

Jainism, Dharma, and Environmental Ethics

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Environmentalism is comparable to a child that only recently learned to walk. Ecospiritualities of different kinds seem to be the invisible backbone of the growth of this child. – Sigurd Bergmann¹

INTRODUCTION

Scholars such as Sigurd Bergmann have noted that each tradition is uniquely linked to its environment and it is best to try to look into native tradition for the ways each tradition or lineage absorbs the environment around it. On the other hand, scholars such as John Cort have raised doubts about linking environmentalism with religious traditions such as Jainism.² Given the absence of a formal category of environmental ethics in Jainism, this paper will explore Jainism's historical relationship to environmental ethics. I will also compare Jainist perspectives on the consumption of natural resources with other lifestyles. From the few examples of Jain "environmentalism" I also seek to redefine the categories such as "religion" and "environmental ethics," especially as they are applied to the non-Western parts of the world such as the Jains in India.

Scholars of environmental ethics and Indic traditions have differentiated two models of environmental awareness for India: the "devotional model" and the "renouncer model."³ These two models are based on a long-standing dichotomy between the householders and ascetics.⁴ Householders perform devotional and ritualistic activities whereas ascetics perform austere practices. My fieldwork with the rural communities of Rajasthan and Gujarat suggests that their practices tend to be devotional rather than ascetic. To be sure, the devotional Indians do not reject ascetics. They continue to attend discourses by ascetics and pay their respect to them but their own practices largely consist of daily rituals, puja, at home and at temples.⁵ Fasting is another common practice performed by Indians. While lay Hindus would eat fruits and vegetables in their fasts, lay Jains avoid water and all

1 Bergmann, Sigurd. *Ecotheology*, Volume 11.3, September 2006.

2 Cort, John. "Green Jainism? Notes and Queries toward a Possible Jain Environment Ethic" in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

3 Nelson, Lance. *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

4 Jain, Pankaj. Chapter, "Householders and Renouncers, The Holistic Combination in Indian Thought" in *Studies in Vedanta: Essays in Honor of S. S. Rama Rao Pappu*, edited by P. George Victor and V.V.S. Saibaba, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2006, pp 165-180.

5 Madan, T. N. *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

kinds of food.⁶ This example indicates an interesting dimension of environmentalism inspired by Indic traditions. The two models of devotional and ascetic actually lead us into a dichotomy of the Hindu traditions and the Jain traditions. As we saw, the majority of Hindu practitioners follow devotion in their daily rituals, and extending our discussion to Jain laity, we find that Jain lay practitioners come much closer to the austere practices of ascetics. Jain role models are their Tirthankaras who had renounced all their belongings including their clothing to perform the toughest austerities possible. Even the temple-going Jains know that the Jain ideal is to renounce householder life and to follow the path of their role models such as Mahavira, other Tirthankaras and the contemporary monks and nuns.⁷ The Jain ideal is to attain Moksha by renouncing worldly life, whereas for most Hindus, especially the followers of Vallabha and Ramanuja, the ideal is to become perfect devotee or attain Moksha by practicing their routine householder lives.

Naturally, scholars of Jain environmental ethics, such as Christopher Chapple, have advocated the ascetic model for environmental ethics in their writings, while scholars of Hindu environmental ethics, such as Vasudha Narayanan and David Haberman, have emphasized the devotional model. I suggest that both these models can contribute for preserving the ecology of India. While the ascetic model can help reduce the over-exploitation of natural resources by limiting one's desire for more luxuries, the devotional model can help restore natural resources to their original beauty and harmony. The ascetic model can be prescribed for people of higher classes and developed societies, those who continue to plunder the planet for their extravagant consumption. While describing American society, Diana Eck posted this on the *Washington Post* blog (December 14, 2006), echoing Gandhi's prophetic words, "The earth has enough for one's need but not for one's greed."

Is it a moral good to consume far more than our share of non-renewable energy resources, creating for us a standard of living that does not know the meaning of the word "enough" and that acquiesces in a world of unconscionable economic disparities?

Turning to the ascetic model, Chapple has advocated that non-violence to animals, trees, and self, combined with non-possessiveness, can result in ecological awareness:⁸

[T]he solutions that Gandhi proposed to counter the ills of colonialism can also be put into effect to redress this new and ultimately deleterious situation. The observance of nonviolence, coupled with

6 Jaini, Padmanabh S. *The Jaina Path of Purification*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 157-185.

7 Valley, Anne. *Guardians of the Transcendent: Ethnography of a Jain Ascetic Community*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002b.

8 Chapple, Christopher Key. *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993, p. 73.

a commitment to minimize consumption of natural resources, can contribute to restoring and maintaining an ecological balance.

Chapple notes Gandhi as an example who limited his possessions and “vital needs” and thus can serve as an inspiration for environmental ethics. According to Chapple, Gandhi and others who follow the ascetic and yogic values such as truth, non-stealing, non-possession, celibacy, and non-violence, serve as role models for limiting the consumption and thus reducing the burden on ecology.⁹ Vinay Lal and other have also put forward Gandhi as “too deep” even for “deep ecology.”¹⁰ What Lal means is that Gandhi serves as a role model of practicing an environmentalism that is much beyond what “deep ecology” presents in its philosophy. Chapple also notes that Jains, following their ascetic values, have exerted an active social conscience.¹¹

They successfully convinced the first Buddhist monks to cease their wanderings during the rainy season, to avoid harm to the many insects and plants that sprout during the monsoons. The Jaina community has developed and implemented lay codes for assuring an integration of nonviolent values into the workplace. Jains have lobbied against nuclear weaponry. The head of the Terapanthi Shvetambara sect, Acharya Tulsi, took a public stance on numerous issues.

Against Lance Nelson’s questioning of world-negating renouncer model, Eliot Deutsch observes,¹² “Paradoxically, when nature is seen to be valueless in the most radical way, it can be made valuable with us in creative play.” Chapple’s observations about the Jain community seem to match with Deutsch’s argument that the practitioners of the ascetic traditions can also be proactive about the ecological concerns.

Christopher Chapple recognized the dichotomy of devotional or world-affirming models and ascetic or world-denying models of Indic traditions and sought to see an underlying common theme in both in this way:¹³

One model of Hindu spirituality encourages physicality through yoga practices that enhance the health of the body and the vitality of the senses. Other spiritual paths (such as Jainism) advocate renunciation of all sensual attachments to the world. However, even within the

9 Ibid, p. 71.

10 Lal, Vinay, “Too Deep for Deep Ecology” in *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*, eds. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

11 Martin, Nancy M., and Joseph Runzo (eds.). *Ethics in the World Religions*. Oxford: One-world, 2001.

12 Deutsch, E. “A Metaphysical Grounding for Natural Reverence, East-West,” in J. B. Callicott and R. Ames (eds.) *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989, p. 264.

13 Chapple, Christopher Key. “Hinduism, Jainism, and Ecology” in *Earth Ethics*, vol. 10, no. 1, Fall 1998.

paths that relegate worldly concerns to a status of secondary importance, the doctrine of dharma emphasizes a need to act ‘for the sake of the good of the world.’ Particularly in regard to such issues as the building of dams in the Narmada River Valley, this requires taking into account social ecology or the need to integrate environmental policy with the daily needs of tribal and other marginalized peoples.

Following Chapple’s attempt to transcend the dichotomy of devotional and ascetic models, I want to extend the notion of dharma further by combining religion, ethics, and ecology. One of the fundamental problems in studying or re-searching Indic traditions is the search for Western categories of knowledge within them. Scholars have long wrestled with various Western categories such as religion, ethics, theology, and history and their Indic equivalents. Gerald Larson wrote about the need to apply Indic categories of knowledge to the study of India instead of looking for Western categories.¹⁴ McKim Marriott’s ethnosociology of India is rooted on the same philosophical problem:¹⁵

It is an anomalous fact that the social sciences used in India today have developed from thought about Western rather than Indian cultural realities. As a result, although they pretend to universal applicability, the Western sciences often do not recognize and therefore cannot deal with the questions to which many Indian institutions are answers.

Elsewhere Marriott notes that the Western history has separated various domains of knowledge such as religion, psychology, sociology, anthropology (and if I may add, ethics and ecology), but the scholars should not assume that the non-Western cultures would also wish to divide them. Following Marriott, I propose not to see environmentalism, ethics, or theology as separate categories in Indic traditions, and suggest that ethics, ecology, and theology are all intertwined in Indic traditions as exemplified by various texts, recent movements, and my ethnographic encounters. I am positing this intertwined relationship in a “dharmic” framework rather than “religious” one in order to stress the integration of ethics and theology in dharma, or to also avoid some specific incorrect connotation conveyed by the western term religious.¹⁶ Vijaya Nagarajan extends Karl Polanyi’s understanding of embedded economies to that of embedded ecologies:¹⁷

14 Larson, Gerald. 2004. “A Beautiful Sunset...Mistaken for Dawn,’ Some Reflections on Religious Studies, India Studies, and the Modern University,” in *Journal of American Academy of Religion* (72/4), p. 1003-1020.

15 Marriott, McKim. *India Through Hindu Categories* (Ed.). New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, p. 1.

16 Although this is not how everyone in the West sees it and the categories in the Western academy result less from a deliberate separation, than from a problem in doctoral studies which rewards expertise in highly focused research areas. And recently, Interdisciplinary studies are on the rise thus diluting the hard-wired categories of the past.

17 Nagarajan, Vijaya. “Embedded Ecology,” in *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, ed. Lance Nelson. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998, pp. 165-195.

The prime reason for the absence of any concept of ecology is the difficulty of identifying ecological processes under conditions where they are embedded in nonecological institutions. Ecological notions, beliefs, and practices are embedded in cultural forms, particularly in religious and aesthetic practices and institutions.

I would like to extend this “embedded” notion further by combining ethics, ecology, and theology with an overarching term “dharma” in which they are intertwined due to its varied interpretations. While it is true that environmentalism as a category does not exist in Indic traditions, it is equally true that the dharmic Indic traditions have helped sustain the Indian ecology for several millennia by inspiring Indians to limit their needs. One of my students put it succinctly:

What sets humans above beasts is their ability to cease or control animal urges. Few animals can control eating, refuse mating, or censure diet. This makes ascetics, fasting, celibacy, and vegetarianism (all important Jain teachings and practices) fascinating to me (though not in my practice) and it is India that is the first place all these things occurred. This makes me think India may be the birth place of humanity.

Asceticism, fasting, and celibacy are practiced by all Jain ascetics. Similarly, the main diet of majority of Jains (and Hindus) largely consists of rice, wheat, pulses, and vegetables. Even those Indians who are classified as “non-vegetarians” depend largely on vegetarian food as the chief components of their diet while egg, meat, and fish are consumed occasionally. In 2002, India’s meat consumption was 5,456,264 metric tons, much less compared to other major meat consuming regions.¹⁸

This shows that even after the advent of modernity and globalization Indians have successfully preserved their vegetarian habits that were laid down by their dharmic traditions several millennia ago. Interestingly, meat eating is now linked to global warming. In a groundbreaking 2006 report, the United Nations said that raising animals for food generates more greenhouse gases than all the cars and trucks in the world combined. Senior U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization official Henning Steinfeld reported that the meat industry is “one of the most significant contributors to today’s most serious environmental problems.” On the one hand, we find a long tradition of avoiding meat in Indian dietary habits and on the other hand, the latest reports from UN declare that the meat eating is one of the main reasons for global warming. Even after Western media¹⁹ reported about the

18 In the same year, the consumption of meat in different parts of the world in Metric Tons was as follows: China - 67,798,988, Europe - 53,996,792, North American - 39,716,290, South America - 24,873,257, Middle Eastern and North Africa - 9,524,500 and Central America and Caribbean - 8,179,695. See: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FAOSTAT on-line statistical service (FAO, Rome, 2004).

19 Such as *CNN*, *Fox News*, *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *Guardian* (UK), and *Telegraph* (UK). See for example, “Meat Guzzler” in *New York Times*, January 28, 2008.

connection of meat eating with global warming, leading environmentalists such as Al Gore, who received the Nobel Prize for his work in this regard, failed to take any notice of meat consumption in the food habits of Western society.²⁰

Even such clear evidences have so far been ignored by the Western society in general and the environmentalists, such as Gore, in particular. Thomas Friedman, a leading *New York Times* columnist noted this and still rejected any changes needed in the Western lifestyle even while demanding the “greener” initiatives from the US government in a piece from April 15, 2007. This Western dichotomy between expecting the “environmentalist” initiatives from the governments and businesses without changing personal lifestyles was the subject of the conclusion of Ramachandra Guha’s book with an appropriate title, “How much should a person consume?” Guha observes that the Western society consists of 20 percent of the world but consumes about 80 percent of the production of the world. The rest of the world consisting of the 80 percent of the world population consumes only about 20 percent of the production of the world. Guha agrees with conservationist Ashish Kothari and criticizes the “hypocrisy” of the developed world:²¹

It is, *the allegedly civilized*, who have decimated forests and the wildlife that previously sustained both tiger and tribal. With rifles and quest for trophies, [they] first hunted wild species to extinction; now [they] disguise [themselves] as conservationists and complain that adivasis are getting in the way. The real ‘population problem’ is in America, where the birth of one child has the same impact on the global environment as the birth of about seventy Indonesian children. Worse, the birth of an American dog or cat was the ecological equivalent of the birth of a dozen Bangladeshi children.

With the social activism based on the dharmic traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism, inspired and founded by the Buddha and Mahavira, Indian society had successfully moved away from animal sacrifices and killings prevalent in the Vedic era to lifestyles largely based on vegetarianism. Jainism classifies the various living beings under different grades according to their development and sense faculties. Living beings fall under two broad classes, *trasa* or mobile and *sthavara* or immobile. *Trasa* beings are those that possess two, three, four, and five sense organs. *Sthavara* beings are those that have only one sense organ of touch, and they are of five kinds, earth-bodied, water-bodied, fire-bodied, air-bodied, and vegetables. A Jain monk is supposed to avoid injury to all *trasa* and *sthavara* beings. A Jain householder is also supposed to avoid injury to *trasa* beings and is supposed to minimize injury to *sthavara* beings. Therefore, Jain householders avoid eating meat and those vegetables that are roots or trunks of the plants. They also avoid eating fruits and vegetables that may contain living organism such as fig and

20 http://blog.peta.org/archives/al_gore/ (viewed on December 20, 2007)

21 Guha, Ramachandra. *How Much Should a Person Consume? Environmentalism in India and the United States*. Berkeley: University of California, 2006, p. 149.

honey. This emphasis on vegetarianism can be linked with the less meat consumption of Indian society as I showed above.

Ironically, scholars seem to have largely ignored vegetarianism as one of the most important dharmic lessons inspired by Indic tradition that can greatly help reduce global warming. We can similarly note others such as Aparigraha (non-accumulation) which have continued to be an “obstacle” against the consumerist revolution in India. Only in 1990s, finally, India also started embracing Western capitalist model of economy and now market forces are fast transcending the proverbial “Hindu rate of economic growth.” Until this Western market invasion, this rate of growth might have been both the result and the reason for limited Indian spending for consumer goods.²²

Valmik Thapar connects Indian traditions to ecology in this way,

[A]fter nearly fifty years of independence, the Indian subcontinent can still be justly proud of its enormously varied flora and fauna. In India alone, 13000 species of flowering plants and 65000 species of fauna have been recorded, including 2000 fish, 1200 birds, and 340 mammals. There are numerous species of reptiles and amphibians, including turtles, crocodiles and over a hundred species of frogs and toads. India is also the only place in the world that boasts both lions and tigers. While the extremes of climate and habitat explain the enormous diversity of life, they do not explain how this wealth of flora and fauna has managed to survive in such an immensely crowded continent. That despite all the pressures, the diversity of both flora and fauna is the richest in the world. The answer lies, in part at least, in the special relationship that the people of the subcontinent had, and continue to have, with the other living creatures that share their land. This special relationship is inextricably linked to religion. Despite the influx of cable television and Western consumerism, religion is still very important in rural life...Hinduism treats many animals and birds with respect...Reverence for things natural also extends to trees and plants.²³

Thapar, like most Indians who speak and write in English, uses the word “religion” to describe rural way of life but what he is really describing is the daily “way of life” which includes ethics, morality, duties, law, and “religion.” In my observations, I found that Indians describe these different categories by their common vernacular term dharma or dharam. In the following section, I note some examples of Jain environmental activism that are a reflection of their dharma. I

22 “Story, Ritual, and Environment in Rajasthan,” in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree*, ed. Philip P. Arnold and Ann Grodzins Gold. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.

23 Thapar, Valmik. *Land of the Tiger, A Natural History of the Indian Subcontinent*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. (Emphasis added)

also note the potential Jain interaction and influence with the Bishnoi community that was founded in the fifteenth century Rajasthan.

BISHNOI COMMUNITY AND JAINISM

Although the Bishnoi community considers itself a caste-group within the larger Hindu community, several of its social and cultural practices match with Jain communities. Bishnoi Guru Jambheshvara in the fifteenth century Rajasthan was probably the first Indian guru to emphasize ecological awareness in his teachings. In his 29 rules, he specifically prohibited harming trees or animals and encouraged vegetarianism.²⁴ Of his 29 rules, eight rules were prescribed to preserve and encourage animal husbandry. These include non-sterilization of bulls and keeping the male goats in a sanctuary, prohibition against killing the animals and the cutting down of any type of green trees and providing protection to all life forms. The followers are even directed to see that the firewood is devoid of small insects before burning it in their hearths. The strong emphasis of Jambheshvara and his followers on revering the animals and trees resemble Hindu rituals and Jain emphasis on non-violence.

Although Jambheshvara prohibited keeping goats as pets, he ordained against slaughter of goats and sheep in another verse, *Kinnri tharpi chhali roso*

24 29 Bishnoi Principles [Bish=twenty(20); noi=nine(9)]

1. Not to fell green trees
2. To provide a common shelter for goat/sheep to avoid them being slaughtered in abattoirs
3. Not to have bulls castrated
4. To take early morning bath daily
5. To maintain both external and internal cleanliness and remaining content
6. To meditate twice a day i.e. morning and evening (times when night is being separated from the day)
7. To sing the 's glory and reciting His virtues every evening
8. To offer daily oblation to the holy fire with a heart filled with feelings of welfare, love and devotion
9. Use filtered water, milk and carefully cleaned fuel/ firewood
10. Filter your speech
11. To be forgiving in nature
12. To be compassionate
13. Not to steal
14. Not to revile/ condemn someone
15. Not to tell lies
16. Not to indulge in opprobrium
17. To observe fast and meditate on new-moon night (and the same day)
18. To recite the holy name of Vishnu
19. To be compassionate towards all living beings
20. To kill the non-perishables evil qualities of humans such as lust, greed, anger
21. To partake food cooked by self/ other religious person or one who is pure by heart and work
22. To observe segregation of the mother and newborn for 30 days after delivery
23. To keep woman away from all activities for 5 days during her menstrual periods
24. Not to partake of opium
25. Not to use tobacco and its products
26. Not to partake of cannabis
27. Not to drink liquor
28. Not to eat meat or non-vegetarian dishes
29. Not to use blue colored clothes

kinnri Gadar gai, sool chubhijey karak dubeli to hai jayo jeeva no ghai, which means, “by whose sanction do butchers kill sheep and goats? Since even a prick by a thorn is extremely painful to human beings, is it proper to indulge in those killings? Therefore, these animals should be treated as own kith and kin and should not be harmed in any way.” In another verse, while preaching to another disciple Nathaji, Jambheshvara says, *Chhery bheri adi ko par upkari mann, raksha main tatpar rabey so buddhiman*. That means that goats, sheep, etc., are rendering services to others, and the one who protects them is a wise person. As a rule, following the Holi festival, villagers participate in a public auction to take care of the cattle sanctuary for the next one year.

Based on the similarities of the two non-violent traditions of Jainism and Bishnoi, it is not surprising that a noted conservationist Valmik Thapar called Bishnoi tradition as an “offshoot of Jainism” (1997). In my quest to explore potential relationship between them, I noticed another similarity in the Bishnoi and the Jain traditions. Although the majority of Jains perform rituals in temples with elaborate idols and images, a new sect emerged on the borders of Rajasthan and Gujarat that completely rejected any use of images similar to Jambheshvara’s rejection of idol worship in the Bishnoi tradition during the same time. The new Jain sect was founded by Lonka Shah who was born in Sirohi district in South-West Rajasthan.²⁵ He was born in 1418 and died in 1484 while Jambheshvara was born in 1452 and died in 1537.²⁶ Lonka Shah’s movement to reject idol-worship started in 1452 and became widespread in Rajasthan and Gujarat by 1474. This is indicated by the manuscripts from 1456 that are found in Bikaner and Nagore, towns near the birthplace of Jambheshvara. Like the 29 rules given by Jambheshvara for Bishnois, Lonka Shah’s written work is also listed with numerical titles, “34 Statements,” “Basket of 58 Statements,” and “13 Questions and Their Answers.” It is believed that he had about 400 ascetic disciples and thousands of lay followers. Out of 45 people who took initiation under him simultaneously, Lakhamsiji, Nunaji, Shobhaji, Dungarsiji, and Bhaninji became prominent monastic leaders eventually, established their own sanghas after the death of Lonka Shah, and named them as different branches of Lokagachha. Eventually, one branch became a prominent branch of Sthanakwasi sect called Nagori that developed, in the Nagore town of Rajasthan, the birthplace of Jambheshvara. Given the wandering nature of Sthanakwasi monks and the powerful new movement launched by Lonka Shah, it can be speculated that Jambheshvara may have met one of the followers or disciples of Lonka Shah that led him to develop the Bishnoi code of conduct based on non-ionic rituals and nonviolence towards animals.

In my fieldwork, I visited the Bishnoi cattle shelter institution Shri Jagatguru Jambheshvara Goshala Sanstha, at Mukam. This takes care of about 1335 cows. Their food is brought from Haryana and Punjab. About 8000 to 9000 kilograms of food is fed to them on daily basis. This institution is inspired by Amar That, an animal shelter institution mentioned in one of the verses by Jambheshvara’s dis-

25 Dundas, Paul. *The Jains*. London: Routledge, 2002 [1992].

26 Jain, Sagarmal and Vijay Kumar. *Sthanakwasi Jain Parampara ka Itihasa*. Varanasi: Parshvanatha Vidyapitha, 2003.

ciple Udoji Naina, *Bakra paley that kar, tanni nahin nakho*, which means that the goats should be looked after in sanctuaries and bullocks should not be castrated. Jains have also long supported such institutions in different parts of India and I visited one of such cattle shelter institution that I describe below.

EXAMPLES OF JAIN “ENVIRONMENTALISM”

In my research for Jain environmentalism, I was struck by a unique center for wildlife protection, Shree Sumati Jeev Raksha Kendra located adjacent to the town of Malgaon in Sirohi District.²⁷ This campus is developed by K. P. Sanghvi Group and it comprises a Jain Temple Complex and Animal Welfare Center. The center, established in 1998, takes care of sick, injured, old, retired, homeless, and rescued stray cattle including cows, buffalos, dogs, and donkeys.



Figure: Cattle at Shree Sumati Jeev Raksha Kendra, Rajasthan, India

The Institute has a Goshala (cow-center) that is spread over more than seven million square feet area that takes care of more than five thousand stray cattle. The center employs more than 150 persons to look after the cattle and three veterinary doctors to give medical aid to the cattle. Cow milk is used for rituals at the adjacent temple complex and the garden in the shelter premises provides flowers for the temple. Mr. Ramavtar Aggarwal, secretary of the All India Goshala Federation said that there are more than 3000 Goshalas in India and Sumati Center at Pavapuri is one of the biggest in India.²⁸ Another organization called

²⁷ http://www.pavapuri.com/kendra_intro.htm (accessed on June 15, 2007))

²⁸ According to the center’s mission, “Animals in this shelter get all the love and affection and are taken care of, like a mother who loves and cares for her children selflessly and teaches them all about their traditions. The center has statues of divine beings that provide the animals with spiritual ambience. The sacred Jain Navkar Mantra is played throughout the day in the shelter that transforms

Love4Cow maintains a nationwide list of Goshalas maintained by Jains (and Hindus) and lists more than 670 Goshalas in Rajasthan alone. Though not trained as a scholar of Jain tradition, Michael Tobias recognized a commonality between his own environmental interests and the Jain worldview.²⁹ Similar such efforts by Hindu and Jain community are widely reported from many places in India.³⁰ *The Hindu* reported a Jain/Hindu Goshala Satyam Shivam Sundaram Gaunivas at Gaganpahad near Hyderabad (July 5, 2005). Considered South India's biggest cow shelter and managed by the Shiv Mandir Goshala set up by jeweler-turned-philanthropist, Dharam Raj Ranka, the shelter houses over two thousand cows rescued from slaughterhouses in addition to three hundred and two hundred bulls. Justice Gumanlal Lodha, a Jain ex-lawmaker from Rajasthan, during his tenure as the chairperson of the National Commission on Cattle, published a detailed report to ban cow slaughter in India and submitted to the Union Government of India. The report, in four volumes, called for stringent laws to protect the cow and its progeny in the interest of India's rural economy. Lodha moved close to a national ban on cow slaughter in India, although most states except Kerala have already banned it long ago. However, this political activism is also interpreted as pseudo-environmentalism since it is tied with a bigger motive of luring the "Hindu" vote-banks in the electoral politics of Indian democracy.

Another dimension of Jain principles in practice is evident at the Jain Bird Hospital in Delhi at the Digambar Jain Temple, opposite Red Fort near Chandni Chowk, where the patients admitted are only birds, preferably the vegetarian ones. It was established by Prachin Shri Aggarwal Digambar Jain Panchayat in 1956 on the Jain principle of aversion to killing. The hospital has separate wards in form of cages for different species like sparrows, parrots, domestic fowls, and pigeons. It also has a research laboratory and even an intensive care unit for its serious patients. The nearby people, especially the Jain merchants, bring the birds for treatment that are usually wounded by fowlers, ceiling fans or by other means. The hospital admits a maximum of sixty injured birds on a day and about 15000 in a year. They are treated, bathed, and fed a nutritious diet for their fast recovery. Later, the birds are set free from the hospital's terrace overlooking the Red Fort. To show yet another example of Jains protecting the animals, in 1969, Goa's largest wildlife sanctuary was named after Mahavira. The Governor at the time was a Jain and he suggested the name. In 1982, the local Jains donated 12.5 million rupees for the development of the Sanctuary.³¹

it into a center of divine presence. Food for the cattle is prepared according to the Jain beliefs of sanctity and purity. This includes green grass, hay, nutritious cattle food, oil, jaggary, invigorating sweets, pulses, etc. The center also maintains a bird shelter where birds are taken care of."

29 Tobias, Michael. *Life Force: The World of Jainism*. Fremont: Asian Humanities Press, 1991.

30 Lodrick, Deryck O. *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places: Origins and Survivals of Animal Homes in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

31 I thank Shonil Bhagwat at the Oxford Long-Term Ecology Laboratory, for this information (personal communication).

Another relatively newer orchard, “Tapovan Ashram,” is in the denuded forests and hill region of the Aravallis at Naya Kheda village in Udaipur district.³² This is a lush green garden of about 15 acres of land with a high water table and exotic herbs and fruits. This began as an experiment by a Jain horticulturist Ratan Chand Mehta in 1991. He harvested the rainwater from the nearby hills and soon the water table of that small area was higher than the surrounding areas. The farming here is titled “Bhagwan Bharose Mast Kheti” (God Blessed Bio Diverse Farming). I asked Mehta about his inspiration for the Ashram (Personal communication June 17, 2007). He emphasized his Jain background and mentioned the Acharanga Sutra, one of the earliest text that recorded Mahāvira’s teachings. Christopher Chapple also cites Acharanga Sutra (2.4.2.11 – 12) in which Mahavira tells his disciples to recognize the inherent value of trees and to turn their thoughts from materiality by reflecting on the greater beauty of sparing a tree from the human exploitation. Sadhvi Shilapi also cites from Acharanga Sutra (1.1.5) to show that Mahavira proclaims that anyone who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, water, and vegetation disregards his own existence that is intrinsically bound up with them.³³

Continuing my description of the environmentalism of Jain organizations, JAINA (an umbrella organization of several Jain associations in North America) has a Jivadaya Committee (Committee for the Compassion for all Beings) that has selected about a dozen animal shelter organizations in India. JAINA encourages its Jain members to send donations to these organizations to help fund animal shelter and protection activities in India. In 2003, Nitin Talsania, an active member of

32 www.tapovanashram.com (accessed on June 15, 2007) “It is essentially based on the Mahayana philosophy of “nothingness” of Gautam Buddha. It corresponds closely to nature and the laws of nature such as the unity of everything, co-existence, self-regulation and regeneration, interdependence of each entity, and is a definite shift from object to relationships. It dwells on the basic premise that the universe is a living co-existential creative experience where the smallest micro-organism (microcosm) is intricately interwoven with the entire cosmos (Cosmo-vision) and that the systems thinking is contextual environmental thinking. Pure natural farming albeit God blessed Bio-diverse farming which we have preferred to call “Bhagwan Bharose Mast Kheti” (or non-farming) is deeply articulated in the ways of living and farming of the tribal community of the south Rajasthan of Aravallis Hill region. It is totally dependent on the blessings of God in terms of the monsoon rains, all powerful source of energy, the sunshine, unpolluted free air and the bio-diverse plant and animal world which has a tremendous capacity to adapt itself to all kinds of environmental conditions. It is “Mast” because there is no worry as to the yield, income, or profit per acre of land or per person deflecting the modern concepts of growth or progress. A mixed pattern of tree, shrub and herb species, one over the other, can take care of the food, fuel, fiber, fodder, resin, gum, medicinal herbs, for abundant health and wealth needed for a frugal and self-fulfilling living. The main features of “Bhagwan Bharose Mast” farming are minimal human intervention, least land manipulation, zero or (minimum) tillage, least use of machine and fossil fuel energy, no use of chemical fertilizers, no use of chemical pesticides (except herbal formulations), herbicides etc., rain fed, life saving irrigation may sometimes be needed, multi-tier bio-diverse mixed farming including true, shrub and herb species to meet the diverse needs of food, fiber, fuel, oils, gums and medicinal plants, being purely natural, strategies based on watershed area delineation converging in common rain water outlet following soil and water conservation, recharge and recycling techniques, developing institutional, human and material resources to restore the human disturbed eco-system to bring it to earlier pristine forms.”

33 Chapple, Christopher Key. *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 160.

several JAINA committees in New Jersey, helped the Voith Family of Angelica, New York in their struggle to raise cows in accordance with their Hindu practice.³⁴ Similarly, the Jain Center of Southern California joined hands with “The Purple Cow and Friends,” a nonprofit organization near San Diego. Its director Ms. Tiffany and her coworkers collected fruits, vegetables and grain from local farmers and grocery stores for more than 100 animals (including cows, dogs, pigs, goats, horses, and others birds).³⁵

In July 2007 at the fourteenth biennial JAINA convention in New Jersey, I met Saurabh Dalal, president of the Vegetarian Society of the District of Columbia, the oldest vegetarian society in the USA. Inspired by his Jain background of Ahimsa, non-violence, Saurabh has been active in spreading the awareness about the connection between meat based diet and global warming. I attended his talk at the convention in which he showed several interesting facts. A vegetarian diet requires only 10% of the land that the standard meat-based diet does while a vegan diet would require only 5% of the same land. Similarly, by becoming vegan, one can save 3900 gallons of water.³⁶ I also met a Jain activist, Pravin K. Shah, who became a strict vegan after his visit to a dairy where he saw the cruel treatment to the cattle there. Anne Valley argues that Jains in the North American diaspora have made a shift from the conservative and orthodox Jain community in India.³⁷ She notes that most Jains in India are not so active in social and ecological areas, whereas the “diaspora” Jains, especially the second-generation youth, are active in interfaith and animal welfare forums and groups. However, my observations from the fieldwork in India do not match her conclusions. In my case studies of animal welfare and protection, the Jain community has taken an active role together with other communities of India. This also matches with the observation of Peter Flugel who notes the “sociocentric” role of Jain community in India.³⁸

Evidently, Jain history is full of examples, legends, and tales of protecting and avoiding injury to plants, animals, and environment in general.³⁹ Jains believe that the nineteenth Jain Tirthankara Mallinatha had taken the responsibility of protecting the forests. A prominent Jain monk during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar, Hiravijaya Suri was invited by the royal court through the governor

34 http://www.nomoreinjustice.org/media_articles_cowscantcomehome.htm (accessed on May 3, 2007)

35 <http://www.jainworld.com/society/jainevents/GJE2003/Purple%20Cow%20Animal%20shelter.htm> (accessed on May 5, 2007)

36 Such arguments seem to be vindicated by the latest study by the National Institute of Livestock and Grassland Science in Tsukuba, Japan (Telegraph, UK, July 23, 2007). Similar conclusions were reached by Gidon Eshel and Pamela Martin, assistant s of geophysics at the University of Chicago (ABC News April 19, 2006).

37 Valley, Anne. “From Liberation to Ecology: Ethical Discourses among Orthodox and Diaspora Jains,” in Christopher Key Chapple, ed., *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

38 Flugel, Peter. “Review of *Jainism and Ecology: Non-Violence in the Web of Life*, edited by Christopher Key Chapple.” *Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 2. (2005), 201.

39 Chapple, Christopher Key. “Jainism and Nonviolence” in *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, edited by Daniel Smith-Christopher. Boston: Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, 1998. Pp. 13-24.

of Gujarat. Following the Jain tradition, Hiravijaya Suri walked on foot to Fatehapur Sikari where he first met the Muslim scholar Abul Fazal and then Akbar. He influenced Akbar to issue several ordinances in 1592 CE to prohibit animal-slaughter for six months, to present the Shatrunjaya temple to Jain authorities, to stop confiscating the property of a dead person, to stop taxes against non-Muslims, and to liberate the prisoners. Even fishing was prohibited in Fatehapur Sikari during his time. This is evident from an edict of 1593 CE found at the eastern entrance-hall of Adinatha temple at Shatrunjaya written by Hemavijay. Akbar himself also refrained from eating meat for a certain period of the year.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that there are several examples of Jains actively protecting the plants, animals, birds, and environment in general. Still, it is true that like other traditional societies, Jains (and other Indians) are yet to wake up to the problems of environmental disasters. Most sects, castes, and other traditional Indian groups continue to practice their dharmic rituals without being mindful of the environmental connections. Yet, despite being the second most populated country on the planet, India continues to boast of the richest flora and fauna on the planet, the bio-diversity that has been preserved for thousands of years as noted by Thapar above.

Unless the ecological awareness is translated into a dharmic message, it will remain a distant voice largely limited to armchair exercises in political or scholarly discussions. For the majority of Indians who speak, think, and read in vernacular frameworks, terms such as “global warming” or “biodiversity” have limited appeal and thus the rhetoric based on these terms will have limited appeal. The sooner these textual and intellectual exercises can become widespread practical movements, the better for our endangered planet. After all, what has sustained our planet for thousands of years is sustainable need-based usage of natural resources, not the greedy exploitation that we have done in the last few centuries in our drive for modern luxuries and comforts.⁴⁰ Historically, the population and consumption

⁴⁰ Even with a rapid growth in its population and a growing economy, India remains as one of the world's top twelve megadiversity countries with a rich variety of biological community types that includes coral reefs and alpine meadows, rain forests and desert scrub (McNeely et al., 1990). India also has the world's largest environmental movement with about 1000 NGOs (Peritore 1993, Chapple 2000). According to the biennial State of Forest Report published by Indian Government in 2001, the forest cover increased by 2000 square kilometers. The increase was in both categories, dense forest (40% canopy) and open forest (10 to 40% canopy). Also for the first time, the forest cover crossed 20% (up from 19.39 in 1999 and 19.27 in 1997). As per the 2003 report of the Forest Survey of India, India's total forest cover rose by 2,800 square kilometers between 2001 and 2003. There is a net increase of 21,000 square kilometers. Forest and trees cover 23.68% of the area, or over 778,000 square kilometers - a net increase of 21,000 square kilometers, 0.65% more in area (Times of India July 21, 2005). This confirms UN's World Forest Report in 1999 that reported that India was the only developing country where forest cover was increasing. However, according to the FSI report released on February 12, 2008, about 700 square kilometers of forest cover was lost between 2003 and 2005 and 20.6 % of India's geographical area is under forest. Although some of this data has been disputed (Paul Robbins, personal communication), there is evidence that the rate of decline in tree cover in India has slowed significantly since the mid-1980s (Saxena 1990). Rajasthan State has registered an increase of 3478 square kilometers of forest cover during the assessment period between 1987 and 2001.

of natural resources of Asian civilizations have always been many times more than Western civilizations and yet it is the Westernized notion of progress in last few centuries that has endangered our planet.⁴¹ Unless we reform and expand our idea of progress by mixing ideas and concepts from the local communities, all ecological rhetoric will remain insignificant for the traditional communities around the world.

In addition, the area of desert in Rajasthan has actually decreased from 1880 to 1980 (Haynes 1998). As a small example, initiatives such as Maiti Ritual have resulted in Uttaranchal now having 67% forest area in contrast to Uttar Pradesh, which has 17.5%. In 1950, Uttaranchal had 58% forest cover, which had dwindled to 36% in 1980. In this ritual, bridegrooms are required to plant trees during the wedding ritual. Around 500 villages practice this ritual as of 2002. See <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/121985>.

⁴¹ Ramachandra Guha, *How Much Should a Person Consume? Environmentalism in India and the United States*. Berkeley: University of California, 2006, p. 5.