

Jains in India and Abroad

A Sociological Introduction

Prakash C. Jain



**International School for Jain Studies
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Publisher's Note

International School for Jain Studies conducts various programs for the students, scholars and faculty members of the universities of North America primarily and Europe, Asia in general. Since its inception, more than 250 persons have attended various programs conducted by ISJS. ISJS alumni occupy positions of significance in their respective universities and are regularly contributing to promote Jain studies, research and publication. Experience of ISJS so far had been the perception of Jainism as being mostly concerned with detachment with the world and aiming to attain liberation. This may be true for the monks but partially true for the laity and householders as Jains do form a small but highly educated, prosperous and socially involved minority community. ISJS had been taking several steps, like organizing eleven one day conferences on Social Consciousness in Jainism in the universities of India and abroad and regularly participate in seminars on topics of social relevance.

The present book by Prof. Prakash C. Jain, is the first publication by ISJS on this topic. Prof Jain is a senior adviser and faculty member of ISJS. I hope this is the beginning and the book shall arouse more research and publication in similar or associated topics concerning anthropology, social and professional ethics, economic, health and political scenario etc. Prior to this publication, ISJS had translated in English books on metaphysics (Jainism, key to reality, i.e. Tatvarthasutra in questions and answer form and Jain Legend (history of Jainism till 1500 A.D. i.e. Jain dharma ka Maulik Itihas by Hasti Malji in 4 volumes) for the benefit of ISJS alumni and associates and English speaking scholars which were published by different Jain research institutes.

We wish success to Prof. Jain on writing this up to date book on Jains in India and abroad and hope it will lead him to undertake more research projects on Jain sociology.

Shugan C Jain

Chairman

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PREFACE

Ever since I was exposed to Max Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis during my M. A. (Sociology) studies programme, I had more or less decided to test the thesis by myself writing a dissertation on Jainism and the Jains. Reading Weber's insightful analysis of Jainism contained in *Religion of India* further strengthened my resolve to do that. An award of Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship for Ph.D. programme in the late 1970s that landed me at the Carleton University of Ottawa kept my resolve intact, where I wrote a term paper on the Jains for a course on Sociology of Religion. Unfortunately it could not go further for a number of reasons. Instead my academic interest got shifted to Indian Diasporic Studies – an academic subject that eventually earned me a Ph.D. degree. Nevertheless, an updated and thoroughly revised version of that term paper constitutes Chapter 5 of the book.

The book begins with an introduction of Jainism with its brief history in different parts of India and the sects and sub-sects that developed within it during the past two thousand years. Some basic social structural features such as family, kinship and marriage are also mentioned alongwith a brief note on food, festivals and places of pilgrimage of Jains. Chapter 2 highlights the salient features of Jain philosophy in terms of its metaphysics, ontology, epistemology and ethics which have been the basis of the Jain way of life for centuries. At the end, the Jain way of life and its practicality in diasporic context as well as India is critically examined.

During the mid-1990s, the Census of India 1991 data revealed a relatively slow population growth rate of the Jains vis-à-vis other five major religious communities of India, namely Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists. The findings were reported widely in the media that rekindled my interest to probe the problem further. Subsequently I wrote a brief article entitled "The Jains in the 1991 Census of India" that I sent for publication to a prominent Jain journal in India. The editor of the journal expressed his inability to publish the same saying "the committee does not want to publish it". I still fail to understand why, given the fact that an article based on the 1981 census data was earlier published by the same journal. My best guess is that perhaps the journal did not want to highlight the suddenly emerged situation of low fertility behaviour among the Jains in the 1991 census data. Meanwhile, the 2001 Census data on religious communities in India were also available, which prompted me to revise the article in the light of the new data. Chapter 3 in the present volume is an outcome of that exercise.

A large number of Jains are either ignorant about the size of their community and its other demographic aspects, or have serious misgivings about it. They often seem to nurse grievances against the Census of India authorities for under-estimating the Jain population. Many of them suggest at the same time that there are no less than 10 million Jains in India. Notwithstanding such a wild claim, the census data clearly point towards a figure of no more than 4.5 million Jains in India. The 1991 and the 2001 Census data also underline the fact of low fertility behaviour among the Jains.

The 2001 Census data further underlined the fact of ethnic revivalism that got intensified among them during the 1990s, as a result of which about 600,000 Jains “lost” to the Hindus returned back to the community. The rise of the Hindu fundamentalism in India since the late 1980s, demolition of the *Babri Masjid* in 1992, and the growing ethnocentrism among other communities might have been responsible for this phenomenon among the Jains, who otherwise have been very well integrated into the mainstream of the Indian society. It would be interesting to note the outcomes of the 2011 Census that might tell us whether the process is over or there is more to it.

Having been engaged in the field of Indian diaspora in general for the past three decades, it was natural for me to pay some attention to the Jain diaspora, which currently is estimated at around quarter of a million, and is growing steadily. Not only numerous socio-cultural associations have sprung up within the Jain diaspora, a number of Jain temples have been constructed in those countries where there is a sizeable Jain community. Lately, Jain diaspora has been in the process of projecting Jainism and the Jain way of life as rational and scientific. Towards this goal some literature is being produced that put emphasis on the Jainist principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *anekant* (relativism). Promotion of vegetarianism as well as Jainism as an area of serious academic research appears to be the twin goals of diasporic Jain activism.

The Jain diaspora has begun to exert its influence on the Jains in India. In the process the Jains in India are also trying to reach out to their counterparts abroad. These mutually reinforcing linkages can best be seen in the activities of such associations as the Federation of the Jaina Associations in North America, the Jain International Trade Organisation, Mumbai and Shree Bharatvarshiya Digambara Jain Mahasabha, Delhi. They have been active in the fields of not only trade and commerce but have also been propagating Jainism around the world. The Jain Diaspora and some of its activities are highlighted in Chapter 4. An earlier version of this paper was presented at Bangalore at a conference on the “Diversity in Indian Diaspora” (Jain 2011).

The book contains a large bibliography with special reference to Jain philosophy and religion, history, demography, anthropology, sociology and other social sciences. Needless to say, the five chapters and a bibliography constitute only a small book – essentially an outline of the theme “Jains in India and Abroad”. As mentioned above, the genesis of the book lies in differential circumstances over a long period of time, and therefore a certain amount of repetition of contents has been inevitable. There might be a number of other shortcomings in the book. Nevertheless, encouragement received from various quarters finally prompted me to put together the book. I earnestly hope that it would be useful to the general readers as well as the scholars.

I am grateful to Prof. Nathan R. B. Loewen of Vanier College, Montreal for reading earlier drafts of the manuscript and for making extensive criticism and comments towards improving the same. Some of the Ph.D. scholars working under my supervision, particularly Kundan Kumar, Jaffar Ali Khan, Rakesh K. Ranjan, Rajiv Kumar, Rajeevan Kunnath, Navendu Shekhar and Ms. Rajni Bala helped me in a number of ways in finalizing the book. Ms. Chanchal Jain and Mr. Sushil Jana of International School for Jain Studies composed the book on PageMaker and assisted in designing the cover page with great enthusiasm. I am thankful to all of them. Thanks are also due to Dr. Shugan C. Jain, India-Director of International School for Jain Studies, New Delhi for promptly accepting the manuscript for publication on behalf of the School.

And finally, the book is dedicated to the fond memories of my father Shri Ratna Chand Jain and my father-in-law Shri C. K. Saxena who, in spite of their different socio-economic and religious backgrounds, had some common “Jaintlemanly” qualities. The book also purports to be a gift to my wife Dr. Renu Saxena, and our daughters Ms. Rashi Prakash and Ms. Sanskriti Prakash who might learn about the Jains a little more systematically than had so far been possible for me by telling them in bits and pieces.

Prakash C. Jain

**New Delhi
March 21, 2011**

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