

Conference Reports

Jainism and Early Buddhism in the Indian Cultural Context

An International Conference at Lund University
in Honour of Prof. Padmanabh S. Jaini, 4-7 June 1998

Jain Studies have been described as a 'growth industry' in a recent review article. A verdict which seems to be confirmed by the fact that within only thirteen years a fourth interdisciplinary conference on this rather esoteric subject took place in Lund, after earlier meetings in Cambridge (1985), Amherst (1993) and Toronto (1995).¹ The conference was organised by Olle Qvarnström in honour of the retiring Berkeley Professor P.S. Jaini, whose book *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) did much to popularise the study of Jainism in North America.

The study of an ancient canonised religious tradition like Jainism is an arduous task, which ideally requires the knowledge of Prakrit, Sanskrit, modern Indian and European languages, and of the comparative methods of anthropology, sociology, and the history of religions. Not surprisingly only few, if any, scholars have mastered all these disciplines. In fact, until the recent advent of anthropological field studies, philology dominated this field for more than one hundred years and bestowed an air of unreality to a religion which is still practised by 3-4 million South Asians in India and abroad. It was therefore a great advance when - in the spirit of Dumont's agenda - Anthropologists and Indologists met together for the first time in Cambridge (1985) and then in Amherst (1993) and began to read across disciplinary boundaries. The living religion of the Jains could simply no longer be ignored by Indologists, because of the increasing socio-religious presence of diaspora Jains in the UK and North America. They made their voice heard, not least through their concerted efforts to implement courses on Jainism in Western universities, and their increasingly successful attempts to co-opt academics for public events with a strong communal flavour, like the influential international exhibition 'Jain Art from India' in 1995, in order to win public recognition for a tradition which still has to acquire the credentials of a reified 'religion'.

¹ cf. M. Carrithers & C. Humphrey, Eds. 1991: *The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; J. Cort, Ed. 1998: *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Culture in Indian History*. State University of New York; O. Qvarnström & M.K. Wagle, Eds. Forthcoming: *Approaches to Jainism: Philosophy, Logic, Ritual and Symbols*. University of Toronto: Center of South Asian Studies

However, in contrast to Buddhism, there are no western 'Jain' academics to date (with the notable exception of the late Charlotte Krause), and there is thus a certain unease on their part about merging academic and communal enterprises. This might be one of the reasons why at present two types of conferences exist: on the one hand, academic meetings, usually dominated by 'first world' Western and Japanese scholars, and on the other hand, mixed academic cum communal meetings, which are funded by Jain organisations, and usually combine topical contributions from modern Jain monks, community leaders, and academics. The Lund conference was, accordingly, complemented by a Jain-funded congress on Jain Ecology in Boston, July 10-12, 1998. Members of the rare species of the South Asian 'Jain academic' who might easily fit into both categories, like Prof. Jaini himself, often do not participate in conferences outside India (maybe because they are not invited).

However, the conference in Lund was of the first kind. It was special because in respect of Prof. Jaini's contributions to both Jain and Buddhist Studies it brought together Jainologists and Buddhologists. The participants invited came from universities in Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Scandinavia, Thailand, and the United States, but none from India. Their contributions comprised four themes: (1) art, literature, and narrative (Janive Leoshko, Siegfried Lienhard, Minoru Hara, Paul Dundas, Kirsti Wiley, P.S. Jaini, Peter Schalk, William Smith, Alvappillai Veluppillai, Catherine Asher), (2) social and contemporary issues (Marcus Banks, Nalini Balbir, Alan Babb, Torkel Brekke, Peter Flügel, John Cort, Whitney Kelting, John M. Koller), (3) early history (Richard Gombrich, Heinz Bechert, K. Roy Norman, Georg von Simson, Johannes Bronkhorst, Peter Skilling, Prapot, William Johnson), (4) philosophy (Christian Lindtner, Noritoshi Aramaki, Colette Caillat, Jayendra Soni, Christopher Chapple, Koju Sato, Uno Tomoyuki, Eva Torow, Sin Fujinaga). The proceedings of this equally demanding (14 presentations per day) and fascinating program, which cannot be discussed in detail here, will be published in due course by Olle Qvarnström. Suffice it to say that although the convenor of the conference explicitly invited papers comparing Buddhism and Jainism, none of the participants followed his suggestion. Everyone played it safe and stuck to his or her special field of expertise, even though the true value of understanding the numerically insignificant Jain traditions may only emerge in the context of comparative study of the history of South Asian religions. Interesting points for future comparative research were only raised in the short discussions following each paper, which will certainly not be published.

From the point of view of Jain Studies fruitful comparison can only begin once the history, doctrine, ritual and organisation of the main Jain sects have been mapped out. It is to be expected that the core of the scholars who attended the interdisciplinary conference and celebrated Padmanabh Jaini

on various festive occasions, will meet again and shape future collaborations in the field of the comparative study of Jainism along these lines. However, it will be interesting to see to what extent academically educated Jain monks and nuns will be able to participate in this endeavour, and how Jain vested interests and the inevitable politicisation of this once 'purely academic' orientalist field of studies will affect the future production of knowledge.

Peter Flügel

Second International Conference on Yi-Studies, Trier University

Trier/Germany, 19-23 June 1998

"Processes of Social Change, Rising Ethnic Identity, and Ethnicity among the Yi Nationality in China" was the topic of the conference, bringing together more than 40 scholars from China, France, Germany, Japan, Poland, Switzerland, Taiwan and the US. The majority were scholars from among the Yi themselves. Altogether 29 papers were presented. Conference language was Chinese. Parallel to the conference an exhibition on culture and society of the Yi was shown in the library of Trier University. The conference was sponsored by the German Research Association (DFG).

Three topics were covered: (1) Processes of change in various aspects of Yi culture; (2) Effects of economic and social change on Yi society and identity; (3) Mechanisms of protecting identity developed among the Yi people themselves.

Part 1 addressed the issue of ethnic identification and definition. Stevan Harrell (University of Washington) exemplified with the Yala, a group of people in Miyi county (Sichuan), the complexity of the term *minzu* (nationality) in China. The Yala are classified as belonging to the Yi nationality, even though they do not recognize any kinship between themselves and the local Nuosu branch of the Yi, and neither group will intermarry, though they live side by side. They are components of the same *minzu*, but they are two different ethnic groups. Therefore there is a difference between the objective characteristics of a group as fixed by the state (nationality or *minzu*) and the subjective consciousness of that group (ethnic group). Pan Jiao (Central University of Nationalities, Beijing) argued that the ethnoscapes in China seem to have confirmed the thesis that ethnicity is created by the nation-state. Although the diversity within the Yi is tremendous, so-called similarities are arbitrary and the tremendous diversity be-