pure self (*nishchaya naya*), any such mistake can be neutralised by a devotee of the Dada Bhagavan who has received the knowledge.<sup>65</sup> The Akram Vijnan Marg thus teaches a mixture of devotion to the pure self and ethics. In this respect its soteriology differs from purely theistic or gnostic approaches.<sup>66</sup> A.M. Patel has made the importance of the role of self-effort – sandwiched between the initial gift of *bheda jnana* by the grace of the *Jnani* and the final gift of *sarvajnana* by the grace of Simandhar Svami – explicit in the following statement:

First I destroy all your blunders because by yourself it is impossible for you. How do I do it? By placing my hand on your head and letting Bhagavan (Dada Bhagavan the Lord of the 14 worlds) give his divine grace (*kripa*). Thereafter, you need to remove your mistakes yourself. You will be able to see your own

mistakes. Daily you will be able to see 5, 50 or 100 faults of your own and thus these mistakes will go on their own. Your realisation of your self will increase as your mistakes (faults) decrease.<sup>67</sup>

The Dada cannot purify. He can only give his knowledge and inspirational power to face own's own mistakes. Only the effort of maintaining a permanent awareness (*jagrati*) of one's real self can purify. In asking the Dada for forgiveness for mistakes during devotional practices, the devotee is not assuming that the Dada cleanses the soul by an act of pure grace, but in evoking the manifestation of the Dada in his/her mind, the experience of his/her own pure soul is realised. It is only the awareness that this was not 'I' who has committed an act of violence, but 'me', that is *prakriti* or the accumulated *karmas* which come to fruition naturally, which reduces the burden of *karma*.<sup>68</sup>

### Following

The Dada Bhagavan cult developed first in Bombay and in A.M. Patel's hometown Baroda. In 1983, only twenty years after the first *jnana vidhi* was performed, already forty of the fifty thousand followers<sup>69</sup> reportedly existed in southern Gujarat and Maharashtra. A.M. Patel's funeral in 1988 in Kelanpur near Baroda was attended by about 60,000 people, and for 1999 the figure of about 300,000 followers is mentioned by the magazine *Akram Vijnan*.<sup>70</sup> The followers of the Dada were not recruited from any particular caste. But because of his own social and professional background, many of the leading adherents were middle-class Patels from Mumbai and Baroda. Even today, the chief personalities of the movement are engineers, merchants and medical doctors. However, most of the common followers of the Dada are uneducated, often illiterate, members of the urban working classes, predominantly Patels, Mahetas and Shahs from the Patidar,

Shrimali and Osval castes of Gujarat who traditionally practise Vaishnavite and/or Jaina rituals often side by side.<sup>71</sup> A.M. Patel supplied their need for religious inspiration, and offered a path of salvation which was easy to understand and practise at the same time. The main reason for the popularity of the Dada Bhagavan cult is its universal, non-intellectual and non-sectarian appeal. A.M. Patel was a simple, unassuming man with a good grasp of Jaina and Vaishnava concepts. He spoke about subtle religious-philosophical ideas in an uncomplicated plain Gujarati language with interjected English terms which everybody could understand, and gave practical advice for the resolution of everyday problems from the point of view of 'absolute truth'.

### Community Organisation

As a matter of principle, A.M. Patel rejected organised forms of religion, *gurus* and religious functionaries. He nevertheless 'agreed to' the creation of community associations. The main association of the Akram Vijnan Marg is the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha in Mumbai. This organisation was founded under the auspices of A.M. Patel himself, who appointed Khetsi Narsi Shah, the head of the local Dada Bhagavan Vitaraga Trust, as the first *sakala sanghapati*, or overall community leader, who acts as the chief coordinator of the activities of all local *sanghs*. After the death of Khetsi Narsi Shah, G.A. Shah from Ahmedabad was appointed as the *sanghapati*. His main duties are to organise the movements of the religious leader and his main disciples, the so-called *aptaputras* and *aptaputris*, a category of celibate laity who are invited by devotees all over the world, and to publish the community magazine *Akram Vijnan* which was first issued in 1979.<sup>72</sup> He also oversees the various building projects and looks after the community funds. Today, the organisation has important strongholds, led by local *sanghaputis*, in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat, London and in the U.S.

### Ritualisation: Nirubahen Amin

The development of the Dada Bhagavan worship from a charismatic family cult into an organised religious movement which refers to itself as the Akram Vijnan Marg, the stepless path of knowledge, is to a large extent, though not entirely, the achievement of Nirubahen Amin (born 1944), the second chief disciple of A.M. Patel. She was instrumental in publishing the discourses of A.M. Patel and effected the creation of an elaborate ritualism, including the formalisation of the *jnana vidhi* which under her influence was developed into a public initiation ceremony lasting more than 48 minutes. She also composed a *puja* ritual and promoted the construction of temples for the veneration of Simandhar Svami.<sup>73</sup>

Nirubahen Amin is a gynaecologist by profession and the daughter of one of the oldest devotees of A.M. Patel, a multi-millionaire from Aurangabad, whose family was traditionally Vaishnavite. She was married, but later separated from her husband and took up medical studies in Bombay, when suddenly her husband died in 1968 under the suspicion of suicide. Shortly afterwards, her mother died as well. After these traumatic events, which left her heartbroken, she went to A.M. Patel, whom her father had asked to look after her in Bombay. 'With the Dada's help,' she said, she finished her medical exams at the end of the year. On the same day her father died. Before the news reached her, 'the Dada' told her about her father's death in great detail, although he had not yet received any report of the death himself. This confirmed to her his omniscience. When the official message was brought to her, she was prepared, fully detached and indifferent. The sad news could not harm her, because she had received the *jnana* from 'the Dada' A.M. Patel and knew that her father – as a dedicated follower of the Dada – would be reborn as a higher incarnation: 'Life goes on, one just changes outer appearances.'

From then on, she says, she became a devotee of the Dada and was never again unaware of her pure self even for one moment.

Initially, Nirubahen had no competence in the 'science' of the self (*atmavijnana*), but she was so impressed by the Dada that she began to tape his religious discourses (*satsangs*) from 1974 onwards. She collected in this way about four thousand tapes between 1974 and 1988, which are currently compiled, transcribed (in a few cases translated) and published under the title *Aptavani*, or words of truth. The currently twelve *Aptavani* volumes represent the emerging doctrinal corpus of the Akram Vijnan Marg.<sup>74</sup> The first one and a half volumes of the *Aptavani* were compiled both by Kanubhai Patel and Nirubahen Amin, and the first volume published in 1973 by the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha. Volumes published later than 1983 are based exclusively on Nirubahen's tapes. The only other textual source for A.M. Patel's teachings is 'Vasudev' Natubhai Patel's collection of *satsang* notes which were published in several volumes under the title *Svarup Vijnan* in the 1980s.<sup>75</sup>

Except for the slightly modified, syncretistic version of the Jaina *Namaskara Mantra*, called *Tri-Mantra*, or three-fold *mantra*, which includes references to the Jinas, Krishna and Shiva and is recited at the beginning of every religious event of the Akram Vijnan Marg,<sup>76</sup> none of the printed compilations used in the current ritual stems from A.M. Patel, who refused to write religious tracts. He only ever composed two short ritual texts, the *Namaskar Vidhi* in 1971-73,<sup>77</sup> a devotional hymn addressed to Simandhar Svami and to all other Indian saints and gods he considered worthy of worship, in descending order from the Pancha Parameshthins of the Jaina *Namaskara Mantra* down to Krishna, the Dada Bhagavan himself and the pure self of all living beings; and the *Nav Kalamo*, the Nine Precepts, in 1977, a prayer to the Dada Bhagavan which is said to comprise 'the essence of all scriptures'.<sup>78</sup> The oldest ritual text of the Akram Vijnan Marg which is the centrepiece of both the daily worship and the *jnana vidhi*, the *Nishchay-Vyavahar Charan Vidhi*,

or Absolute-Relative Foot Worship, was written by Vanubhai Patel at the request of A.M. Patel and Nirubahen Amin in 1968.<sup>79</sup> The opening chants of today's formalised rite of knowledge were composed by a songwriter from Bombay, Navanit Patel, in 1970.<sup>80</sup>

In 1976 Nirubahen had an ecstatic religious experience in A.M. Patel's presence which, in her words, also established a unique link between herself and Simandhar Svami, and inspired her to compose the text of an *arati* ritual for the veneration of Simandhar. Her description of the event resembles the narration of the enlightenment experience of A.M. Patel. But it highlights the significance of the mediation of the Dada and of a special *mantra* composed by him:

Naturally, before I came into contact with Pujya Dadashree, I was not familiar even with the word 'Tirthankar' in its real meaning. As such, how was I to have any information regarding Shree Simandhar Swami? It was 1971. We were in Vadva. At night, we were all sitting in a small room of Pujariji. Each one of us present there had to recite, one by one, the following mantra: 'In the very presence of Dada Bhagavan and through him, most devoutly do I bow in supplication unto *tirthankar* Bhagavan Shree Simandhar Swami, traversing at present Mahavideha Kshetra.'<sup>81</sup> First of all, Dadashri recited it to show us how it should be recited. Then he penned it on a piece of paper and gave it to me, asking me to make others recite it in turn. This was my first acquaintance with Shree Simandhar Swami. Then, in September 1972, there was one *shibir* of three days in Aurangabad. During the morning prayers, Dadashri reflected on something and told us all present there: 'One who recites this mantra forty times a day shall gain the fruit of offering one hundred and eight obeisance directly to Shree Simandhar Swami.' Thereafter everyone started reciting this mantra forty times a day. Dadashri had suggested that, time permitting, you should at least once a week, on a holiday, recite

this mantra forty times. As far as I am concerned, the rule of reciting the mantra, which was ingrained into my being then, has come down till today, uninterrupted and unbroken. In 1976, while Dadashri was staying in Mamani Pole, Baroda, I had the golden opportunity of serving him during his illness. It was 12.30 p.m. Having taken his dinner, he was, as usual, sitting on a bench. I was sitting on a sofa just opposite to him. On the wall facing me was a photograph of Shree Simandhar Swami. While conversing—I don't know how or why, be it some divine inspiration or be it the ripe time to shower his infinite grace onto me—he attuned my being with Shree Simandhar Swami and set a unique link between us! I don't have adequate words to express my Ecstatic Experience and Great Bliss of that moment. Thenceforth, the moment my *chitta* [reflective mind] feels free and unoccupied, it gets lost in the lotus-feet of Shree Simandhar Swami. In those days, when Pujya Dadashri used to smoke a *hookah* [hubble-bubble], there sprung in me such an overflowing feeling of oneness with Shree Simandhar Swami that I was divined and inspired to compose His *aarti*. The *aarti* has in it all the mysteries of my unique union with Him.<sup>82</sup>

Nirubahen Amin continued to work in a small surgery in Bombay until 1978, when A.M. Patel suffered a fractured leg. From then on he needed constant medical care and Nirubahen was asked to stay with him and to do *seva* in the place of Kanu Patel. Her medical expertise was particularly valuable during A.M. Patel's missionary tours abroad between 1982 and 1987, which Kanu Patel, who had to look after the business of Patel & Co., could not join. Thus, for the last ten years of A.M. Patel's life Nirubahen became the person closest to him, apart from his wife. Being the daughter of a multimillionaire, she was able, like her brothers, to live off her share in her father's business.

During the last years of A.M. Patel's life, the issue of how the movement could be perpetuated beyond his death was hotly



debated. After some hesitation, A.M. Patel finally agreed in 1980 to the construction of a temple for the worship of the three images (*trimurti*) of Simandhar, Krishna and Shiva in order to spread the message of universal religion. But he spoke out against the worship of his own image and insisted that his method of liberation should only be spread by the lineages of his successors, which he called *jivanmurti*, or living idols:

Don't we have the (paintings) of Mahavir and Krishna? Keep them. Don't put our photograph. It won't be useful to you in any way. We'll leave behind us our successors and then the (chain) link of *Jnanis* will continue. Therefore find out a living idol. The puzzle won't be solved without his [sic!] guidance.<sup>83</sup>

In 1993 the impressive Tri-Mandir temple near Surat was inaugurated and a *dharmashala* was built nearby, both under the management of the Mahavideha Tirthadham Trust. But, although the Tri-Mandir temple in Surat was constructed in such a way as to demonstrate that the same god (the pure soul) dwells within everyone – in Simandhar, Krishna and Shiva – it also offers the chance to worship the photos of A.M. Patel and Kanu Patel in a separate chamber underneath the central Simandhar Svami temple.<sup>84</sup>

### Succession Dispute

Shortly after the death of A.M. Patel on 2 January 1988, the Akram Vijnan Movement split into two factions. The person who was close to him until 1978, Kanubhai K. Patel, took over as the sole religious leader of the Akram Vijnan community with the institutional backing of the main community association, the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha in Bombay. Nirubahen Amin seceded and created a separate community on her own. There are two conflicting accounts of this split.

According to Nirubahen, A.M. Patel decided near the end of his life to secure the continuation of the Akram Vijnan Marg by passing on his powers (*siddhi*) of liberation (*mukti*), knowledge (*jnana*) and grace (*kripa*) to a number of successors. In 1987, he blessed Nirubahen 'in the presence of Simandhar' with a secret *mantra* through which she would be able to temporarily manifest the Dada (the pure soul of A.M. Patel) within herself and thus be able to access him, and through him, Simandhar's spiritual power. In this way, a spiritual link would be maintained across the hiatus of physical death between the presently living *tirthankara* Simandhar Svami, the *jnani purusha* Dada Bhagavan and Nirubahen who was called *satpurusha*, the divine being or the being of truth. A.M. Patel also gave her the authority to perform the *jnana vidhi*, and trained her for five months, during which she learned the required words by repeating what he said.

After the death of A.M. Patel, Nirubahen began to perform the *jnana vidhi* on her own, claiming that the Dada had given her the powers to do so and is actually speaking through her for a significant part of the ritual. Nirubahen present herself as a medium (*nimitta*) of the Dada. However, she says that she communicates with him even in her dreams, where she experiences how the Dada passes her messages to Simandhar and Simandhar's answers on to her. This assertion was not acceptable to the leaders of the Jay Sacchindananda Sangha, who supported Kanu Patel as the successor of A.M. Patel, because they would not accept a female leader. However, Nirubahen continued and left the community organisation to build up her own following. Like A.M. Patel, she officially rejects the notion of organised religion (in order to juxtapose herself against the followers of Kanu Patel), but nevertheless inspired the creation of organisations of her own supporters, first the Dada Bhagavan Foundation Trust of Ajit Patel in Chennai and Ahmedabad, and more recently the Simandhar Svami Aradhana Trust in Ahmedabad and Nirubahen Amin's own Mahavideha Foundation in Mumbai. At the moment, Nirubahen

Amin is the most popular religious leader of the Akram Vijnan movement. She also frequently appears on Indian television. Since 1999 she is called Niru-ma, 'Mother Niru', by her followers.

This version of events is contradicted by the account given by the followers of Kanubhai Patel. They produced a tape of a private conversation between A.M. Patel and Nirubahen, which was recorded by chance on their tour of the United States on 19 September 1987, to prove that the Dada intended Kanu Patel and not Nirubahen Amin to be his successor.<sup>85</sup> At the beginning of the short conversation, conducted in a husky voice with long intervals between utterances, A.M. Patel gave her instructions for his funeral and then, using the formula '*Dada Bhagavan bole che*' (Dada Bhagavan says), he said that Nirubahen should continue to perform six more *satsangs* herself. After this, she should help Kanubhai in the same way as she helped him to perform the *jnana vidhi*. He then said: 'I have [already] passed the *vidhi mukeli* [rite of liberation] on to Kanubhai.' This evidence seems to prove that A.M. Patel wanted his two main disciples to work together. He wanted Nirubahen first to teach the performance of the ritual to Kanubhai and then to assist him. At the time, Kanubhai had no experience in performing the *jnana vidhi* himself. He apparently received the powers to do so from A.M. Patel already in the early 1960s, but refused to perform the *vidhi* 'out of respect (*vinaya*) for the Dada'. However, Nirubahen performed the *jnana vidhi* a few times herself. When she saw that it worked successfully, she simply continued and refused to step down and serve Kanubhai.

The followers of Kanubhai accept that Nirubahen acquired many powers in her years in the presence of the Dada, but emphasise that the power of liberating others has not been given to Nirubahen, which she accepts herself. By contrast, the first two disciples of A.M. Patel, the late Chandrakant and Kanubhai, are regarded by them as *jnanis* in their own right who are entitled to perform the rite of knowledge on their own, without recourse to the Dada. Many of Kanubhai's devotees accept his claim that he will be reborn as one of the twenty-four *tirthankaras* of the next time cycle

(*kalachakra*) and recite verse no. 10 of the *Namaskar Vidhi*: 'Dada Bhagavan na bhavi tirthankar sahebo ne atyant bhakti purvak namaskar karum chum'—'With extreme devotion I offer my salutations to future *tirthankara* lords of Dada Bhagavan.'<sup>86</sup> In other words, they see encounters with him as a possibility to establish a direct link (*rinanukandha*) with a future *tirthankara*. 'Kanudada' as he is sometimes called, is also recognised by the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha as the 'presently existing enlightened being' (*pravartaman pragat jnani purusha*).<sup>87</sup>

## Two Approaches

Nirubahen Amin accepts that the Dada passed the authority to perform the *jnana vidhi* also to Kanu Patel (though not the *mantra*). But she does not agree with Kanu Patel's claim to spiritual leadership under the pretext that he is the currently living *jnani purusha*. Because, in her view, A.M. Patel was the only *jnani*, she merely assumes the humble role as his spiritual medium (*nimitta*) for herself. Moreover, she accuses Kanu Patel of not distinguishing between *samyak darshana* and *moksha*, that is between the experience of the difference between body and soul, and salvation. Because he claims to be the self-realised one, she says, Kanu Patel has no religious aim, no transcendence to offer anymore, although his conduct hardly matches his claim to have reached salvation within the world. 'No-one owns this knowledge, only the *tirthankaras*,' she says, and only 'someone with sufficient purity can give the *bhed jnan* to others.'<sup>88</sup> Nirubahen Amin unequivocally states:

The science of Akram Vijnan is transferable. Thousands became enlightened through the grace of Dadashree and thousands continue to experience instant living *moksh* even now provided they surrender their intellect and their beliefs to god, Dada Bhagavan, the lord of the universe, who was fully manifest in A.M. Patel.<sup>89</sup>

It becomes obvious in the following quotation that Nirubahen's interpretation of God comes close to what might be called the 'Jina-nature within',<sup>90</sup> which is generally contrasted by her with the 'self-deification' practised by Kanu Patel:

A very important message of note for all who are new to Pujya Dadashri's Science of Akram Vijnan is to be aware that the title of Dada Bhagvan can never be given to any living being. Dada Bhagvan is the name given to the Lord within. This was frequently asserted by the *Jnani Purush* Dadashri and now is being asserted by Pujya Nirubahen and all who have received Jnan from her.<sup>91</sup>

Kanu Patel, on the other hand, insists that one cannot transfer spiritual experiences by performing ritual acts or by becoming a medium. Words themselves are not important, whether they are the exact utterances of the Dada or not. The *vidhi* can be performed in any language, not only in Gujarati as Nirubahen maintains.<sup>92</sup> For the *jnana vidhi* to be efficacious it is of the utmost importance that the performer is enlightened himself. Everything must be based upon one's own experience, on mind (*mana*), not on action or speech:

'I cannot be out of my centre,' he said, 'my experience is individual, it has to be independent. There cannot be any hierarchy. The Dada did not give special powers to anyone. No person can make others experience the truth, neither can books nor any transfer of intellectual knowledge. Grace is the only way to achieve self-realisation. And grace exists only when nothing is given and nothing received. I am neither the giver nor the receiver. I am totally free. I am not out of my centre. My own experience is more important than the word. The Dada's speech is fundamental in the *vidhi*, yet the potential for divine speech is essentially existing within everybody. Every human being can have the experience of liberation out of suffering in the present

life. Only animals and plants cannot have this experience. The *vidhi* itself does not cause any material changes.<sup>93</sup>

Kanubhai also claims to have experienced great intimacy with the Dada, although Nirubahen stayed with A.M. Patel during the last ten years of his life, and says that the Dada was principally opposed to the development of any cult, and did not design any definite ritual, like Nirubahen, because he thought that rituals and ceremonies develop naturally as a form of *vyavasith shakti*.

However, there was another reason for the departure of Nirubahen. Kanu Patel and the *sanghapati* were simply not prepared to accept a female leader, although they offered Nirubahen the opportunity to work for the *sangha*. They reported that the Dada himself was opposed to women becoming *brahmacharinis*, 'just because they don't want to marry'. Apparently, A.M. Patel said: 'Women cannot observe my principles and better do more chanting', although this is uncorroborated by the followers of Nirubahen. He apparently also believed, like most Jainas (and Hindus), that women have an inferior *karmik* constitution and that, therefore, few have higher spiritual experiences. It is widely held that women generally have more *mohaniya*, or mind-deluding, *karmas* and therefore cannot realise the effects of the *jnana vidhi* as easily as men. Although the influx of new *karmas* will be stopped after undergoing the ritual, too many old *karmas* continue to discharge. Kanu Patel claims that this was the reason why A.M. Patel had initiated only *aptaputras* and no *aptaputris* at all [Kanu Patel has not initiated any *aptaputras* or *aptaputris*].

Kanubhai's followers generally criticise Nirubahen's 'desire for power' and her 'lack of humility' which they see confirmed by the fact that, in contrast to the Dada and Kanudada who continued to wear their everyday dress after their enlightenment, she (and her main disciples) changed her dress to pure white, thus getting involved in the 'relative world'. The Jay Sacchidananda Sangha officially rejected Nirubahen Amin's claim that she is a medium of

the Dada, discouraged her following and frequently broke up her meetings. In 1993, at the consecration ceremony of the Akram Vijnan Simandhar temple near Surat, the association produced a written document in which it renounced all responsibility for Nirubahen Amin's actions.

The aversion between the two sections of the Akram Vijnan movement is currently only concealed under a thin veil of silence publicly observed by the followers of both sides. Nirubahen Amin is said to have taken advantage of her position 'as a nurse' to claim greatest closeness to the Dada out of greed and depression. And Kanu Patel is painted as a 'religious imposter' who claims *jnani* status on no merit. Stories about the embezzlement of community funds to cover Kanu's business losses are also circulating. The religious leaders of both groups pressurise their followers to take sides or to risk losing the *jnana*, 'because the turmoil of doubt caused in the mind will attract more *karmas*, if you support both sides, you lose your *jnana*'.<sup>94</sup> Most followers understand this of course not in *karmik*, but in personal terms, and fear to lose spiritual and social support. An atmosphere of supernatural angst therefore prevails in the Akram Vijnan community today.

### Routinisation of Charisma

The developments shortly before and after the death of A.M. Patel correspond well to the pattern outlined in Max Weber's theory of the routinisation (*Veralltäglicung*) of charisma. In fact, the two solutions offered – the attempt to perpetuate the charismatic cult of the Dada through a designated, similarly qualified successor, on the one hand, and the objectification of charisma in *mantras* and designated ritual acts with a magical link to the original charismatic source, on the other hand – are paradigmatic options of the model. The two groups also play the two sides of the ambiguous Dada cult against each other: the Dada as the medium of Simandhar, and the

Dada as a self-enlightened being. Since both groups tend to rely more and more on the creation of religious institutions and rituals, in particular the devotional worship of the Dada image, it seems that Nirubahen is better placed, because of the detachment of the source of charisma from her person to a *mantra* which can be transmitted from *guru* to *guru*. Therefore, (a) her future successors will not have to pretend to be self-enlightened, but will qualify for the performance of the *jnana vidhi* by merely receiving the blessings of their predecessor and the Dada's *mantra*, (b) the leadership and the *brahmacharya vrata* can be given by the spiritual leader, or *atmajnani*, of the movement to both men and women, and (c) the option of a pure image cult, entirely detached from a *guru* lineage, is maintained by the consecration of a new temple, the Mahavideha Tirthadham, in Ahmedabad on 31 December 1999, to match the temple of Kanu Patel's followers in Surat. Ultimately, the anti-female position of the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha and the lack of a successor to Kanu Patel will probably turn the tide in favour of Nirubahen Amin, who is already more popular than Kanu Patel outside India, where she has founded the Jaya Sacchidananda U.K. and other community organisations in the U.S. However, it should be noted that some followers of the Dada, most of them *mahatmas* associated with the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha, accept neither Nirubahen nor Kanubhai as their *gurus* but continue to venerate the Dada and Simandhar Svami. Similar forms of routinisation of charisma can be found amongst the Shrimad Rajachandra movement and the Kanji Svami Panth.<sup>95</sup>

### Conclusion

In contrast to the theistic Vaishnava traditions, which propagate devotional religion (*bhakti marga*), and to Shrimad Rajachandra, who promulgated a '*kramik*' combination of devotion, asceticism and knowledge, with an emphasis on devotion, the new Akram Vijnan movement professes to follow the path of knowledge (*jnana*



*marga*). However, a comparison with the Pushtimargis in Ujjain, for instance, who are aptly described in Peter Bennett's ethnography *The Path of Grace*, shows that the Dada Bhagavan cult incorporated key elements of Vaishnava forms of worship in their religious practices. Both traditions share the doctrinal rejection of asceticism and of strict rituals, and claim to offer a universalistic trans-religious vision open even to Muslims or Christians. However, the mediating role of the *guru* is pre-eminent and often no clear distinction is made between god and man. In practice, the professed doctrinal universalism therefore invariably turns into *guru* cults with exclusivist tendencies. The most visible resemblance between the Pushtimargis and the Akram Vijnan Marg (as well as the Svaminarayan tradition) is the practice of symbolically surrendering all worldly attachments, that is *karmas*, including one's property, through a formal resolution (*sankalpa*), called *samarpana*, at the point of initiation.<sup>96</sup>

In contrast to Jaina mendicants, the *sadgurus* of both the Rajachandra and the Akram Vijnan movement have in common with Hindu *gurus* that they often present themselves as *avatars*, as manifestations of gods on earth, or as their mediums. However, in practice the distinction between incarnate god and medium is hard to maintain. Gombrich and Obeyesekere, who investigated the current urban resurgence of 'spirit cults' in Sri Lanka, which combine elements of traditional Buddhism with influences of *bhakti* and Tantra, have observed:

One can of course argue a difference between miracles, which a god produces by his grace to favour his devotees, and magic, a technique by which humans can coerce unseen powers. But when the miracle-working god takes human form, the distinction becomes blurred...<sup>97</sup>

Gombrich and Obeyesekere interpret these spirit cults as imports from Hinduism, though the Buddhist *bodhisattva* worship takes similar forms. P.S. Jaini, who often acts as a defender of the classical

view of Jainism, has also argued that similar popular forms of *bhakti* religiosity amongst Jains are forms of Hinduisation (though imported in a consciously Jainised form):<sup>98</sup>

For Jainas, in other words, no synthesis of the human and the supramundane was ever possible; hence the *tirthankaras* [and not the *bodhisattvas*] remained the highest models of spiritual development, and such tantric practices as identification of the self with the deity were simply out of the question.<sup>99</sup>

Although Jaini principally denies the existence of a 'Jain' cult of chosen deities (*ishta-devata*),<sup>100</sup> he does not fail to mention the frequent examples of Vaishnava and Tantric influences on Jaina texts and practices such as the deification of the Jina, the visualisation of omniscience or the concentration on that which transcends form, mentioned for instance in Hemachandra's *Yogashastra*, which 'give the meditator a kind of experimental contact with the "ultimate Self" (*paramatman*)', an experience which, Jaini hastens to add, is 'not equivalent to that of *siddhahood*' itself.<sup>101</sup> J.E. Cort also noticed that Murtipujak Jains in Gujarat often blur 'the distinction between the Jinas and the living mendicants, in the same manner that Vaishnavs oftentimes conflate Vishnu-Krishna and their living gurus'.<sup>102</sup> However, 'the Shvetambar Murtipujak guru remains much more a human being, albeit a special, powerful human being, whereas among the Hindu guru cults the guru tends to assume the status of a deity'.<sup>103</sup>

I would argue that the 'Digambara Mahayana' teachings of Kundakunda, which have greatly influenced a variety of Jaina lay movements, including the Shrimad Rajachandra movement and the Akram Vijnan Marg, cannot entirely be brought under the verdict of Hinduisation.<sup>104</sup> The fact that they could be easily reinterpreted by the layman A.M. Patel from 'theistic', 'devotional' and 'Tantric' perspectives rather seems to reflect the fact that there is not one Jainism made up of a fixed set of discernable 'core beliefs',<sup>105</sup> promoted by identifiable individuals or groups but a plurality of

doctrinal elements and practices that are compiled, combined and labelled in various ways.<sup>106</sup> What is certainly special about any self-consciously 'Jain' movement is the principal emphasis on the soteriological importance of non-injury and the soteriological goal of liberation preached by the Jinas, which is shared by both Kundakunda and the Akram Vijnan movement, although the latter adopts the Samkhya ontology of the passive soul whereas Kundakunda retains the traditional Jaina interpretation of the soul as intrinsically active. In his analysis of Kundakunda's concept of self-realisation, William Johnson writes: 'one can only speculate on the effect of such ideas on the Jaina layperson,' arguing

that any changes must have been largely in terms of expectation rather than practice...such theoretical possibilities as that of a 'Jina-nature' nevertheless make liberation *seem* closer. They are affectively satisfying....<sup>107</sup>

The logical, although not necessary, conclusion Johnson writes, for those who take Kundakunda's mystical philosophy seriously 'would seem to be abandonment of the external forms of Jaina ascetic life in favour of self-realisation, to be achieved by meditation on the pure self. It never quite comes to this'.<sup>108</sup>

This paper has attempted to show that there is now a religious lay movement which works out the implications of Kundakunda's ideas from new angles. It can from different points of view, be interpreted as a form of 'Digambara Mahayana', 'Jaina Samkhya', 'Jaina Vaishnava syncretism' or 'Jaina Tantra'.<sup>109</sup> However, to the participant it does not merely represent an admixture of elements of Buddhist, Vaishnava and canonical, classical or mystical Jaina sources, to the latter of which it is, nevertheless, closely related, but a new doctrinal synthesis, which offers salvation to everyone in the mythical pure land of Mahavideha Kshetra through the grace of Simandhar Svami. Because of the similarities in doctrinal structure, this synthesis can be legitimately labelled 'Jaina Mahayana'.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This essay is based on intermittent field research in London, Ahmedabad, Surat and Mumbai between 1997 and 2001. If not indicated otherwise, all texts and translations have been cited verbatim from the literature of the Akram Vijnan Marg.

1. Walther Schubring, *The Doctrine of the Jainas: Described after the Old Sources*. Translated from the original German by S.B. Shrotri, 2nd English Edition (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1935/2000), 60f.
2. Robert Williams, *Jaina Yoga: A Survey of the Medieval Shravakacaras* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963/1983), xix.
3. Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 88. See Chapter 9 on the issue of Hinduisation.
4. I will not attempt to trace the history of specific doctrinal imports from Mahayana Buddhism into Jainism but rather emphasise the general structural parallels to a new Jain religious movement.
5. If anyone should prefer the label 'Jaina Samkhya' or 'Jaina-Vaishvana syncretism' for the characterisation of the Akram Vijnan Marg, I would not object, since the thrust of my main argument is not affected by this.
6. The Digambara *acharya*, Kundakunda, lived in South India sometime between the first and the eighth century CE.
7. The 'import' of elements of Mahayana, Samkhya and Vedanta philosophies, especially by authors such as Kundakunda who are associated with the Digambara Jain 'mystical' tradition, has been discussed in particular by Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation*. Translated from the original German by Shridhar B. Shrotri (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1925/1999), 504; A. Chakravarti, 'Introduction', in *Acharya Kundakunda's Samayasara, with English Translation and Commentary based upon Amritacandra's Atmakhyat*, 3rd Edition, edited by A. Chakravarti (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1925/1989), 103ff; Adinath Neminath Upadhye, 'Introduction', in *Shri Yogindudeva's Paramatmaprakasha (Paramappapayasu): An Apabhramsha Work on Jaina Mysticism* (Bombay: Sheth Manilal Revashankar Jhaveri, 1937), 29ff; Walther Schubring, 'Kundakunda echt und unecht', in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 107 (1957) 568-74; Ram Jee Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*

- (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1974), 54–57, n. 25; Bansidhar Bhatt, 'Vyavahara-Naya and Nishchaya-Naya in Kundakunda's Works', in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Supplement II* (1974) 283; Bansidhar Bhatt, 'On the Epithet: *nataka* for the *Samayasara* of Kundakunda,' in *Jainism and Prakrit in Ancient and Medieval India*, edited by N.N. Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 432, 455; William J. Johnson, *Harmless Souls: Karmic Bondage and Religious Change in Early Jainism with Special Reference to Umasvati and Kundakunda* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), 45, 180ff, 281–87; Nalini Balbir and Colette Caillat, 'Introduction', in *Yogindu: Lumière de l'Absolu*, traduit de l'apabhramsha et présenté par Nalini Balbir et Colette Caillat, Préface de Bernard Sergent (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1999), 40ff.
8. Heinz Bechert, 'Buddhist Modernism: Present Situation and Current Trends', in *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravada-Buddhismus. Band II. Burma, Kambodscha, Laos, Thailand*. Neuausgabe mit Supplementen sowie Personen- und Sachregister (Göttingen: Seminar für Indologie and Buddhismuskunde, 2000), xxxii.
  9. The student of Mahayana Buddhism will find numerous structural similarities in the following description of the Akram Vijnan Marg, although I refrained from pointing them out one by one, to mention only the significance of wisdom, compassion, devotion and magic in the cult of the *bodhisattva* and the concepts of *Buddha kshetra* and *tathagatagarbha*. There are equally important parallels to Vaishnavism.
  10. Statement of a male devotee of the Akram Vijnan Marg in London.
  11. On Simandhar Svami and Mahavideha see Mohanlal Mehta and K. Rishabh Chandra, compilers, *Prakrit Proper Names, Part II* (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1972), 799; and Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 1992), 255f, n. 65. Simandhar is not only worshipped by the Akram Vijnan Marg. The Murtipujaka Tapagaccha tradition of the *acharyas* Buddhisagar<sup>vi</sup>, Kailassagar<sup>vi</sup>, Kalyansagar and Subodhsagar, inspired the construction of the first modern Simandhar temple in Mahesana in north Gujarat. Simandhar is also worshipped by the Digambar followers of Kanji Svami. References to Simandhar abound in the

post-canonical literature, but until recently he never became the focus of the religious cult, like Mahavira.

12. It seems that the Jaina *tirthankaras* in Mahavideha play a similar role to the Buddhas in the pure lands of Mahayana Buddhism, while A.M. Parel, the Dada Bhagavan, resembles the *bodhisattvas* in Buddhism, who are able to communicate with the Buddhas in the Buddha fields with supernatural means. Although outwardly human, he acts as a self-awakened enlightened being, and thus as a god on earth, for the benefit of others. However, this is not yet recognised in the scholarly literature. See Suzuko Ohira, *Study*, 204f.
13. For conceivable reasons for its creation see Ohira, *Study*, 33, 168. The possibility of visiting the Mahavidehas, where always 4–24 (the number varies from text to text) Jinās live due to the absence of the time cycle, is discussed already in the canon. See *Viyahapannatti* (*Bhagavati*) 25.6.11 (=895b). On Mahavideha and its *arhats* see in particular *Thana* (*Sihanaga*) 3.390, 4.137, 4.315, *Uvavaiya* (*Aupapatika*) 101–116, *Viyahapannatti* 20.8 (=791b); Willibald Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder nach Quellen dargestellt* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1920/1967), 229–42; Schubring, *Doctrine*, 220, 222. The possibility of achieving liberation in Mahavideha is described in canonical narrative texts such as the *Nayadhammakabao* (*Jnatridharmakatha*) I. 1, 19, 13, 16, 19, etc. and the *Uvasagadasao* (*Upasakadasha*) 2, 7, etc.
14. See the commentary on the *Pravachanasara* 1.3–5 by the twelfth century *acharya*, Amritachandra, in Acharya Kundakunda, *Pravachanasara together with the commentary, Tattva-dipika by Amritachandra Suri* (=PS). Vol. 1. Jain Literature Society Series. English translation by Barend Faddegon, edited with an Introduction by F.W. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1935), 3–4; Dundas, *The Jains*, 230.
15. Late-canonical mythological and cosmological texts such as the *Jambudvipaprajñapti* do not refer to the conveyance of omniscience to Bharata through an act of grace. Bharata is invariably characterised as a *pratyeka buddha*, a self-enlightened being. He is however the only householder mentioned in the canon who gained omniscience spontaneously, without first having been initiated as a monk. See Schubring, *Doctrine*, 22, 225; Acharya Hemachandra, *Trishashishalakapurushacharitra* (=TSPC), translated by Helen

- M. Johnson as *The Lives of Sixty-three Illustrious Persons*, Vol. 1, Verse 715–45 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1931), 376–78.
16. A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, edited by Khetsi Narsi Shah, translated by V. Pathak and G. Shah (Bombay: Sacchidananda Sangha, 1983), 11, cf. 70. Compare the original Gujarati text, *Aptavani* (=AV), Vol. 1–12, compiled and edited by Nirubahen Amin (Amadavad: Dada Bhagavan Foundation, 1995–1999), Vol. 1, pp. 9, 57 (the first edition of Vol. 1 was compiled by Kanu Patel and Niru Amin and published on 15 July 1973 by the Jay Sacchidananda Sangha in Bombay).
  17. A.M. Patel, in Khetsi Narsi Shah, 'Foreword', in A.M. Patel, *Science of Liberation*, compiled by Aptaputra Dr Shailesh P. Mehta, edited by K.N. Shah (Bombay: Sacchidananda Sangha, 1995), iv. See the original passage AV I, 6f, and its English rendition in A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 7f.
  18. Rajachandra's original name was Lakshminandan Maheta. Although he rejected traditional *gurus* and his contemporary Jaina mendicants who acquired their charisma only *qua* position, he taught *bhakti* towards a truly enlightened *guru* as the principal path towards salvation. (See Emma Salter, 'Unity and Diversity amongst the followers of Shrimad Rajachandra', in *Jinamanjari* 23, 1 (2001): 32–51.) His emphasis on *atmadharma* derives from the tradition of Kundakunda.
  19. Another word that he often used was *muktabhava*, or freedom from the effects of feelings. See Nirubahen Amin, 'Who is Dada Bhagavan?' in *Dadavani* (Ahmedabad: Dada Bhagwan Foundation, n.d.), 30.
  20. The only self-description I found was in a short discourse (translated?) in Hindi in A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 2nd edition, edited by Nirubahen Amin (Madras: Dada Bhagavan Foundation, 1973/1995):  
*Prashna: Ap jnani kaise hue?*  
*Dada: Yah but natural ho gaya hai. 1958 mem Surat steshan par lakri ki bench par sham ko suryastakal ke samay andar achanak jnan prakash ho gaya. Sare brahmand ko ham ne dar asal vastu ke rup meim dekha. Tab se vah 'jnani' nirantar prakash deta hi rahata hai. Yah natural production hai. Khud prayatna karke prapta karna bahut hi mushkil hai. (215)*
  21. Amin, 'Who is Dada Bhagavan?' 30.

22. A.M. Patel utilises the terminology of Digambara mysticism, which has parallels in the Vedantic tradition, in order to explain the relationship between soul and body; in particular, Kundakunda's distinction between three aspects of the soul: *jiva* (life), *atma* (individual self-consciousness), and *paramatma* (supreme self or God), which is frequently equated with *shuddhatma*. Instead of *atma*, he often uses the term *pratishthi atma* to mark the difference between ego-centred erroneous (*vikalpa*) self-consciousness and the pure self. For *jiva* he often uses the word *bhava*, or consciousness, stating: 'A "jiva" does not know "who am I"' (A.M. Patel, *Aptavani* I, 115, cf. AV I, 94).
23. That is, a stepless or instant experience, not generated through specific religious practices.
24. See Nirubahen Amin, 'Who is "Dada Bhagwan"', in A.M. Patel, *The Essence of All Religion*, edited by Nirubahen Amin (Ahmedabad: Dada Bhagwan Foundation, 2000), iv, cf. Nishpakshapati Trimandir Sankul Mahavideh Tirthadham (=NTS), editor, *Trimandir Paricay* (Surat: Mahavideh Tirthadham, n.d.), 15.
25. Padmanabh, S. Jaini, 'On the *Sarvajnatva* (Omniscience) of Mahavira and the Buddha', *Buddhist Studies in the Honour of I.B. Horner*, edited by L. Cousins et al. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974), 71f; and R.J. Singh, *Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, identified two different interpretations of 'omniscience' in the Jaina tradition, 'namely, omniscience as knowledge of essentials [the eternal self, P.F.] and omniscience as universal knowledge' (56). Kundakunda (*Niyamasara* 158, in *ibid.*, 53) tried to combine both views. Consistent with Kundakunda's views, A.M. Patel claimed to know 'every atom of the soul and the non-soul, separating both of them' (*Aptavani* I, 20, cf. AV I, 16).
26. The best discussion of *samyak darshana* is Chapter 5 of Jaini's *Path of Purification*, 134-56.
27. 'Even a degree of *Keval Gyana*, "we" call *Pragna*...Absolute Omni-Science or *Keval Gyana* is at the completion of 360° full' (A.M. Patel, *Aptavani* I, 272).  
 'A circle has 360°. The English are on 110°, the Muslims on 120°, the Paris on 140° and the Hindus on 220°; and all of them look at reality from their own points of view...But "We" are sitting at the centre-completing full circle of reality and so our vision is perfect. A Gnani [a realised soul] sitting at the centre has the right [true]



- perception of reality...But...“We” also could not digest 4° more and hence “we” are poised on 356° (ibid., 207).
28. ‘Knowing here means realising’ (Singh, *Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 51). See also Johnson, *Harmless Souls*, 238.
  29. A.M. Patel sees the ‘superimposed’ or embodied self as a mixture of ego (I) and attachment (me): *ahamkara (hum) ane mamta (marum)* (AV I, 109, cf. A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 134f).
  30. A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 7, 6. Compare the following analysis of A.M. Patel which uses techniques of reversal that are frequently found in Tantric literature. It is a good example of the way in which ‘the knowledge (sans intellect)’ is applied: ‘Nobody likes to be insulted. But “We” say that it is very “helping”. Respect and insult are the sweet-bitter juice of the ego. Let me tell you, he who insults you has come to squeeze the bitter taste out of you. When somebody said, “You are a fool”, he drew away that juice from you. The ego gets broken in proportion to the amount of juice extracted from it and this is done, without our labour, by someone else...We “Gnani Purusha” are “Abuddha” (sans intellect); but know that the “Gnani” possesses so many powers that he can easily squeeze all the juice of the ego. But you don’t have such powers’ (A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 119, cf. AVI, 97).
  31. Amin, ‘Who is “Dada Bhagavan”,’ v.
  32. Interview with Kanu Patel, 1999.
  33. The word *apta* means also trustworthy, reliable, authoritative. For its use in Jainism, see Jayandra Soni, *The Notion of Apta in Jaina Philosophy: The 1995 Roop Lal Jain Lecture* (University of Toronto, 1996).
  34. Only the *mohaniya*, or delusion-producing *karmas* can be destroyed by the *Jnani*. Thereafter, the aspirants are said to be able to prevent the influx of new *karmas* through the practice of passionlessness. However, the already accumulated *karmas* need to come to fruition naturally. If they are acted out dispassionately they will not bind new *karmas*.
  35. It is believed that in the presence of a Jina or his immediate disciples, arhatship can be achieved within a few births through the annihilation of the *mohaniya karmas* via *kshayaka samyaktva*, insight through destruction, in the eighth *gunasthana*, or stage of purification (Jaini, *Path of Purification*, 146).

36. A doctrinal impossibility, which devotees explain was made possible by the intervention of the gods.
37. For a detailed description and analysis of the rite, see Peter Flügel, *Present Lord*, Forthcoming.
38. Shrimad Rajachandra, *Shrimad Rajachandra*, edited by Manubhai B. Modi, 7th Edition (Agas: Shrimad Rajachandra Ashram, 1951/1995), 679. Translated in U.K. Pungaliya, *Philosophy and Spirituality of Shrimad Rajachandra* (Jaipur: Prakrit Bharati Academy, 1996), 204. For affirmative references to the example of Rajachandra, who is popularly called Kripalu Deva, or merciful god, see A.M. Patel, *Aptavani* I, 207f. (cf. AV I, 97) and *Generation Gap*, 62: 'If you pray to Kripalu Dev (another *Gnani Purush*) or Dada Bhagavan, it will be the same, because they both are the same in the sense of *Atma*. They are physically different in appearance, but in essence the same. Even if you invoke Lord Mahavir, it is one and the same.'
39. A.M. Patel declared that only three *jnanis* ever existed in Bharata (India) since the *nirvana* of the last *tirthankara*: Acharya Kundakunda, Shrimad Rajachandra and himself. He did not regard the neo-Digambara *brahmachari*, Kanji Svami (1889–1980), as a *jnani*. For Kanji Svami, see Dundas, *The Jains*, 227–32.
40. Kundakunda maintained the principle that the soul is active, though it can only transform itself. See Acharya Kundakunda, *Samayasara, with English Translation and Commentary based upon Amritachandra's Atmakhyat* (=SS), 3rd Edition, edited by A. Chakravarti (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1925/1989), verse 340–41, 202f. See also A. Chakravarti, 'Introduction' 108, 157f; and Johnson, *Harmless Souls*, 292–95, on Samkhya and Vedanta influences on Kundakunda's philosophy.
41. Like Rajachandra (SR 238), A.M. Patel was strongly influenced by the Bhagavad Gita, in which, in the words of J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavad Gita in the Mahabharata: Text and Translation* (=BG) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), at least in certain passages, 'a three-order universe (God, *jivas*, *prakriti*) is superimposed on a Samkhya two-order universe (*purushas*, *prakriti*) with the implications not wholly thought through' (169, n. 2, commentary on BG 37).
42. The two-truth theory in a mature form was introduced into Jainism by Kundakunda, *Samayasara*, Verse 7, 14f.

43. Rajachandra writes in his famous text on the six principles (*shatpad*), that it is the activity of the soul itself that binds *karma*: 'atma che', 'te nitya che', 'che karta nijakarma', 'che bhokta', 'vali moksha che', 'moksha upaya sudharma' (*Atmasiddhi* 43, in Rajachandra, *Shrimad Rajachandra*, 538). In other words, 'the soul is the doer (*karta*)'. A.M. Patel, on the other hand, insists that 'the soul is not the doer', it is 'only the knower'. Accordingly, Rajachandra teaches a more traditional interpretation of Jainism, although he also writes: '*karta bhokta karmano, vibhava varte jyamyā; vritti vahi nijabhavamam, thayo akarta tyamyā*' (*Atmasiddhi*, 121, 554): 'In delusion one does the deeds, receives the fruits; but non-doer he is, when he sows the knowledge-seeds, and constantly remains the knower' (*The Self-Realisation, Being a Translation of Atma-Siddhi of Shrimad Rajachandra by Brahmachari Govardhanadasajira*, Agas: Shrimad Rajachandra Ashram, 1985/1994, 87). The principal difference between the teachings of Rajachandra and A.M. Patel is that the latter emphasises exclusively the religious value of the *nishchaya* perspective, whereas Rajachandra combines, often in an unexplicated way, *nishchaya naya* and *vyavahara naya*. The classical Jaina view is that without taking into account the *vyavahara* perspective, religion remains ethically impotent and salvation impossible. For Rajachandra, world-renunciation is ultimately indispensable. On this point, see Pungaliya, *Philosophy and Spirituality of Shrimad Rajachandra*, 285f.
44. A.M. Patel, in N. Amin's 'Introduction' to A.M. Patel, *Generation Gap*, ii.
45. These powers include mind-reading, *manaparyaya jnana*. See A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 90, cf. AV I, 75.
46. *Ibid.*, 204, cf. AV I, 185.
47. *Ibid.*, 119, cf. AV I, 96f.
48. *Ibid.*, 55, cf. AV I, 45f.
49. *Ibid.*, 27, cf. AV I, 21f.
50. *Ibid.*, 58, cf. AV I, 47: '*Jyare akram marg mam jnani purush mathe hath muke to pote purush thai akhi prakriti ne samaji jay.*'
51. *Ibid.*, 21f, cf. AV I, 15f.
52. God is, here, the soul and the boss is A.M. Patel, though the statement is deliberately ambiguous.
53. A.M. Patel, *Aptavani I*, 71, cf. AV I, 59.
54. Kundakunda also devaluates scriptural knowledge in favour of

- self-realisation, but he does not mention the possibility of a transfer of self-knowledge.
55. Krishna Kumar Dixit, *Jaina Ontology* (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1971), 133, and Jaini, *Path of Purification*, explained that the common sense use of the term *pratyaksha* for 'ordinary, sense-mediated cognition' is a specific historically development (ibid., 122, n. 44).
  56. A.M. Patel, *Aptavani* I, 72f, cf. AV I, 59f.
  57. Although the term 'astral body' is occasionally used, this is apparently achieved without even utilising the so-called communication body, or *aharaka sharira*. See Schubring, *Doctrine*, 137–39, on the Jaina doctrine of the five bodies. A.M. Patel, *Vartaman Tirthankar Shri Simandhar Svami*, edited by Nirubahen Amin (Chennai: Dada Bhagavan Phaundeshan, 1994), said elsewhere that the grace of Simandhar operates only indirectly through *anumodana*, his empathy (13).
  58. *Hum bijo mahavira chum, em mane atmika shakti vade janayum che* (SR 27, 165f).
  59. Also Kanu Patel. Paul Dundas, 'Somnolent Sutras: Scriptural Commentary in Shvetambra Jainism', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (1996): 82f., also interprets Simandhar as a *tirthankara* of the future, comparable to the future Buddha Maitreya: 'Shvetambara sources suggest that...only goddesses could have immediate access to Simandhara.' S I
  60. The Akram Vijnan Marg distinguishes between final *moksha* and living *moksha*. See Sharadaprasad Ramadevanahalli. See page 2 of <http://www.geocities.com/Atens/Acropolis/7591/gnani.html>. Two other websites contain useful conformation on the Akram Vijnan Marg are: <http://www.dadabhagawan.org> and <http://www.dadashri.org>.
  61. See Jaini, *Path of Purification*, 142f.
  62. In other sources, rebirth after a strict monastic life is presented as the standard method for reaching Mahavideha. See the story of Ambada in the *Uvavaiya Suttam* (*Aupapadika Sutra*) 101–116, which presents Mahavideha without reference to Simandhar Svami, who seems to be a historically later invention.
  63. The problem is that the realisation of old *karma* automatically binds new *karmas* of the same type. It is therefore assumed that the cycle of bondage cannot be interrupted merely by assuming 'a good state'.

- of mind' and waiting for the natural maturation (*udaya*) of *karma*, but only through a slow and painful process of purification of one's old *karmas* (*apurva karana*) through a logical sequence of stages of asceticism and meditation which cause the premature maturation (*udirana*) of *karma* in a controlled way. See Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Die Lehre vom Karma in der Philosophie der Jainas* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1915) 81; and Schubring, *Doctrine*, 325, cf. 178f.
64. The Bhagavad Gita follows the Samkhya view. The following well-known passage must have influenced A.M. Patel: 'At any rate, actions are performed by the three forces of nature, but deluded by self-attribution, one thinks: "I did it!" But he who knows the principles that govern the distribution of those forces and their actions knows that the forces are operating on the forces, and he takes no interest in actions' (BG 3.27–3.33, 83f).
  65. This technique is a major improvement over the schematic rites of repentance (*pratikramana*) which are obligatory for Jaina mendicants. For a detailed analysis of the ethical principles and the rites of purification of the Akram Vijnan Marg, see Flügel, *Present Lord*.
  66. Johnson, *Harmless Souls*, 271, 281f, 293, etc. notes a similar 'eclectic' combination of gnosis and ethics in Kundakunda's *Samayasara*, and argues—pace Schubring, *Kundakunda*, 574, but with B. Bhatt, *Vyavahara-Naya and Nishchaya-Naya in Kundakunda's Works*, 288, who attributes only the gnostic sections to Kundakunda—that the text, whose content appears to be inherently 'contradictory', must be the product of more than one author and compiled with a social purpose in mind (265, 307). A similar theory could obviously not explain A.M. Patel's views.
  67. A.M. Patel, *Who Am I*, edited by Amin, 34.
  68. The idea that self-knowledge is the true form of renunciation, not the renunciation of physical objects, had been stated by Kundakunda (SS 34, translated by Johnson, *Harmless Souls*, 288).
  69. Nirubahen Amin, compiler, *Tirthankar of Today Shree Simandhar Swami*, translated by G.A. Shah (Bombay: Shri Dada Bhagvan Vitarag Trust, 1983), 22.
  70. *Akram Vijnan* 20, August 1999, 35.
  71. The great majority are Patidars, the dominant agricultural caste of Gujarat, who traditionally practice some form of Vaishnavism. Most of them perform the emotive Krishna Bhakti worship of Vallabhacharya's Pushtimarga, the path seeking the grace of God, or

the Svaminarayan tradition of Sahajananda Svami (1781–1830). An excellent ethnography of the Pushimarga is Peter Bennett's *The Path of Grace: Social Organisation and Temple Worship in a Vaishnava Sect* (New Delhi: Hindustan Publications, 1993).

72. Both wings of the Akram Vijnan Marg distinguish today three religious statuses: (1) The spiritual leader, Kanu Patel on Nirubahen Amin, who carries the title *pujya atmajñani*, venerable knower of the soul, and who alone can perform initiations and the rite of knowledge, (2) the group of approximately fifty male and seven to ten female celibate disciples (*brahmachari* or *brahmacharini*), called *aptaputras* or *aptaputris*, or true spiritual sons or daughters of the Dada, the one with the speech of truth (*aptavani*), and (3) the common believers, who, after their initiation, are either called *mumukshus*, seekers for salvation, like the followers of Rajachandra, or *mahatmas*, great souls. The leaders of the local or all-embracing lay associations are distinguished with the title *sanghapati*.
73. The reason for this is that rebirth in Mahavideha Kshetra is believed to be achievable through the creation of a link of mutual indebtedness (*vinanubandha*) with Simandhar generated by devotional practices (A.M. Patel, in Amin, *Tirthankar of Today*, 29f). Because Simandhar is a living *tirthankara* he can indeed, if accessible, enter relationships of reciprocity, in contrast to the liberated 24 Jinas of our world. Simandhar thus plays a similar role in the religious imagination of his devotees as miracle-working Jaina ascetics or the deceased *dada guru devas* of the Kharataragaccha described by Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw in their book *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50, etc.
74. See AV (1995–1999). In contrast to Rajachandra, who explained his teachings mainly in his letters to his closest friends, collected in the volume *Shrimad Rajachandra*, A.M. Patel did not write tracts or letters on religious subjects. His discourses were informal conversations in Gujarati with the participants of his *satsang*. Although he has not attempted to produce a work of systematic theology, his teachings are logically coherent. Only the first volume of his published discourses is available in translation. See A.M. Patel, *Aptavani* I.
75. Natubhai B. Patel, editor, *Svarup Vijnan: Pujya Dada Bhagavan ni Jagatkalyan ni Vani Emna Ja Shabdo mam*, Shreni 2–3 (Mumbai:

Shri Dada Bhagavan Vitarag Trast, 1989). Initially, A.M. Patel did not permit the taking of notes of his discourses, but Natubhai Patel convinced him that otherwise he could not remember much.

76. Apart from the first sentence of part 1, '(1) I bow before the unattached ones (*vitaraṅga*)', the first part of the text is identical with the (Murtipujaka) Jaina *Namaskara Mantra*. However, part 2–3 is idiosyncratic: '(2) Om. I bow before Lord Vasudeva [Krishna]. (3) Om. I bow before Shiva. Hail to the eternal truth, knowledge and bliss [of the pure soul]. In the original: (1) *namo vitaraṅgaya*,... (2) *om namo bhagavate vasudevaya*. (3) *om namo shivaya, jay sacchidananda* (Nirubahen Amin, compiler, *Charan Vidhi*). 2nd Edition (Chennai: Dada Bhagavan Phaundeshaṇ, 1998).
77. A.M. Patel, in *Dadavani*, n.d., 13–16. For a rendering into English, see A.M. Patel, *Ultimate Knowledge*, edited by Rakesh M. Patel (London, 1994), 68–70. The key verse is no. 13: 'The real self is god and therefore I see god in all living beings' (70).
78. A.M. Patel, in *Dadavani*, 18–22. For a rendition into English, see A.M. Patel, *Ultimate Knowledge*, 73–76. The text is a variation on the theme of the five great vows (*mahāvratā*) of the Jains: '(1) He Dada Bhavagan! Give me the infinite inner strength not to hurt, cause someone to hurt, nor instigate anyone to hurt the ego of any living being, even in the slightest extent...' (73).
79. See N. Amin, *Charan Vidhi*.
80. The devotional form of this rite which aims at the creation of a union between the worshipper and the worshipped was almost certainly inspired by Amritachandra's depiction of Kundakunda's legendary yogic travels to Mahavideha in search for inspiration from Simandhar. See Amritachandra, *Tattva-dīpikā*, 3–4.
81. The original Gujarati text of the *mantra* is identical with the first verse of the *Namaskar Vidhi* text as reproduced in footnote 81. Cf. A.M. Patel, *Vartaman Tirthankar Shri Simandhar Svami*, 11.
82. N. Amin, in: N. Amin, *Tirthankar of Today*, 24f.
83. A.M. Patel, *Aptavani* I, 73, cf. AV I, 60.
84. A similar arrangement – the image of the *sadguru* placed in another room underneath the Jina image – can be found at the temple in Agas, the main centre of the Rajachandra cult.
85. Both Nirubahen and Mina (Patel) taped all *satsangs* of this tour, and Mina's tape-recorder went on recording the conversation which took place after the *satsang*. It was later discovered and excerpts printed in

- the magazine *Akram Vijnan*, June–July 1999, 5. (I had the opportunity to listen to a copy of the tape.)
86. In A.M. Patel, *Essence of All Religion*, 51.
  87. NTS, 16.
  88. These statements have been compiled from the author's interviews with Nirubahen Amin.
  89. N. Amin, 'What is your spiritual state after "Gnan Ceremony"?', 30.
  90. Johnson, *Harmless Souls*, 282f has introduced this term.
  91. www. 7.1.1999 (the website does not exist anymore).
  92. The followers of Nirubahen always insist on the special status of Gujarati as the religious language of the Dada.
  93. Author's interview in 1999. However, the following critical report of a participant indicates that Kanu Patel's performance is not much different from Nirubahen's: '*Samyak darshan* cannot be achieved through magical means, but only through self effort. I met Kanubhai Patel and went through one of his sessions. Before shouting "*Hum shuddhatma chum*" everyone was touching Kanubhai's toe to get the power of enlightenment transferred from Simandhar while Kanubhai, who was in touch with Simandhar through *atmasakshatkar*, was muttering a *mantra*. It is impossible to get *samyak darshan* transferred this way. Even asceticism only prepares the ground. Important is only *atmasakshatkar*, experiencing one's own soul' (Interview with Anupam R. Shah, Mumbai).
  94. Comment of an *aptaputra*.
  95. Salter, *Unity and Diversity*, 44–49, observed three methods of tradition-building amongst the followers of Shrimad Rajachandra which she analysed in terms of two types of 'true gurus': (1) present/living *gurus* (*pratyaksha guru*): (a) *guru* lineages, (b) independent *gurus*; and (2) absent/dead *gurus* (*paroksha guru*)—Rajachandra and his immediate disciples. Both the veneration of the independent *gurus* and the absent *gurus*, she writes, are based on Rajachandra's writings and, at least in the latter case, also on his image. As in the case of the Akram Vijnan movement, there are at least two types of *guru* lineages: (a) the line of Rajachandra's personal disciples which terminated with the death of his last disciple (direct contact with the founder: lineage of Agas), and (b) a lineage based on the transmission of a secret *mantra* authenticated by Rajachandra (indirect contact with the founder: lineage of Sayla). On the Kanji Panth see W.J. Johnson, forthcoming.



96. Bennett, *Path of Grace*, 35, sees the initiation *mantra* as the 'lifeblood' of the segmentary lineage structure of the Pushtimargis.
97. Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton University Press, 1988), 55. The authors define Tantra 'by the doctrine that the same observances may yield either material benefits (*bhukti*)—notably power—or salvation (*mukti*)' (56).
98. Schubring, *Doctrine*, emphasised that already Umasvati, the principal author of classical Jain doctrine, managed to 'incorporate the magical faculties' (*iddhi, laddhi, siddhi*) frequently mentioned in the Canon into the system (316). He interprets this as a 'concession made to the popular belief' (*ibid.*).
99. P.S. Jaini, 'The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast', in *Studies in the History of Buddhism*, edited by A.K. Narain (New Delhi: BR Publications, 1980), 88.
100. Jaini, *Path of Purification*, 254. The analytical literature on Jain *bhakti* is still sparse. Lawrence A. Babb, *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 177, *pace*, 93, tends to regard all types of Jaina Bhakti as variations of a 'common South Asian theme'; while Jaini, *Path of Purification*, writes that even though 'the Hindu concept of *ishta* has exerted a certain amount of influence... Jain devotionalism is oriented not towards a chosen deity (*ishta-devata*) but toward an ideal, the attainment of *kevala jnana*; thus reverence is given to all beings who have been or are actively engaged in pursuit of that ideal' (163, cf. 194f). John E. Cort, *Jains in the World: Religions Values and Ideology in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), has emphasised the non-derivative nature of Jaina Bhakti and proposed 'to conceive of *bhakti* as a style of religiosity, one that can be applied to almost any religions content' and suggested the 'term *enthusiasm*... as an alternative gloss' (John E. Cort, 'Singing the Glory of Asceticism: Devotion of Asceticism in Jainism', in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70.4 (2002): 738; while M. Whitney Kelting, *Singing to the Jinas: Jain Laywomen, Mandal Singing and the Negotiation of Jain Devotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 113, emphasises the commitment to 'the right sentiment' and that in fact appeals to the 'grace and compassion of the Jinas are not seen as "un-Jain"' (13). The issue of the absence of the divine in Jainism has been extensively (and controversially) discussed by

- Sinclair Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1915/1984), 289–98.
101. Jaini, *Path of Purification*, 256.
  102. John E. Cort, *Jains in the World*, 114.
  103. Ibid., 116. For a similar verdict see Jaini, *Path of Purification*, 254.
  104. Cf. Schubring, *Kundakunda*, 569, on SS 141–44.
  105. Cf. the *tattvas*, or truths, of classical Jainism.
  106. See the work of Klaus Bruhn on Jaina texts.
  107. Johnson, *Harmless Souls*, 282f. They are certainly also cognitively satisfying for the believer.
  108. Johnson, 'The Religious Function of Jaina Philosophy: *Anekantavada* Reconsidered', in *Religion* 25 (1995): 47.
  109. References to the scant literature on Tantric practices in Jainism can be found in the David G. White (ed.). *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).