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Women roles in the Jain tradition

Enthusiastic statement about women in the Jain tradition

The role of women in Jain religion has been very progressive and ennobling on the whole. As mothers they have given birth to Tīrthaṃkaras, as wives they have provided inspiration to their husbands; as individuals they have managed large trade and commerce independently. In the Jain way of life, woman has always for ever been honoured everywhere. Sādhvīs have set an example for the society in matters relating to the ultimate achievement of spiritual progress. The liberation of women, the freedom of women and the advancement of women are integrated in Jain religion. These principles are sure to guide and lead the people in the ensuing decades towards the new path of attainment of the liberty of women’

Jainism as ‘indigenous feminism’ ?

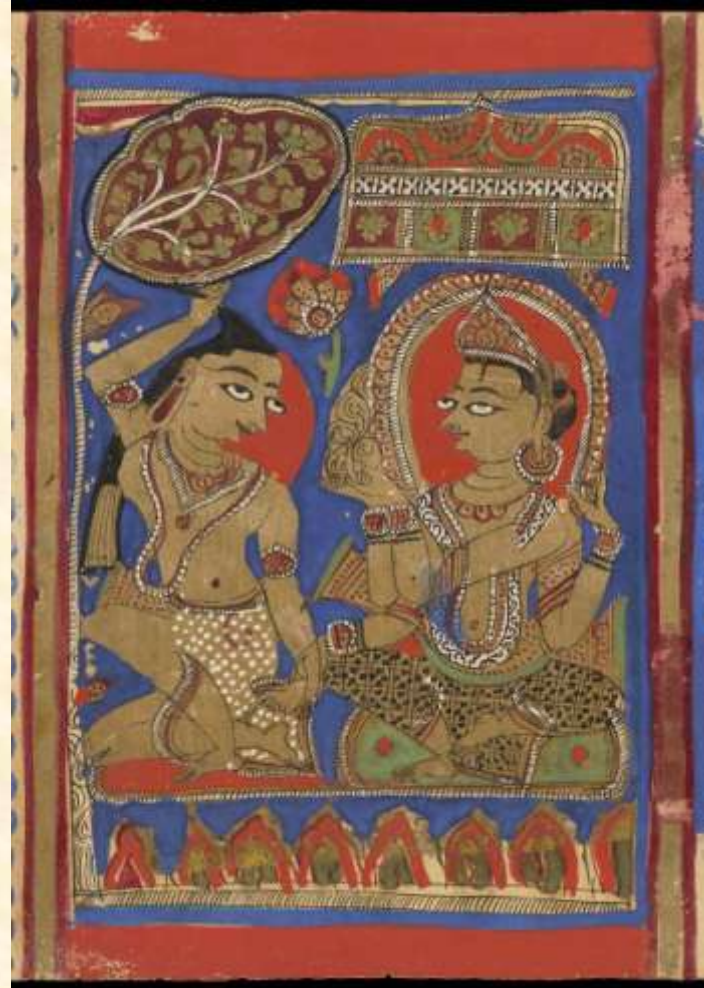
Today's presentation

- Women in general
- Nun portraits
- Women as donors
- Construction of gender in mythology and related issues

A Jain nun turned Buddhist

‘With hair plucked out (*lūnakesī*), wearing dust, formerly I wandered, having (only) one robe, thinking there was a fault where there was no fault and seeing no fault where there was a fault. Going out from my daytime-resting place on Mt. Gijjhakūṭa, I saw the stainless Buddha, attended by the Order of bhikkhus. Having bent the knee, having paid homage to him (I stood) with cupped hands face to face with him. ‘Come, Bhaddā’, he said (to me); that was my ordination’. (*Therīgāthā* 107-108).

Plucking out the hair (ms. of the
Kalpasūtra, Wellcome G 453, 15th



Dhammapāla on Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā

- Accuracy in describing the practice of plucking out the hair
- Bhaddā a *nigganthī*
- Bhaddā a lady of powerful intellect, versed in debates – but unable to answer Sāriputta' s question!

Transmission of teaching: Women have no role

- Absent from Sthavirāvalī: exclusively male spiritual genealogies
- No women among the 45 seers (*isi*, Skt. *ṛṣi*) ascribed with wise sayings in the *Isibhāsiyāiṃ*.

Nuns depicted collectively as part of the fourfold sangha (15th c. ms.)

मणा निगंघाताणवसवगाहाणां। सिञ्जंति। बुञ्जंति
 सुञ्जंति परिनिवांति। सवडरकाणमंतकरिंति। वा अञ्जे
 गइयाडावणंनवगाहाणां। सिञ्जंति बुञ्जंति सुञ्जंति
 ति परिनिवांति। सवडरकाणमं तंकरिंति
 वा। अञ्जे गइयाडावणं। नवगा हाणा
 णं। सिञ्जंति जावअंतकरिंति। सन्न सवगाहा
 णां। उणा नाइक्रमंति। वा। तणं काल्। णं। तणं सम।
 णं। समाण नगवं मदावीर। शय गिह मथार। उणा मि
 त्त्वावइय। वरूणं समाणां। वरूणं समाणां। वरूणाः



शंख

Women in Shvetambara Jain canonical sources

- Statistic data on monastic and lay communities surrounding some of the Jinas given in the *Kalpasūtra*: nuns and women followers outnumber monks and men followers
- *Chedasūtras*: monastic discipline, rules for monks and nuns, cf. M. Jyväsjarvi Stuart's lecture in this series (30 April 2015).
- . *Ācārāṅgasūtra* 1: masculine gender

Outbursts of ascetic misogyny

- ‘Wisely reject hope and desire, and extracting that thorn thou (should act rightly). (...) The world is greatly troubled by women. Men forsooth say: ‘These are the vessels (of happiness)’. But this leads them to pain, to delusion, to death, to hell, to birth as hell-beings or brute beasts.’
(*Ācārāṅga Sūtra* Jacobi p. 21).

The wording of major vow No. 4: celibacy

- ‘A Nirgrantha does not continually discuss topics relating to women. He does not regard and contemplate the lovely forms of women. He does not recall to his mind the pleasures and amusements he formerly had with women’ (*Ācārāṅga Sūtra* Jacobi SBE vol. 22 p. 207-208)
- *Itthi-kahā* ‘Talks about women’
- *Itthī-parinnā* ‘Knowing women’

Rājimatī as a role model in *Uttarādhyayanāsūtra* chap. 22

- A princess promised to prince Ariṣṭanemi
- Wedding aborted as A. renounces worldly life
- Rājimatī becomes a nun
- Seen by Rathanemi, her former brother-in-law, a monk while in a cave
- He proposes to her
- She puts him back on the right path.

Absence of motherhood regretted (*Puṣpikā Upāṅga* chap. 4)

- ‘Complete is the life as humans of those mothers and blessed, fortunate, and meritorious are those mothers who have given birth to a child; who breast-feed their own child who is eager to suckle, who sweetly stutters, and who in stupor shifts from the base of the breasts toward the armpit; who have heard the sweet stutter of the child and comforted it by hugging; and who have lifted the baby with their tender and loving hands, placed it in the lap and enjoyed sweet and loving talk with the baby. But I am the wretched and ill-fated one that has been deprived of any of these pleasures of an offspring’.

A 'nannyng nun'

'She started searching and bringing a variety of things for these children (...) Of these adolescents, kids, and babies, she would massage some with oil, rub pastes to some, give bath with clean water to some, paint legs and lips of some, apply collyrium to eyes of some, make arrow like figure with saffron at the center of the foreheads of some, and rock some in a rocker. She would also make some kids stand in a line and then make them stand apart for applying sandal wood paste to some and perfumed powder to others. To some she would give dolls to play with, to some she would feed sweets and to some she would feed milk rice. She would take off garland from neck of some and shower flowers on them. Some she would place on both the legs and others on her thighs. She would lovingly cuddle and fondle babies lifting some on her legs, some in her arms, some on her waist, some on her back, some on her breasts, some on her shoulders, some on her head and some in her palms. Smooching them, she would sing lullabies to some and songs in loud voice to others. This way she spent her time with children, vicariously satiating her desire for son, wish for a daughter, and craving for grand-children'.

Motivations for becoming a nun

- Insatisfaction with the worldly life of a woman: absence of children, unhappy married life etc.
- Positive motivations, interactions with mendicants' teachings in early life, cf. story literature and autobiographies, e.g. the nun Prasannamati in W. Dalrymple, *Nine Lives*.
- Issue of ascetic life and femininity

Femininity suppressed

ताणसब्रखित्रीतहिसंपन्नारिसिवरप्रवित्राजहिंजहिं संचरंति
तहिंतहिंरखसगणउसरंति। तवेवसिलायलुणि उवविहु
सुदत्तोमुणिअबम्भुानहअवरजईसरविगयगब... विहाफासुयम

हिहिंसवाघत्ता। बुडुइरि
वाममुविसोहियजजा
खणेबुधिरुअठियठा
तालिरकाकारणिणिय
यगुसाखुल्लयजयलि
उच्चियजा। १२पमणितते



Nudity and chastity: Rājimatī and Rathanemi



Abduction of nun Sarasvatī: the Kālaka story



Nun in danger, community in danger

- ‘Because you violated (*aṇicchantīe sāhuṇīe viddhaṃsaṇaṃ kayaṃ tumae*) a nun against her will and did not respect the Congregation, therefore I have done this. Whatever man, with mind deluded by mighty delusion, destroys a nun’s virtue, he lays a fire at the root of the profit arising from the enlightenment of Jain religion’ (Story of Kālaka) .

Women as donor of food in texts about rules regarding alms

- ‘If a woman of the house wastes the food when distributing it, (the monks) should refuse (it, saying to) the (alms-giver): ‘I may not accept such alms. When he notices that she crushes living beings, seeds and plants with her foot, he should avoid such a house, knowing that she performs that which is not suitable to his self-control. She brings food and drink having put her hand into the vessel and pours out that which was inside. In all these cases, he should refuse. If she brings food and drink having put down her crying boy or girl to whom she is giving the breast, that food and drink is not allowed’.(*Daśavaikālikasūtra* chap. 5).

Lady offering food to a monk: depiction of rules regarding alms in the Sāmācārī (Wellcome Trust, Gamma 3)



Lady as donor of alms: Shālibhadra story

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सीसोडननीआसरे ॥६॥वेवेण॥द्वनअलीकनघायैवीर
नौरे।प्रैसणपिणनलहाघरमंकिरे।एसुंअउंघाणउंसाचाष
यारेइकसाहरीमानैवल्लिवांकरे ॥७॥तिणिऊलेसाक।
नमैसैणंतस्यारे ॥८॥किणिऊ लिजातांऊवैअपीतरे।एम
दिमासीनैणवावल्पारे एदऊसुविदितमुनिनी।
रीतरे ॥९॥ऊंतौमास षमणनौपारणारे।पी
णमनिमोलाव्योनलिगा ररे।अधकेरातयअणल
रधइऊवैरे।लाधैदेदीनाअ रधररे ॥१०॥दलतांमारी
गमादिआवीमिलीरे।माधैऊपरिगोरसमाटरे।घंसाणीपरा।
सरिनसकैषिसीरे।देधीसालिऊमरनौघाटरे ॥११॥लोचनवै
कस्यातनुमनकलस्यारे।रोमंघितघईसारीदेहेरे।करिदाला



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शालिबहुरीण
रत्नपतिरे
३३

Centrality of the lady donor role in the tradition

- Candanā, Mahāvīra' s chief nun
- Revatī, Mahāvīra' s chief female lay disciple

both distinguished by offering food.

In contrast unwilling female donors are also favorite story characters.

Women guarantee the preservation of rules and tradition: not eating after sunset.

Construction of gender in mythology

Women in the lives of the Jinas

- Mothers, e.g. Marudevī in the Shvetambara tradition,
- Wives: the issue of the Jinas' marriage

Women in Mahāvīra's biography (Shvetambara)

- Complying with his parents' wish, the young Mahāvīra married Princess Yaśodā.
- Their child was a daughter, named Priyadarśanā – 'Pleasant to the sight' both in name and form.
- Priyadarśanā later married Jamāli, who was Mahāvīra's nephew through his sister.
- Priyadarśanā rebels to Mahāvīra's doctrine before coming back to his fold

Gender in mythology: the 19th Jina Malli and spiritual liberation of women

- Digambara position: Malli was a man
- Shvetambara position: Malli reborn as a woman reached final liberation in that birth: 'Because of penance mixed with deceit, he acquired woman-inclination-karma *strī-veda*, and also the body-making-karma of a Tīrthamkara because he had observed devotion to the Arhats and other religious practices' (Hemacandra, 12th c.).

Gender in language

- Digambaras: Malli (short i, masculine)
- Shvetambaras: Mallī (long i), feminine and ‘Malli the Arhat’, ‘Malli the Jina’, ‘Lord Malli’ .

The 19th Jina, Mallinâtha, as a female (Lucknow, 10th-11th c.?)



Backview of preceding image



Malli: iconography in the debate

'For example, no one in the world has ever perceived the [alleged] femininity of the images of the Lord Malli; on the contrary, those images are always depicted in masculine gender... The Lord under debate must be a man, because he is never portrayed as female in his images. This is like the images of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, which are well known to be male in the tradition of both parties (Digambara author, 14th c.) .

Male/female distinction and spiritual perfection: a Buddhist voice

What does womanhood matter at all

When the mind is concentrated well

When knowledge flows on steadily

As one sees correctly into Dhamma.

One to whom it Might occur,

I'm a woman or I'm a man

Or I'm anything at all

Is fit for Māra to address (Somā, *Bhikkhunī-
Saṃyutta, Saṃyutta-nikāya*)

Justifying respect for women

- ‘The layfollower should consider as worthy of recipients of generosity also the laywomen and the nuns who possess qualities, because something sown in the fourfold sangha as a whole gives a lot of fruit’.
- ‘There is no invariability in the fact that women only are full of bad points: the same is true of men too. They are also very often seen to be cruel, unbelievers, ungrateful, etc. And all that does not justify that great men be despised. Similarly in the case of women. Even if some of them are found to be full of bad points, there are also some who are full of good points. As a matter of fact, even though they are women, the Jinas’ mothers are worshipped even by the highest gods and praised by the best sages because of the importance of their qualities’
(Hemacandra, 12th c.)

Further reading

- Sherry Fohr, *Jainism. A Guide for the Perplexed*, Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Gender and Salvation. Jain Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women*. Berkeley, 1991.
- M. Whitney Kelting, *Singing to the Jinas. Jain Laywomen Maṇḍal Singing and the negotiations of Jain devotion*, Oxford University Press, 2001.
- M. Whitney Kelting, *Heroic Wives. Rituals, Stories and the Virtues of Jain Wifhood*, OUP 2009.
- Manisha Sethi, *Escaping the World. Women renouncers among Jains*. Routledge, 2012.