

**G A N D H I**  
**&**  
**J A I N I S M**

SHUGAN CHAND JAIN



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**Front Cover:**

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Palm: Jain symbol. The raised hand means stop. The word in the center of the wheel is “Ahi s”. Ahi s means non-violence. Between these two, they remind us to stop for a minute and think twice before doing anything. This gives us a chance to scrutinize our activities to be sure that they will not hurt anyone by our words, thoughts, or actions. We are also not supposed to ask or encourage others to take part in any harmful activity. The wheel in the hand shows that if we are not careful and ignore these warnings and carry on violent activities, then just as the wheel goes round and round, we will go round and round through the cycles of birth and death.

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## FOREWORD

Mahatma Gandhi was not born a Jain and never claimed to be a Jain. Yet, throughout his life he adhered to a Jain lifestyle and advocated Jain values. In this important and original work, Dr. Shugan C. Jain explores this paradox and offers an answer to the riddle: Why does Gandhi seem to be a Jain?

According to Jain philosophy, the status of a person is not determined by the family to which one is born, but by the actions one takes. Based on this criterion, even though Gandhi was not born a Jain, he understood Jain principles and acted in accordance, making him in every aspect an 'exemplary Jain' (p. xx, p. 175). Dr. Jain defends this thesis in five chapters supported by two useful appendices. Early chapters recount Gandhi's life, drawing wherever possible from Gandhi's own writings. Chapter V provides an analysis, drawing from secondary sources and from the author's own views. Appendix-I offers a concise summary of Jain philosophy. Appendix II discusses the life and thoughts of Gandhi's spiritual guru, the Jain philosopher, Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta, and it reprints a translation of his correspondence with Gandhi.

Although several Jains have addressed the influence of Jainism on Gandhi, western scholarship has been limited. Useful websites on the life and works of Gandhi include [www.gandhifoundation.net](http://www.gandhifoundation.net) and [www.gandhiheritageportal.org](http://www.gandhiheritageportal.org). A search of these sites shows that Dr. Jain is filling a void in this literature by offering the first book-length and thoroughly-documented discussion on Gandhi and Jainism.

Chapter-I discusses Gandhi's childhood exposure to Jain thinking. Chapter-II discusses his student life in England together with his struggle to find his own spiritual path. Chapter-III introduces Rajchandra, who

Gandhi meets on his return from England. When Gandhi later travels to South Africa, he continues correspondence with him and begins to refer to him as his most influential spiritual guide. While in South Africa, Gandhi lives in accordance with Jain principles and develops his philosophy of *Satyāgraha*, the insistence on truth, which forms the basis of nonviolent resistance to injustice. His correspondence with Rajchandra reassures Gandhi that his own Hindu beliefs can incorporate Jain values. Chapter-IV then recounts Gandhi's return to India, his successful fight for home rule, and his ultimate passing.

Chapter-V provides a thorough exploration of the influence of Jain philosophy on Gandhi. Jain values include *Ahiṃsā* (nonviolence in action, word, and thought), *Anekānta* (respect for diversity), *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness), and *Brahmacarya* (celibacy and restraint of passions). Dr Jain explains how Gandhi lived these values. Gandhi also transcribed the *Gītā*, and in doing so, he displayed a strong Jain influence. His correspondence with Rajchandra also demonstrates Gandhi's sympathy with Jain ethics, Jain metaphysics, and Jain epistemology. Dr Jain carefully traces and documents each of these Jain influences on Gandhi.

In sum, *Gandhi & Jainism* provides a welcome and useful contribution to the literature on the life and works of Mahatma Gandhi. It also retells the life of an "exemplary Jain" in ways that help illuminate the 5000-year tradition of Jainism. The book deserves a careful read by both Jain and Gandhian scholars alike.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gandhi is popularly known as *Bāpū* and Father of the Indian Nation. He accomplished the unique feat of freeing India from the mighty British Empire using soul-force rather than physical force or coercion. Further, he was able to arouse and mobilize the masses to join his *Satyāgraha* movement, the truth-based, nonviolent resistance for the liberation of India. His attempt was well summarized in this popular song composed by the poet Pradeep: ‘*Dedī hame ājādī binā khaḍga binā dhāla, Sābaramatī ke santa tune kara diyā kamāla*’ and which translates as, ‘O! Saint from Sābaramatī, you did wonder by giving us the freedom without the use of sword or the shield’. How did he accomplish the unthinkable? The basis of his philosophy and how he superimposed his spiritual values for social transformation is the subject matter of this book.

gandhi claimed himself to be a Hindu and Hinduism to be a confederation of all Indic religions. Having said that, the question arises as to which religion had a significant impact on his philosophy and how he used it to mobilize the masses to free India from its slavery, as well as his own objective of *mokṣa*, self-realization that can be understood as experiencing God face-to-face.

Several Western academicians have tried to write about the early influence and effects of Jainism on Gandhi’s philosophical interpretations and inferred that Jainism, too, was instrumental in his formulation of concepts like *Ahimsā* (nonviolence), *Ātmā* (soul), God, *Satya* (truth), fasting, *Brahmacarya* (celibacy), observance of vows and religious harmony. Their task, as well as that of Indian academicians, became difficult perhaps due to the lack of English-speaking Jain scholars and the scarce existing amount of Jain literature in English. Vinoba Bhave attempted a concerted effort with other fellow Jains to

compile a book like *The Gītā* on Jainism, which resulted in the publication of *Samaṇ Suttam* by Sarva Seva Sangh, in Varanasi. It is a compilation of verses and stanzas extracted from Jain canonical and sacred literature in four chapters. Several Jains like Kumar Pal Desai, and a few PhD dissertations at University of Madras and Jain Vishwa Bharti did make attempts to analyze the impact of Jainism and particularly of Rajchandra on Gandhi. In 2005, Professor Satish Sharma wrote an excellent book, titled *Gandhi's Teachers: Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta*, which was helpful in this research.

Gandhi understood Jain principles very well, particularly relating to *Ātmā*, *Ahimsā*, *Anekānta*, *Aparigraha*, fasting and *Brahmacarya* through many sources, but primarily through his interactions with Rajchandra during 1881-1891. He adopted these principles in his personal life as well as improvised them to use them in public life and for his followers. In this regard, we may cite some examples of his own life such as his public declaration of taking the vow of *Brahmacarya* or taking the vow of *Kṣetra-Sanyāsa* for one year during which he taught *The Gītā* to *ashramites* in *Sābaramatī āśrama*. Similarly, he expressed, 'I very much like this doctrine of the many-ness of reality,' as it enabled him to judge a Muslim from his own standpoint and a Christian from his. This Jain doctrine of *Anekānta* played an important role in developing and implementing Gandhi's concept of religious harmony. Similarly, his acceptance of Rajchandra as his refuge in his moments of spiritual crises shows the impact of Jainism on him.

Gandhi must have interacted with several Jains. During the research for this book, notable Jains like Dr. Pranjivan Mehta, friend and benefactor of Gandhi, who came up with the ideas of the Salt Tax movement and Hind Swaraj and supported him financially in setting up Phoenix and *Sābaramatī āśramas*, and Gujarat Vidhyapeeth, Virchand Gandhi, lawyer and Jain philosopher, and Rajchandra, were discovered who had profound impact on his life. Similarly, we find another Jain, Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai, President of Ahmadabad Textile Mills Owners, whom Gandhi opposed during Ahmedabad Mill strike. Ambalal also admired Gandhi and later donated significantly to Gandhi's movement to abolish

untouchability, when other Hindu donors refused to support him. Ambalal's sister Anusuyabehn and daughter Mridula were always there to support Gandhi's *Satyāgraha*. Further, Jain monks, like Bechar Swami, were a regular visitor to Gandhi family during his childhood, as was Mahāsati Ujjawala during his month-long sojourn in Birla House Bombay in 1944. These are just a few names that were found. There were undoubtedly many more, however the attempts to uncover those names were impeded as most of the Jains in Western and Southern India do not write 'Jain' as their surnames. We also came across a number of incidences where Gandhi exhorted Jains and asked them to become true Jains by practicing *Ahimsā* and *Aparigraha* as propagated by Mahāvīra.

The variables identified for comparative analysis are primarily moral-cum-religious values which impact a person in his responses to an event, be it external and caused by others or internal and self-invoked. The task gets complicated as almost all Indian religions believe in the doctrine of rebirth, soul, delusion and attachment as the causes of pain and sorrow. Thus, the unique features of Jainism for these values will be examined, including their impact on Gandhi's thought and the events as they occurred in his journey from Mohandas to Mahatma. Some key and unique features of Jainism are briefly mentioned below:

**Definition of *Sat*:** Reality or truth as with the origination-destruction and permanence – permanent as well as momentary state of an entity are both real or existent, as well as *Dvait*, the duality of existents or living and non-living beings as real.

**Concept of God:** God is omnipresent, the creator, benefactor is referred to as *Sat-cit-ānanda* in most Indian and theistic religions. In Jainism, these are the attributes of the independent, pure soul residing in each living being but defiled by the karmic impurities associated with it. This implies the Jain belief of infinite independent living beings, each with its own independent eternal soul and not just one God as the source of all that exists. This leads to the Jain belief of *Śrama*, self-effort, through the activism of the soul to achieve one's objective; be it worldly or spiritual, such as becoming a pure soul or unto Godhood. This implies spiritual or



religious activism, prompting us to develop an attitude of detachment, *Vītarāgatā*, from worldly objects and thoughts.

**Doctrine of Karma:** As you sow, so shall you reap; this doctrine renders every living being responsible for their actions and the results thereof. This makes *Ahimsā* as the supreme spiritual value of Jainism.

**Ethics:** Righteousness and duty cannot be separated from one another; one has to be vigilant of their own acts, keeping their righteousness and results in mind while performing any act. Based on this dictum and the guiding principle known as *Mokṣa Mārga* (right faith, knowledge and conduct together leads to liberation), *Ācāryās*, or Jain preceptors, have laid down a regime of ethical practices based on the concept of minor vows, the partial observation based on minimization of violence for lay people with gradual upward movement and major vows for monks. For the lay people, these consist of practices that adhere to the basic virtues, abstinences, six essential duties with spiritual and worldly overtones. For serious practitioners, they are made to follow a stricter version of the same regime, which is termed as the major vows. Jain ethics also stress the need for self-improvement as the first and foremost goal rather than correcting others.

*Anekāntavāda* and *Syādvāda* are the two unique features of Jainism. *Anekāntavāda*, the doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints or non-absolutism, is derived from the definition of *sat* by Jains. This doctrine accepts the difficulty in knowing completely any entity as even its permanent existence and nature is changing continuously. So, one's knowledge is partial and perhaps biased by the knower's own limitations. It therefore requires one to value the views of others as well. The associated doctrine of conditional dialectic, *Syādvāda*, is the verbal expression of *Anekāntavāda*.

Gandhi always believed and practiced Truth, *Ahimsā* and conscious self-suffering for achieving improvement. These were his biggest tools for self-realization. He then asked his followers to do the same to alleviate their suffering, as well as their fellow countrymen's. It is interesting to

see how he translated these three in his life. Briefly he described them as follows:

- Truth metaphysically is God, the inner-self that is free from all tainted emotions. Practicing truth in day-to-day life implies not to lie and say things as they are, neither less nor more, without causing hurt to anyone, including our own selves. As per the logic, Truth is multi-faceted, literally infinite, and thus, the doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* is very important to explore Truth.
- *Ahimsā* implies non-hurting of any living beings, including ourselves. Its practice in day-to-day life means non-violence, love, equanimity, compassion, tolerance, help and sharing.
- Austerities implies developing an attitude of detachment or selflessness to develop control on your sensual inclinations and limit your desires. In day-to-day interactions with others, it implies extending love to all and to perform *Tapas* or penance, to cleanse your soul and thoughts. In Jainism, *Tapas* also involves participating in a series of fasts and controlling one's palate.

Gandhi's objective in life was to see and experience God face-to-face, with God defined as our pure soul that is free from delusion and attachment to worldly wants. On the social front, he saw God in every living being and hence made use of his countrymen to achieve freedom from bondage, pain and suffering as his life mission. This is in line with Jain doctrine of helping each other. His famous recitation of '*Vaiśṇava jana to tene kahiye je pīra parāī jāṇe re*' – 'a godlike man is one, who feels another's pain, who shares another's sorrow, shows his sincere concern for the welfare of the lowliest and all suffering human beings.' This is the basis of compassion, one of the social applications of *Ahimsā*, as expounded in Jainism.

Gandhi was brought up in an environment where all religions, be they Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity or Zoroastrianism, were practiced. He believed in religious harmony and the validity of each religion to enable its practitioners to achieve peace and happiness. He

claimed to be a Hindu, but some religions did have more impact on him than others, depending on his beliefs, interactions with religious leaders and social experts, self-study and experiments to come to the conclusion. His prayer, ‘*Raghupati Rāghava Rājārāma, patitapāvana Sītārāma; Śvara Allāha Terenāma, sabakosanmati de Bhagavāna.*’ – ‘God is supremely benevolent and is known by different names such as *Raghupati, Rāghava, Śvara, Allāha*; may He bless everyone with true intellect,’ shows again his feeling for religious harmony and equanimity. He even said Hinduism is a confederation of all Indic religion<sup>1</sup> like Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism primarily, and also accepted Abrahamic religions like Christianity and Islam originating in the deserts of Middle East, even though these are foreign and separate from Hinduism.

In this book, the historical facts about the events in Gandhi’s life are given and analyzed based on his own works, research produced by other scholars and the author of this study. It is divided in five chapters, followed by two appendices.

**Chapter I – Sprouting the Roots:** This chapter analyzes the impact of the geography and demography of the place where Gandhi was born, his parents lived and Gandhi’s experiences at school. It exhibited a strong presence of Jainism, as Jains particularly outnumbered Hindus in the *Moḍha-Baniā* community to which he belonged.

Gandhi’s mother was very religious displaying strong influences of Jainism; she fasted, respected even the smallest form of living beings with *Ahimsā*, served Jain monks like Becharji Swami and insisted that Gandhi sought permission from Becharji Swami to go to England for further studies. Some scholars, like Romain Ronald, even mentioned that his mother was a Jain even though Gandhi claims her to belong to the *Prañāmika* sect of *Vaiṣṇavas*. Gandhi’s father was an able administrator and a religious man, who organized and attended religious pilgrimages, as Porbandar was the gateway to *Cāradhāma* (four abode) pilgrimage. Like his wife, Gandhi’s father was also an ardent practitioner of *Ahimsā*,

as seen when he shed tears on his sick bed after reading Gandhi's confession of stealing.

Other members of the household, like Gandhi's elder brother, who was very affectionate and caring, and the maid, Rambha, who taught him the efficacy of repeating God's name, were filled with religiosity. Similarly, Jain values of *Pratikramana* – confession and seeking repentance for the wrongs committed (part of Essential daily observances) – and re-initiation after a fall are visible all through his childhood, in which he experiments with bad habits but returns to his family and their spiritual values. Gandhi did not subscribe to superstition-based religious practice. He was married in his childhood. Later, to become self-reliant and make a decent livelihood, he decided to go to study in England.

**Chapter II – Strengthening the Roots:** Gandhi went to England in 1888, for three years to study law. There also, he experimented with the British way of life but returned to the Indian way of life to pass law examination and achieve his ultimate objective of self-realization. Accordingly, he adopted a simple lifestyle based on self-effort, continued dietetic experiments on a vegetarian diet, practiced celibacy, and deepened his understanding of other religions to get clearer insight. He returned to India immediately after qualifying the examination and being admitted to the bar to start his practice.

However, Gandhi's return to India was not a pleasant experience as he discovered that he was declared an outcast by his community for travelling overseas and his mother had passed away while he was overseas. Similarly, his experiences to start legal practice were a non-starter due to his insistence to not take cases based on falsification or where he had to give commission. His experience when meeting the British agent in Rajkot made him realize that he could not play dirty and thus he remained loyal to his spiritual values.

Gandhi found his first opportunity in South Africa and left for a year's assignment. However, his stay in India was extremely important as he had the opportunity to meet, observe and discuss philosophy with

Rajchandra, a young *Vaiṣṇavas* Jain jeweler of the same age, family background and place as himself. Gandhi started his relationship with Rajchandra as a friend but later, Rajchandra became his spiritual guide and almost a guru to him. It was he who had the greatest impact on Gandhi all through.

**Chapter III – Choosing the Route: *Satyāgraha*:** Gandhi arrived in Natal, Durban, in May 1893. His journey by boat was a demanding experience in terms of adhering to his dietetic habits and his vow of celibacy. However, his earlier travel to England had equipped him with tools to manage the journey. His first week in Durban gave him the experience of extreme discrimination against Indians, who were brought there as indentured laborers supported by own experiences in the train journey from Dublin to Pretoria. He decided to stay in South Africa and experiment his philosophy of truth, *Ahimsā* and dietetics to minimize the suffering of Indians there, as well as to gain legal experience and earn a living. He successfully completed the first legal case and keeping true to the principle of *Ahimsā* and *Anekānta*, by bringing both warring Indian businessmen to an amicable resolution.

While planning a return to India, Gandhi read about the new bill to restrict the movement and trade of Indians. He was always vocal; he began to print his ideas in press and wrote to the authorities for social injustice only. He refrained to write to them regarding his personal grievances. So he decided to stay back after the Indians, impressed by his success and commitment to uplift their cause and gave him a year's retainer also. He decided that he would freely offer his services for social cause. Gandhi mobilized public support, organized them into an association to educate them about their rights and duties, and resolved some of their problems like he did for Balasundrama. He also abolished the 3 Pound tax being levied on ex-indentured Indians, set up the Natal Indian Education Association to teach children of Indians born in South Africa about their motherland.

Gandhi was in touch with religious leaders to gain insight to different religions and was also in regular touch with Rajchandra on such matters

as well and who pacified him, his philosophy having a deep impact on Gandhi as will be seen in most of his responses on personal and even social issues.

After three years in South Africa, Gandhi went back to India where he met important with leaders and newspapers owners to seek their support for his movement in South Africa. He returned to South Africa with his family to prepare for the Natal parliament session in January 1897. He developed the concept of *Satyāgraha* for his ceaseless effort to get justice for his fellow Indians. He was equitable towards Indians, as he tried to have them get rid of their insanitary and unhygienic habits as well as to support British in Boer's war, Zulu rebellion and the plague.

Gandhi also read *Unto This Last* by John Ruskin which became the basis of his philosophy of *Sarvodaya*, and Leo Tolstoy's was *The Kingdom of God is within You*, which led him to set up Phoenix *Āśrama* in Durban and Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg. Both settlements were communities which had all shades of people, regardless of their race and occupation. He developed a regime of vows to be practiced by the dwellers of both *Āśramas*, as well as by participants of the *Satyāgraha*. He declared his life's mission as self-realization. His lifestyle, comprising *Ahimsā*, *Aparigraha*, truth, vows, fasting, celibacy and religious harmony, is analyzed during his stay in South Africa, with particular attention of relevance to Jain practices. The Jain doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* allowed Gandhi to conceive ultimate reality pluralistically, in both personal theistic and impersonal *Advaitic* terms. He was thus able to exercise not only tolerance but empathy for those with whom he disagreed.

After gaining the acceptance to all his recommendations, including abolition of the need of a permit to stay in South Africa by the government, he sailed for India on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1914. During his stay in South Africa, he moved higher in his spiritual purification, by advancing from an ordinary householder to a serious holder by accepting the vows. He referred to *The Gītā* several times in his autobiography.

**Chapter IV – Fruits of the *Satyāgraha*:** Immediately on arrival in India, Gandhi toured the country as an ordinary poor Indian to experience their plight. He set up Sābarmatī *Āśrama* in Ahmedabad as his headquarter for *Satyāgraha*. He kept the same eleven vows to be observed by inmates of the *Āśrama*. To demonstrate its efficacy, he participated successfully in three movements, namely the Champaran struggle, the Kheda dispute, and the Mill-owners dispute in Ahmedabad.

Gandhi became actively involved in the Indian National Congress to gain political involvement in his movement. He opposed the British repressions and their Rowlatt Bill while simultaneously supporting them in World War I. He joined Muslims in their *Khilāfata* movement to gain their involvement as well. He also involved untouchables in his movement, as he wanted an all-inclusive struggle to end the discrimination against lower caste Hindus. Afterwards, he started the Civil Disobedience movement, Non-Cooperation movement, Dandi March for the abolition of the Salt tax, *Svadeśi*, *Svarāja* and finally Quit India movement. India finally became independent on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947. He was assassinated on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1948 by a hardcore Hindu.

All through his struggle, Gandhi became stronger in his philosophical ideals like observance of vows, dietetic habits, celibacy, equality, *Ahimsā* and truth, which are analyzed with a Jain perspective. He published *Yerawada Mandir* as a handbook to the eleven vows, taught *The Gītā* and wrote a detailed commentary on it.

**Chapter V – Roots & Routes – An Analysis:** Gandhi claimed to be a *Vaiṣṇava* Hindu and later, an untouchable. He also talks of Rajchandra and his profound influence on his spirituality and religious inclinations. He talked of *The Gītā* as his solace in times of difficulty. In this chapter, an analysis is done of the Jain influence on his interpretation of *The Gītā*. Finally, the eleven vows which form the basis of his ethics are analyzed with a Jain perspective.

As per the Jain philosophy propagated by its *Tirthankaras*, status of a person is determined not by just the family he was born into but by his actions. Jain history is full of non-Jains, who understood Jain principles very well, practiced them and became exemplary Jain preceptors. Based on this dictum, even though Gandhi may not have been born in a Jain

family, his understanding and practice of Jain doctrine makes him an exemplary Jain.

Two appendices have been added to these chapters. The first appendix is on Jainism and the Jain way of life, which describes Jainism as it is a little-known religion, even though it is one of the oldest Indian religious traditions. Jains today account for less than 0.4% of India's population. The Jain community is by and large a non-violent, religious, peace-loving, highly educated, prosperous and socially-conscious part of India's community. Appendix II discusses Rajchandra and his answers to the 27 questions Gandhi asked him, so that he could develop clarity in his thinking and philosophy. Rajchandra, who was a Jain householder votary and spiritualist simultaneously, had a tremendous impact on Gandhi. Gandhi personally interacted and observed him as well as kept in touch with him through a series of letters.

The research methodology for this book delves around the classic theories of personality which generally hold the perspective that most personality development occurs in childhood, and that personality is stable by the end of adolescence. Further, personality traits are like open systems that can be influenced by the environment at any age. This interactional model of development emphasizes the relationships between an individual and his environment throughout his lifespan. Large-scale longitudinal studies have demonstrated that the most active period of personality development appears to be between the ages of 20-40. Although change is less likely to take place later in life, individuals retain the potential for change from infancy to old age. This pattern is influenced by genetic, environmental, transactional and unpredictable random factors.

In this edition, I have added diacritical marks on Hindi and Prakrit words which have significant importance, as well as on the names of some persons of importance who existed, say 1000 years or more before. The diacritical marks were not used in quotes as they were taken as it is from the reference itself.

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As the author of this book, I take full responsibility for errors, omissions of references or acknowledgements which were unintentional. I realize that several people who indicated their views are not included in this book as I could not locate the source of their views. This was more due to my own limitations. I invite comments from the readers and experts so that the same can be analyzed and used to update the next edition of this book.

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Dr. Shugan C. Jain

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All Indic religions believe in life after death, transmigration of soul, and karma doctrine. Each religion delves deeper and emphasizes some features more to give them a unique identity. For example, in Jainism, detachment, *Ahiṃsā* at the subtlest level, *Anekāntavāda*, celibacy, vows and fasting are emphasized the most.

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