Jain Studies Papers at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Annual Conference on South Asia (ACSA), 2025

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Abstract: The following report summarizes the papers and presentations given at three major academic conferences held in the USA in 2025. These include the Annual Conference on South Asia (ACSA) in Madison, Wisconsin, the June Online Annual Meeting and the in-person Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR).

Keywords: Amṛtacandra, Gaccha, Anupdās, Parasnath, Jinaprabhasūri, Rāy Dhanpatisiṅgh Bahādur, Śrīmad Rājcandra, Kānjī Svāmī, Śrāvakācāra, Digambara Monasticism, Muni Ratnacandra, Engaged Jainism, Jain Art, Orientalism, Jain Semi-Renouncers, Capitalism, Festivals, *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, Yaśovijaya, Acharya Sushil Kumar, *dhyāna*, *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, Hemacandra, Ghaṇṭākarṇa, Haribhadra, yoga, Anoop Mandal, *Śīlopadeśamālābālāvabodha*

Annual Conference on South Asia (ACSA), Madison, Wisconsin

The 53rd Annual Conference on South Asia (ACSA), hosted by the University of Wisconsin's Center for South Asia, was held in Madison, Wisconsin from October 22 to October 25, 2025. There were twelve total Jain Studies papers, including two panels devoted entirely to Jainism.

Revisiting Amṛtacandra

The panel "Revisiting Amṛtacandra" featured four papers that took stock of the philosopher-monk's influence in shaping Jain thought. In "The Role of Amṛtacandra in Reorienting Kundakunda's Philosophy," Anubhav Jain (SOAS, University of London) argues that Amṛtacandra's commentaries present Kundakunda's work in a systematic and methodical framework that helped to resolve apparent inconsistencies in Kundakunda's works by using contemporaneous philosophical ideas to make sense of troublesome points. Demonstrating the explosion of interest in Kundakunda's work in the second millennium, Jain shows how Amṛtacandra reintroduced several of Kundakunda's ideas into mainstream Jain thought on metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology. Jain offered further evidence that the *adhyātma* group of thinkers (including Banārasīdās) revived Kundakunda's "mysticism" via Amṛtacandra's works.

Ana Bajželj (University of California, Riverside) presented "Amṛtacandra on the Luminosity of the Self," an examination of analogies of light that elucidate the embodied self (*jīvātman*) in the *Laghutattvasphoṭa*. While these analogies are common in Indic and Jain canonical and philosophical literature, Bajželj shows that Amṛtacandra uses them to explain how the self pervades the body, how its cognitive processes work, and, most often, how consciousness operates, culminating in its perfection in omniscience. Amṛtacandra's analogies of light establish him in Kundakunda's lineage of thought, supporting a similar balance between the ultimate (*niścaya*) and worldly (*vyavahāra*) perspectives and allowing the notion of a pure, unified self to coexist with both figures' commitment to *anekāntavāda*.

Aleksandra (Sasha) Restifo (Florida International University) argues in "Feeling Knowledge in Amṛtacandra's Exegesis of Kundakunda's *Samayasāra*," that the use of aesthetics-related terminology in the *Ātmakhyāti* and *Kalaśa*s to translate Kundakunda's philosophical concepts "invites the audience to engage with philosophical ideas as they would with a drama: through feeling and experience." The drama of life gives the soul the capacity to distinguish transient feelings from lasting knowledge. Ultimately, these aesthetic experiences allow the self to transcend dualistic cognition and perspectivism to apprehend Kundakunda's notion of the pure self.

Jinesh Sheth's (University of Birmingham) paper, "*Anekāntavāda* and Jain Ethics: Reflections on Amṛtacandra's *Puruṣārthasiddhyupāya*," argues that Amṛtacandra views *anekāntavāda* in consonance with the two-truth theory and that he applies them in this unique *śrāvakācāra* text to argue that activities that may appear to be *hiṃsā* may, from another perspective, not be so regarded. Sheth concludes that the deployments of these two doctrines of *naya*s in a text on lay ethics may be Amṛtacandra's original intervention.

Jain Ascetic Lineages: Of Trees and Branches

The panel "Jain Ascetic Lineages: Of Trees and Branches" featured four papers that reassess the nature of mendicant lineages in Jain history. Nandita Punj (Arizona State University) presented "Rivalry and Reform: Jain Monastic Lineages in Medieval Western India." Examining the earliest inscriptions and manuscripts of the Kharatara Gaccha, Punj shows that the story of its origin as a reformist sect opposed to temple-dwelling (*caityavāsin*) monks has little support. Instead, she argues, the early sources of this order are concerned with the purification and restoration of temples (*vidhicaitya*), delineating lay support for these efforts through rearticulating the benefits of *dāna* and a return to proper mendicant conduct (*vidhimārga*), especially regarding celibacy. Punj additionally notes that a careful attention to inscriptions can demonstrate mergers of *gaccha*s (orders) in addition to schisms.

Shailesh Shinde (Deccan College) presented "The Kharataragaccha in Transition: Lineage, Reform, and Ascetic Authority (15th–18th Century)." Examining the *sāmācārī* writings of the leading monks of this little-studied period of the order and comparing them alongside lineage chronicles (*paṭṭāvalī*s, etc.), inscriptions, and manuscript colophons, Shinde argues that the sources reveal an order in transition that looks to redefine the leadership roles of its mendicants. As an example, he shows that leaders in the sixteenth century had an especially strong interest in criticizing the institution of *yati*s, local clergy who take mendicant vows and who appear to have had significant authority within the order.

Eric Villalobos (PhD student, Emory University), in "A Jain Monastic Lineage Dispute during the Migration of the Kutchi [Kacchi] Jain Oswals," asks who the "other" is in internally articulated efforts to "reform" *gaccha*s. Villalobos focuses on *yati*s' relationships with both *saṃvegī sādhu*s and the lay communities who supported and relied on them by examining a case of an A(ñ)cala Gaccha *yati* lineage in a Daśa Oswal community in the early twentieth century as they moved from Kacch to Bombay (now Mumbai). He shows that calls to "reform" the *yati* lineage had to do with intra-caste disputes involving the community's migration to Bombay, amid which an A(ñ)cala *saṃvegī* lineage was invited by certain factions to take over. As the *śrīpūjya*'s authority waned and his lineage disintegrated, many of his disciples joined the *saṃvegī* lineage. Villalobos concludes that Jains across western India were steeped in the language of reform, aware of broader calls to reform Śvetāmbara society and mendicant orders in the period, as figures like Vijayānandasūri (a.k.a. Ātmarāmjī) responded to colonial and missionary critiques of Indian society and religious traditions.

Tillo Detige (Rutgers University) presented "Digambara Jain Ascetic Lineages of the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Tradition in Western and Central India," a sweeping historical reconsideration of the nomenclature and organization of Digambara mendicant lineages in these regions. He shows how four orders became consolidated into the

Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha, supported by a different set of castes from those supporting the Mūlasaṅgha's Balātkāragaṇa but undergoing a parallel evolution in terms of repeated lineage bifurcations, frequently relocated seats, and similarly diverse ascetic *saṅgha*s. Additionally, Detige urges scholars to historicize forms of Jain devotional expression that may persist, if unacknowledged, into the present. Specifically, he shows that, during the centuries of Muslim rulership, Jains developed Islamicate idioms that changed the language of royalty and kingship describing Digambara mendicant hierarchies, especially for *bhaṭṭāraka*s. Additionally, the material history of funerary monuments shows similar patterns in how ascetic lineages have been characterized and deceased *muni*s memorialized.

Individual Papers on Other Panels

Additionally, four Jain Studies papers were included on other panels. David E. Silverberg (PhD candidate, Columbia University) presented, "*The Life of Fatimai*: Femininity, Indigeneity, and Anti-Jainism." A Hindi text locally produced and distributed in rural Rajasthan, *Fatimai* is ostensibly about a goddess worshiped by the Meena community, a scheduled tribe classified in colonial digests as a "criminal tribe." But as Silverberg points out, most of the text is about Anupdās (1848–1921), the founder of the Anoop Mandal, and is replete with numerous quotations from his 1909 major work, *Jagat Hitkārnī* (*For the Welfare of the World*). Where *Fatimai* focuses on the present, it is an Anupdās-ian commentary on the "Rajput-ization" of the Meena, portraying the community's attempt to rise in social status by adopting Rajput rituals and social customs as a story of abandoning defining practices of the community to its detriment. Silverberg argues that women's changing status is both an example and a metaphor for the community. As an example, by assimilating Rajput models of patriarchy, Meena women lose the power to divorce and remarry, while adopting practices such as female infanticide and sati. As a metaphor, they are given a false sense of being in league with hostile actors who have long been the community's oppressors, namely the *bania*s, by attempting to raise their own status. While the text does not name them as Jains, Silverberg calls this stance "anti-Jainism."

Jyoti Agarwal (PhD student, Emory University) presented "Sanctity versus Sanitorium: Jains and the 'Others' on Parasnath Hill, 1827–1861." Agarwal argues that the May 2025 Jharkhand High Court ruling that granted the site exclusively to Jains against a competing claim that the hill is also sacred to Santhal Adivasis must be understood as a continuation of colonial legal knowledge systems. Agarwal examines nineteenth-century Jain efforts to stymie the construction of a British sanatorium on the site, which reveals to her "three interconnected processes through which sanctity became legible to the colonial state: (1) colonial governance that translated sacred presence into property and law; (2) Jain mercantile patronage that mapped ritual

authority onto the landscape through temple construction, donor inscriptions, pilgrimage, and moral claims to purity; and (3) local custodianship rooted in zamīndārī authority and inherited guardianship rather than formal ownership." Simultaneously, Agarwal recognizes the "limits of colonial legal rationality" in the colonial archive, which created a "structural silence" that failed to recognize Santhal ritual claims to the hill based on kinship, land-based practices, and orally transmitted knowledge.

Abhinandan Banerjee (PhD student, University of California, Riverside), in "Orientalist Mis/Recognition of Jainism, 1800–1900," highlights how the western Orientalist project's misrepresentation of Jainism as a branch of Hinduism or Buddhism for much of the nineteenth century was the direct result of marginalizing the voices and opinions of its South Asian interlocutors. He uses the misrecognition as an example of the methodological and ideological limits of western Orientalism as a knowledge-making and meaning-making project and the epistemological lacunae and ethical fallouts those limits could and have caused.

Steven M. Vose (University of Colorado, Denver) presented the paper, "The *Ācārya*, His Story, and Its Publics: Telling and Re-Telling the Story of Jinaprabhasūri and Sultan Muḥammad bin Tughluq." The panel sought to use "publics" to theorize new ways to understand precolonial religious communities by discerning the readership of texts. Vose presented on biographies of the Kharatara Gaccha *ācārya* Jinaprabhasūri (*ca*. 1261–1333) composed by two fifteenth-century Tapā Gaccha monks, arguing that they demonstrate an evolving reading public for the monk's magnum opus, *Vividhatīrthakalpa*, that extended to other Śvetāmbara monastic orders and the lay communities that supported them. The biographies follow two themes: one, using Jinaprabha's relationship with the Tughluq sultan to reflect on proper relations monks should have with those called "Turkish" (*turuṣka*) or "Non-Aryan" (*anārya*) kings (terms the later biographies adopt and render in Sanskrit from Jinaprabha's Prakrit narratives); the other, praise of pious laymen who build temples in their homes located on the frontiers of Śvetāmbara Jains' ambit of trade, such as Pratiṣṭhāṇa in the middle Deccan.

Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR)

The American Academy of Religion hosted two international conferences in 2025. In all, there were twenty-two presentations of research in papers sessions and roundtables, conference wide. Additionally, each conference featured a panel on a forthcoming Jain Studies volume.

Online June Sessions of the Annual Meeting

In the Online June Sessions of the Annual Meeting, from June 23 to 25, 2025, the Jain Studies Unit hosted two panels, with a total of ten papers conference wide.

Jainism and Technology

The first Jain Studies panel, "Jainism and Technology," included three papers. John E. Cort (Emeritus, Denison University), in "Jain Book History: Nineteenth-Century Arguments over Whether or Not to Print the Sciptures," points out that Jains were relatively late adopting print technology; significant efforts began only in the 1870s. The first two sustained Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak Jain print projects were the four-volume *Prakaraṇ Ratnākar*, published by Bhīmsingh Māṇak (Māṇek) in Bombay between 1876 and 1881, and the twenty-three books of the *Āgama Saṅgrah* sponsored by Rāy Dhanpatisiṅgh Bahādur of Murshidabad and printed in Calcutta, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Banaras, and Murshidabad between 1874 and 1900. Cort analyzes the publishers' arguments in defense of the use of mechanical print to publish Jain religious texts, as both projects faced stiff opposition from more conservative elements in Jain society. Cort speculates on the relative status gained by those early adopters of print technology, located away from centers of Śvetāmbar power at the time but in emergent colonial-era cities.

Steven M. Vose (University of Colorado Denver) presented "Digitized Authority, Dynamic Archive: Truth and the Online Biographies of Śrīmad Rājcandra." Arguing that the changeover from print to Internet-based information dissemination relocates religious authority from lineage-based chains of transmission to a hyper-individualized "consumer appeal" model of the bandwidth privileged, Vose illustrates this historical process by comparing the online biographies of Śrīmad Rājcandra (1867–1901) of two organizations: one, the Shrimad Rajchandra Ashram in Agas, Gujarat (est. 1919); the other, the Shrimad Rajchandra Mission of Dharampur, Gujarat (SRMD) (est. 2001). Regarded as the authoritative print biography of Rājcandra throughout the twentieth century, since 2016, Agas's online biography has included details found only in the SRMD's much more popular online biography. Vose argues that Agas's online biography has become a "dynamic archive" that authorizes the SRMD's online-only version, which simultaneously acknowledges and dismantles both archival- and memory-based truth claims. Instead, as the Internet is a commercial platform in which all information operates on the logic of capitalist consumption, truth becomes a matter of the information producer's ability to fit aesthetically into the consumer's self-image and "lifestyle."

Corinne Smith (PhD student, SOAS University of London) presented "Jain Ritual and Technology: The *Pañca-Kalyāṇaka Pratiṣṭhā* in the Kānjī Svāmī Tradition." The *pañca-kalyāṇaka pratiṣṭhā* ritual consecrates a new temple image (*pratimā*), with the reenactment of the five key events of a *tīrthaṅkara*'s life, transforming the sculpted image from mere marble to that which embodies the perfected qualities of a Jina and is therefore worshippable. Smith shows that, within the Kānjī Svāmī tradition, this ritual has long constituted an important part of temple life and is enthusiastically celebrated, despite the apparent contradiction it poses to the knowledge-based path to liberation that it promotes. Using archival images and fieldwork interviews, Smith shows how the ritual changed through the adoption of new audio and visual technologies, allowing for novel and expanded means of performance and participation. She offers a comparative, historical analysis to demonstrate how the incorporation of different technologies has transformed not just the ritual itself but has also placed new emphasis on the experience for the participant, renewing a sense of individual and collective *mumukṣu* identity.

Jain Texts on Conduct: Current Research and New Voices

The second panel, "Jain Texts on Conduct: Current Research and New Voices" featured five papers, all from current PhD students. Anchit Jain (Delhi University) presented "The Issue of Monastic Dwelling in Jain Texts on Conduct: Sustained Idealization, Silences, and Adaptations." While early Jain literature, canonical and noncanonical, regardless of its sectarian affiliation, glorifies monastic stays in liminal spaces and solitary isolation, Jain points out that later texts gradually reflect adaptations accommodating communal living, urban stays in laymen's houses, and, sometimes, structured monastic spaces. He argues that these differences emerged out of pragmatic readjustments to contemporaneous needs by both sects, and that "a long developmental phase of the canonical literature" accounts for the textual variance on this issue, which is confirmed by similar trends in the later exegetical literature, commentaries, and other normative texts. Jain argues that such a *longue durée* examination shows how monastic lawgivers navigated these tensions, balancing adherence to orthopraxy with pragmatic concerns, sometimes through a sustained idealization or through necessary adaptions, and sometimes through uncanny silences.

Kshitij Jain (Oxford University), in "Establishing Righteous Conduct: Ritualization of Organizational Discipline in Digambara Monasticism," engages Talal Asad's theoretical focus on religious discipline as embodied practice to analyze the establishment of authority and obedience in the ritualized organizational discipline of Digambara monastic jurisprudence. Focusing mainly on the *Mūlācāra* of Vaṭṭakera and its commentary, the *Ācāravṛtti* of Vasunandi, Jain draws three examples of embodied practices from the text—*samācāra*, *vinaya*, and *vandanā*—to explore the ritualized

organizational discipline of a monk. Engaging in a philological analysis of primary sources with a focus on the historical framework provided by Asad, Jain asserts that bodily discipline and ritual practices are central to understand the purpose and function of (inscribed) monastic authority in Digambara communities.

Abhinandan Banerjee (University of California, Riverside) presented "*Śrāvakācāra* in Canon: Considering the Case of the *Upāsakadaśāḥ*." Banerjee points out that, although Jain layperson-hood has been the focus of considerable anthropological scholarship in Jain studies in recent decades, the seventh *aṅgā* of the Śvetāmbara canon, which merely by its title suggests that it focuses on lay conduct, has received little scholarly attention. Historicizing the text's role as "one of the earliest consolidated attempts by the predominantly monastic Jain ascetics to situate the laity within their theological-philosophical framework," he analyzes how the framers of the Śvetāmbara canon constructed a consolidated discourse on lay conduct, complete with both doctrine and narrative tales that "image" the ideal Śvetāmbara *śrāvaka*.

Alba Rodriguez Juan (University of California, Riverside), in "The Reframing of Yoga as Conduct by Jain Intellectuals," examines the evolution of yoga in Jain thought. Early Jain sources define *yoga* as the activity or vibrations of the soul, with Umāsvāti's *Tattvārthasūtra* describing it as "bodily, verbal, and mental action" (TS 6.1Ś), showing that yoga is initially tied to karmic bondage and distinguished from *viyoga*, which signifies liberation. Over time, she argues, under Upaniṣadic influence, yoga became associated with ethical restraint, prayer, and meditation. Some medieval Jain thinkers, such as Haribhadra, Śubhacandra, and Hemacandra, redefined this understanding of yoga within distinctively Jain practices. Haribhadra defines *yoga* in the *Yogabindu* as any and all spiritual and religious activities leading to emancipation, a perspective later systematized slightly differently by Yaśovijaya (1624–1688). In modern times, Rodriguez Juan concludes, Jain definitions of *yoga* have continued evolving, evincing diverse interpretations across numerous contexts, some re-inheriting earlier definitions drawn out in modern historical scholarship.

Samyak Modi (University of California, Riverside) presented "The Ideal Jain Layperson in the 1950s: Muni Ratnacandra's Interpretation of the Thirty-Five *Guṇa*s of the *Mārgānusārī*," a deep study of Ratnacandra's *Nīti Mārgānusārīnā 35 Bola Athavā Māṇasāi Eṭale Śuṃ?*, a 1951 commentary on the thirty-five qualities of an ideal Jain layperson found in Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra*. Unique within Sthānakavāsī traditions, Modi asserts, the text emphasizes benevolence, humanity, and ethical living, offering a perspective on Jain moral values in the early postcolonial era. Modi further argues that Ratnacandra redefines the ideal Jain layperson within an ethical framework that refracts Jain ethics through nationalist and anticolonial sentiments. Modi's study shows how one monastic leader connected modern ethics with tradition to forge a specifically Jain national identity.

Individual Papers on Other Panels

In the Open and Relational Theologies Unit, Pragya Jain (International School for Jain Studies; Oxford Center for Hindu Studies) presented the paper, "Pathways to Peace: *Siddha* in Jainism and the Process of Becoming in Process Philosophy." Jain highlights parallels between Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and Jain thought, asserting that both emphasize interconnectedness, the dipolar nature of existence, and transformative experiences of becoming. Jain argues that the traditions converge on a complementary vision of permanence within a dynamic reality. That is, Whitehead's process philosophy views reality as dynamically interrelated, with peace being a process of becoming and an intuition of permanence, which Jain sees resonant with Jainism's conception of *mokṣa*, where the soul attains the permanent state of a *siddha*, free from karmic material yet still undergoing origination and destruction. Second, she shows that both philosophies emphasize the dipolar nature of existence—Whitehead's primordial and consequent nature of God, and Jainism's *dravyārthika* (substantial) and *paryāyārthika* (modal) viewpoints of substances. Finally, Whitehead's prehensions parallel *śukla dhyāna*, as both highlight transformative experiences that foster deeper connectedness to reality.

Finally, the Yoga in Theory and Practice Unit hosted a book panel on the forthcoming edited volume, *Engaged Jainism: Critical and Constructive Studies of Jain Social Engagement* (SUNY Press, March 2026). The panel featured reviews of the seventeen-chapter volume from Venu Mehta (Claremont School of Theology), Anil Mundra (University of California, Santa Barbara), and Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Coeditors Christopher Miller and Cogen Bohanec (Arihanta Institute), along with contributors Shivani Bothra (California State University, Long Beach), Jonathan Dickstein (Arihanta Institute and Claremont School of Theology), and Tine Vekemans (Ghent University) responded.

November Annual Meeting, Boston, MA

The November Annual Meeting was held in Boston, Massachusetts from November 22 to 25, 2025. The Jain Studies Unit hosted three panels, including one co-sponsored with South Asian Religions (SARI).

Rethinking Jain Semi-Renouncers

The Jain Studies Unit's first panel, "Rethinking Jain Semi-Renouncers," featured four papers. Christine Chojnacki (University of Toronto, Mississauga) began the panel by asking, "Who Were the *Yati*s of the Jain Śvetāmbara Romance-Poems (8th–12th

Century CE)?" In some premodern Jain literature and early twentieth-century scholarship, she notes, the terms *yati* and *caityavāsin* carry pejorative connotations, referring to monks known for their lax practices. However, in ten long narrative works, mainly in prose and verse, written by monks between the eighth and twelfth centuries, Chojnacki shows that the term *yati* is synonymous with standard terms for monks, including *sādhu*, *śramaṇa*, and *muni*, bearing no negative connotations; in fact, one text lists ten essential virtues of a mendicant, calling it *yatidharma*. Strikingly, Chojnacki further shows that in the "complex and still shadowy monastic world of the turn of the [second] millennium," there is hardly any criticism of sedentary monks, who are described, if they are as such, in neutral terms, obviating the question of whether *yati* applies to the so-called *caityavāsin*s in this period. This suggests that the Kharatara Gaccha stories about Jineśvarasūri's 1024 CE debate with the so-called *caityavāsin* monk is a later development. Chojnacki concludes with some thoughts on the birth of the term *gaccha* to describe a monastic lineage in this era.

In his paper, Anchit Jain (PhD student, Delhi University) similarly asks, "Who Were the *Caityavāsins*? Monastic Dwelling, Sectarian Polemics, and Reform in Medieval Jainism." Noting that the term "*caityavāsin*" has long been used to describe Śvetāmbara Jain monks accused of abandoning itinerancy and residing in temple complexes, he argues that this characterization was shaped by later reformist narratives that equated temple dwelling with monastic laxity. However, like Chojnacki argues, he notes that pre-reform sources largely remain silent on these issues and that other non-Kharatara Gaccha texts do not emphasize this supposed transformation. Over time, he argues, *caityavāsin* became a ubiquitous polemical label, retrospectively applied to define the pre-reform past or to discredit rivals. Taking the Upakeśa Gaccha as a case study, Jain examines the historical limitations of these polemical labels and questions the assumption that temple residence inherently violated monastic vows. By reassessing epigraphic, textual, and archaeological evidence, Jain challenges these reductionist views and, further, shows how his interrogation of the sources can address broader questions of how to define the *caityavāsin* tradition, its practices, and the evolving concerns over monastic dwelling in Jain reform movements.

Presenting further research on modern *yati*s, Eric Villalobos (PhD student, Emory University), in a presentation titled "Challenging Semi-Renunciancy," asks with his subtitle, "Did Śvetāmbara *Yati*s Take the Five Great Vows?" He points out that much of the modern historical narrative about Jainism has been shaped by the reformist contexts of the late colonial and postcolonial eras in which Western scholars conducted their research. Twentieth-century scholars gathered most of their material on Śvetāmbara sects from *saṃvegī sādhu*s, who had only recently all but succeeded in reforming the *yati* renouncers out of the tradition. This, he argues, colors Jain histories of the modern era that leave *yati*s out of Jain history altogether or characterize them as "lax monks" (*śithilatā*) or as corrupt priests who took either partial or diminished vows.

Working from colonial-era evidence including gazetteers and invitation scrolls, Villalobos shows that *yati*s were highly venerated renouncers with large followings. Although questions remain whether they all took the five great vows of a proper Jain monk, he shows that at least some were initiated as *yati*s by *saṃvegī ācārya*s. He concludes that terms for *yati*s like "semi-renunciant" mischaracterize the actual status they held as renouncers, both with the laity and even with at least some *saṃvegī* monks.

Tillo Detige (Rutgers University), in "The King Is Dead, Long Live the King! Digambara *Bhaṭṭāraka*s and *Muni*s," continuing his presentation from the ACSA conference (see earlier section), argues that the Sultanate- and Mughal-era *bhaṭṭāraka*s were, at the time, far from being considered mere "semi-renouncers," but rather took the vows of fully initiated Digambara renouncers and were venerated as paramount ascetics. He further argues that the practices and symbols of sovereignty they adopted from Rajput and Persianate courtly cultures were not seen as signs of their ascetic laxity, but as expressions and confirmations of their authority as the "kingpins" of Digambara *polities*. Even contemporary Digambara *muni*s, who operate in a social world that values different models of power, engage in many of the same community functions as their premodern *bhaṭṭāraka* forebears, and in many ways are still rhetorically and ritually conceived of as kings (*mahārāja*).

Religion and Global Capitalism in Jainism and Beyond

The second panel, co-sponsored with the South Asian Religions Unit (formerly Religion in South Asia), "Religion and Global Capitalism in Jainism and Beyond," featured three Jainism-focused papers. Whitney Kelting (Northeastern University), in "Money and Masculinity in Late Capitalist Jainism," presented a Bourdieu-ian theoretical reflection on social capital, discourses of prestige, and the difficulties of class mobility in contemporary neoliberal India, demonstrating why lower-middle-class Jains cannot change status despite getting white collar jobs and leaving the family shop behind. Kelting argues that to be able to move up in status, a person would have to be able to command three forms of capital—social, cultural (in this case, institutional), and economic—or to carry so much of one as to obviate whatever one lacks. Comparing the discourses of the "great layman" (*mahāśrāvak*) and the "great merchant" (*mahāśeṭh*) in contemporary social and religious settings, Kelting points out that the former is used almost pejoratively for pious laymen who otherwise lack the economic means to make significant contributions to the community or to provide well for their family. The latter thus serves as the more cogent model of lay masculinity, with biographies of indigenous capitalists of the colonial era serving as the main models. As donors to Jain institutions—temples, pilgrimages, etc.—successful laymen advocate for their community, turning wealth into piety. As founders of family firms, they simultaneously operate in an intra-community network of social capital in which

cultural-institutional-religious capital can translate into social prestige that allows them to call upon fellow businessmen in the community in times of economic crisis. Thus, the three forms of capital mutually reinforce and can flow as needed. In neoliberalism, transition to white-collar service jobs spells the loss of the family firm, eliminating social capital and thus access to collective financial capital. The added costs of nuclear-family lifestyles diminish the economic gains of such service economy jobs. For those who move to far-flung cities or go abroad, even the network built into supporting the cultural-institutional-religious capital is minimized, effectively dissolving the *mahāśeṭh* model of economic piety.

Justin Henry (University of South Florida), in "Capitalism and the Cultivation of Virtue from a Jain Perspective," considers Jain discourses of "Dharmic capitalism," surveying a spectrum of emic attitudes toward the relevance of principal tenets of Jainism to navigating complexities of twenty-first-century global free market commerce with three case studies. The first, Ācārya Mahāprajña's *The Economics of Lord Mahavira*, locates principles of free market capitalism within the scriptural tradition and notes its ability to increase wealth globally while advocating for models of economic development that avoid exploitation and uphold Jain morality, pointing to the kind of *swadeshi* anti-consumerism of Gandhi (and Rājcandra) as demonstrating an ideal attitude of non-possessiveness over wealth. The second model, exemplified in the works of Atul Shah, champions a classical liberal model of global capital and finance but criticizes the hyper-individualism of neoliberalism while advocating for a kind of Keynesian regulation of the market. Shah insists this setting would allow for responsible investment in which viewpoint diversity is taken seriously, corporate cultures are built on respect, and the environment is regarded as a stakeholder in development. Henry points to Shah's favorite example of this, the creation of a company that sells drip irrigation systems to farmers to maximize yield while undermining the "indenture of seed" models of agricultural megacorporations. The third example is Abhay Firodia, a car manufacturer who advocates for a libertarian model in which religious institutions take over the work of social welfare, which he locates in his reading of the *Ādipurāṇa*. He sees the Indus Valley Civilization as an instantiation of the ideal free market with unregulated international trade that brought material equity to all, in which people practiced charity as a principle of *aparigraha*, not coerced through taxation.

David E. Silverberg (PhD candidate, Columbia University) presented "Jainism and Commercial Capitalism: Ethno-Religion, Commerce, and Historical Transformation." This paper argues for an expanded concept of commercial capitalism to understand the economic practices of Jains in the early twentieth century, which persist into the present. Following economic historian Jairus Banaji, Silverberg argues that capitalism is neither simply commercial activity, as in Adam Smith's famous "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange," nor reducible simply to heavy industry. Rather, he calls

attention to the ways that capital orders not just the economy but society, globally and locally. Drawing on colonial-era archival data on Sirohi (now in southern Rajasthan), Silverberg puts forward a theory of how local commercial capitalists, mostly Jain, came to dominate and even control agrarian production through the demands of the marketplace. He further shows, based on his own ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Rajasthan and Gujarat, that contemporary perceptions of Jains, from below and above, are still primarily structured by this form of capitalism.

Celebrating the Jinas: Celebrations and Festivals in Jain Visual and Material Culture

The third Jain Studies panel, "Celebrating the Jinas: Celebrations and Festivals in Jain Visual and Material Culture," featured three papers. Anna Tosato (University of Illinois) presented "Dancing in Celebration of the Jinas: A Study of Performing Artists and Performing Arts in Ancient Jainism." Focusing on a first-century BCE architrave found at Kaṅkālī-Ṭīlā, Mathura (now in the Lucknow Museum) that depicts a female dancer in a rudimentary *maṇḍapa* with a pointed, tiled roof on four wooden supports, surrounded by viewers and seemingly within view of two statues of Tīrthaṅkaras, Tosato unravels the mystery of the dancer's unique posture. She argues that the dancer's hands are in *karaṇa karihasta*, "the elephant-trunk gesture," while her feet are in the *añcita* gesture, of which there are only five mentions attested, none of the others before the fourth-century CE. Tosato posits that this may be an early depiction of the Dance of Nīlañjanā. She compares this scene with Buddhist and Jain epigraphical evidence and similar sculptural depictions at Mathura and Bharhut, which attest to the importance of *abhinaya* that would be later codified in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in early Jain culture. This analysis, she argues, highlights the importance of performers and performances in the religious life of ancient India and shows that sculptors skillfully integrated the technical language of dance into their works, thus imbuing sculptures with layered meanings, including religious concepts and the expression of emotions. Tosato also demonstrates how examining sculptures of performances can enhance our understanding of ancient performing artists, their arts, and the cultural significance of festivals and celebrations in ancient India

Ellen Gough (Emory University), in "Painting Jain Festival Narratives: The Story of Viṣṇukumāra," analyzes a twentieth-century narrative scene painted in the Lāl Mandir (Red Temple) in Delhi's Chandni Chowk. Specifically, she analyzes a depiction of the Jain narrative linked to the festival Rakṣā Bandhan: the story of the Jain monk Viṣṇukumāra's rescue of 700 Digambara monks from the fiery torments of the nefarious minister-turned-king, Bali. Drawing upon interviews with a current artist at the Lāl Mandir, a Rajput who paints for a variety of Sikh, Hindu, and Jain religious places, Gough argues that the iconography of modern Jain temple paintings has more

to do with contemporaneous non-Jain paintings than it does the Jain architectural and ritual context.

Nandita Punj (Arizona State University) presented "Monks as Artists: Visual Interpolations and Interpretations in a Shalibhadra Chaupai Manuscript." Punj examines two identical *Śālibhadra Caupāī* manuscripts set roughly a hundred years apart, both painted in Jaisalmer. Keeping patronage and viewer reception in mind, she discusses the role of Jain monks not just as scribes but as artists as well. The story extols the benefits of almsgiving and was therefore (and still is) directed at lay merchants, who commissioned manuscripts of the story for their families. The manuscripts celebrate merchant culture, using visual tropes that refer to the traditional depiction in paintings of celebratory events in the lives of Jinas. The first, dating to 1637, was painted by the monk Devakuśala for a family resident in the palace. The second, dating to 1726, was painted by the monk Kanakakīrti but clearly modeled after the first. Punj interrogates the agency of the monk-artist of the second manuscript to ask what the monk saw fit to expand upon from the first. While some modifications appear to be at the request of the patron, such as the depiction of diamonds in the household, Punj points out that the monk also painted Śālibhadra and Dhanya's final end in the *siddhaloka*, not merely stopping with the story's conclusion that both were reborn on Mahāvideha and would attain *mokṣa* only in a future birth. She concludes from this that monk-artists had agency to engage in visual storytelling, to present scenes of pleasure and awe, and to connect the manuscript with storytelling performances, which frequently extend beyond the end of a story.

Contours of Freedom: Contemplative Practices in Jain Thought and Literature

The Contemplative Studies Unit hosted the panel, "Contours of Freedom: Contemplative Practices in Jain Thought and Literature." Morgan Curtis (PhD candidate, Harvard University) presented, "Let the Animals Lead the Way: Mantra, Contemplation, and Spiritual Progression in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*." Curtis admits that the ninth-century Tamil narrative poem *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* is not the first place most scholars of Jain Studies would think to look for Jain perspectives on contemplative practice, as the text, which tells the story of Cīvaka<u>n</u> ("Jivandhra" in Sanskrit) is well known—even infamous—for its excessive eroticism. Although some scholars interpret it as ultimately critical of embodied experiences, Curtis argues that it can also be read as exploring what it means to be embodied while on a spiritual path. In the narrative world of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, animal interactions form a critical part of that path for Cīvaka<u>n</u>, evincing a Jain sensibility that animal interactions and animal suffering can catalyze intense emotional experiences, moments of contemplation, mantric practice, and, in this case, the central character's ultimate decision to renounce kingship and the world.

Alba Rodriguez Juan (PhD candidate, University of California, Riverside) presented "Yaśovijaya's Insights on Contemplation and Meditative Experience." This paper examines Yaśovijaya's engagement with the first part of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*—the *samādhi pāda*—in his *Dvātriṃśaddvātriṃśikā*, a long compendium on mendicant conduct that includes an auto-commentary. The first part of the *Yogasūtra* presents, among other topics, different practices to stabilize the mind, obstacles in meditation, and different types of *samādhi*. Its compact style has often posed challenges for commentators. With original translations, Rodriguez Juan explores how Yaśovijaya navigates the text, offers a particular interpretation of Patañjali's teachings on meditation that draws upon Vyāsa at points, and builds on earlier Jain authors like Haribhādrasūri, applying Jain ontological and ethical frameworks to his interpretation of the text. She also shows how Yaśovijaya's engagements with different currents of thought reveal important concerns of his time.

Christopher Miller (Arihanta Institute) presented "Arhum 'Jain' Yoga: Acharya Sushil Kumar's Assemblage of Pan-South Asian Contemplative Practices in *Song of the Soul*." Here, Miller focuses on Jain contemplative practices in the Arhum Yoga tradition of Acharya Sushil Kumar (1926–1994), a Jain guru who left India to establish a community in North America in the 1970s. While Kumar described his contemplative system as "Jain Yoga" in his book, *Song of the Soul*, Miller shows that the contemplative practices contained therein reveal that Kumar was drawing from manifold non-Jain pan-South Asian influences to create his yoga system. He argues that Kumar was therefore carrying forward a medieval tradition found in Jain yoga texts, such as Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* and the later *Yogapradīpa*, both of which drew contemplative practices from non-Jain traditions while maintaining their commitment to the Jain soteriology. What is most striking, Miller notes, is how Kumar draws from non-Jain Vedic, *haṭhayoga*, and tantric traditions, and in doing so appears at times to present a non-Jain ontological and soteriological system.

Samani Pratibha Pragya (Florida International University) presented "Secularization of Contemplation: The Example of *Prekṣā-Dhyāna*." The term "contemplation" (*anuprekṣā*), she notes, refers to an ancient Jain meditative practice based on continuing to think about religious subjects with soteriological purpose. That is, the *Uttarādhyayanasūtra*'s descriptions of the daily routine of ascetics includes the five types of self-study (*svādhyāya*), wherein *anuprekṣā* is one technique used as a component of advanced types of meditation (*dharma-dhyāna* and *śukla-dhyāna*). From here, Pratibha notes a shift toward a systematized, increasingly modern packaging of *anuprekṣā*, which is different from its traditional forms in the Jain Āgamas and the *Tattvārthasūtra* (9.7), as it is presented under the meditation system named *prekṣā-dhyāna* by Ācārya Mahāprajña (1920–2010). She argues that the main difference between the premodern practices and modern *anuprekṣā* is that the premodern method involved merely mental thinking, whereas modern *anuprekṣā* introduces many steps,

such as relaxation, positive affirmation, color visualization, and concentration on psychic centers within the body, demonstrating the entanglement of secular and soteriological goals.

Individual Papers on Other Panels

Individual papers and presentations appeared in panels on other units. The Hindu Philosophy Roundtable focused on the theme "Debating Yogic Perception." Panelists presented various traditions' rebuttals of Kumārila's skeptical critique of yogic perception in his *Ślokavārttika*. Representing Jainism, Jed Forman (Simpson College) presented objections by Hemacandra, Amṛtacandra, and Haribhadrasūri. In the *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, Forman claims, Hemacandra presents an epistemological chain argument, claiming that knowledge is always tied to a knower, and therefore knowledge even of past objects can be discerned from the chain of transmission, without which a Vaidika would have to concede that the Vedas had not conveyed knowledge to anyone. In the *Tattvadīpikā*, Amṛtacandra uses the analogy of the working of the eye to claim that the soul knows objects without or without not entering into them, and so, too, yogic perceptions work the same way (following his reading of *Yogasūtra* 3.25). In the *Śāstravārttasamuccaya*, Haribhadrasūri argues that there is no logically consistent reason to claim that yogic perception is understood to be in error, as other forms of recognition cannot be said (contra Buddhists) to be a fundamental error.

Lynna Dhanani (University of California, Davis) also presented another of Hemacandra's objections to the radical skepticism militating against yogic perception. Following Haribhadra's rejection as outlined above, Hemacandra defends the chain of direct (*pratyakṣa*) forms of knowledge—*avadhi* (clairvoyance), *manaḥparyaya* (mind-reading), and, of course, *kevala* (omniscience)—to claim that perfect yogic knowledge is possible, and the lower two forms of it point the way to the reality of the ultimate form.

For the Tantric Studies Unit, Ellen Gough (Emory University) presented, "Ghaṇṭākarṇa Mahāvīra and the Jain Tantric Diagrams of Temple Bells." Asking, "What is the point of ringing a bell at the entrance to a temple?," Gough shows that for some Jains, the answer is that it protects the temple through the sounding of mantras inscribed on the bell in diagrams (*yantra*s). Gough examines this understudied ritualized use of *yantra*s by looking at the history of the Jain deity Ghaṇṭākarṇa Mahāvīra (that is, Great Hero Bell-Ears), who, at his most popular temple in Mahudi, Gujarat, is known as one of the fifty-two "heroes" (*vīra*), and is honored with "tantric" *havana*s on Kali Chaudas, the second day of the five-day festival of Diwali. Gough examines various understandings of this category of *vīra* and shows how Ghaṇṭākarṇa did not enter Jain traditions in the premodern period as a

vīra but as a protector deity akin to a *gaṇa*, or attendant, of Śiva whose *mantra*s were inscribed on metal *yantra*s and bells to sanctify temple spaces.

Leah Kalmanson (North Texas University) presented "Freedom and Fantasy: On the Self as a Source of Unfreedom." For many traditions whose aim is liberation, she asserts, to seek freedom for the everyday self is to pursue a delusion. While various Vedic schools and Buddhist and Jain sects agree on this point, they diverge on what constitutes liberation—describing it variously as: the blissful absorption of consciousness freed from materiality, the overcoming of the mirage of individuated existence, the loving relationship between a devotee and a deity, or an indescribable attainment beyond both perception and nonperception. Although none of these senses of liberation resemble freedom as we typically understand it, Kalmanson resists the impression that such spiritual trajectories are thereby depoliticized. In particular, she interrogates the contemporary tendency to seek political insights from Asian sources only from discourses that stress nondualism and instead explores the liberatory aims of explicitly dualistic language in traditions such as Jainism and Sāṁkhya.

In the Yoga in Theory and Practice Unit, Alba Rodriguez Juan (PhD candidate, University of California, Riverside) presented "Jain Yoga and the Quest for Authenticity: Haribhadra and Yaśovijaya's Perspectives." Examining discourses concerning the authenticity of yoga within Jain intellectual traditions, Rodriguez Juan focuses on the works of Haribhadra (ca. sixth to eighth centuries) and Yaśovijaya (1624–1688). She argues that these thinkers positioned their yoga practices as the true or authentic form of yoga in juxtaposition with other religious traditions. Both categorize practitioners based on their capabilities and progress in yoga practice; thus, their texts reflect hierarchical judgments and reinforce the superiority of Jain yoga. She traces Haribhadra's classifications of *yogin*s across various works and investigates how Yaśovijaya expands on his ideas. Although recognizing that a non-Jain yogi could attain the state of *apunarbandhaka* (one who will not be bound [to karma?] again), she claims that both authors emphasize *avañcaka-yoga* (authentic yoga) as the final stage in yoga practice, achieved through purification resulting from adherence to Jain ethical precepts and ascetic disciplines. She shows how both engaged with broader intellectual currents while firmly situating their systematizations of yoga within Jain soteriology and karma theory.

In the Hinduism Unit panel, "Hinduism in the Anthropocene," David E. Silverberg (PhD candidate, Columbia University) presented, "Ecologies of Blame: Religion, Commerce, Conspiracy, and the Climate Crisis," presenting further work from his dissertation-in-progress on the "anti-Jainism" of the Anoop Mandal. A religious sect centered throughout the arid and drought-prone districts along the border between Rajasthan and Gujarat, Anoop Mandal devotees (*bhāvik*s) believe that Jain merchant castes, *baniya*s, control all the world's governments, the economy, and even the weather—and are thus the source of the current climate crisis. Critics contend that this

is evidence of the backwards status of the group's members, who are mostly low-caste, and the underdevelopment of the region. However, Silverberg, having conducted extensive fieldwork with Anoop Mandal communities, argues that their beliefs represent not a premodern prejudice but a form of Hindu theorizing that connects anthropogenic climate change with the demands of a specific economy. Rather than calling it "the Anthropocene," Anoop Mandal *bhāvik*s would sooner assert that this period is the "Capitalocene." Silverberg asks how and why the causes of ecological devastation become conceptualized as personal rather than systemic for members of the Anoop Mandal, how religion facilitates this process, and why the target of this theory is an ethnoreligious group.

Zoë Slatoff (Loyola Marymount University) presented "Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral: Our Karmic Connection to Those Born from Horizontal Wombs" in the Collective Karma and Karmic Collectives Seminar. She focuses on Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra*, which explains that "the soul behaves like an actor in the drama of cyclic existence," changing wombs in different births, transforming from a Brahmin to an outcaste, to a god, to an insect and everything in between (4.65–66). Although, Slatoff asserts, Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Jainism have slightly different ideas about what the animal-and-plant realm consists of and how transmigration works—the former relying more on the interplay of the three *guṇa*s and the latter on a material notion of karma—they share the idea of instantaneous rebirth and the recognition that all beings suffer and therefore should be treated with care. She argues that Hemacandra is clear is that, while a human birth is precious in its ability to cultivate virtue and ultimately seek liberation from the cycle of rebirth, we live in an interconnected karmic web and we thus have a responsibility not only to extend compassion to our fellow creatures and planet but also to learn from our pets, trees, and even raindrops.

In the Hinduism Unit panel, "The Languages of Hinduism," Steven M. Vose (University of Colorado Denver) presented "The Virtuous Vernacular: Cultivating Jain Women's Moral Conduct (*Śīla*) in a Fifteenth-Century Gujarati Story Collection." Vose claims that the bulk of writing in the nascent period of vernacularization in western India was not devotional in nature but didactic. That is, didactic story literature comprises the majority of the folios produced in Māru-Gūrjara in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Drawing attention to this weighty fact, Vose demonstrates that the *bālāvabodha* (teaching children or novices) genre was heavily favored by Jain monks to create story collections on points ranging from poetics and grammar to everyday virtue and moral conduct. Focusing specifically on the *Śīlopadeśamālābālāvabodha* of the fifteenth-century Kharatara Gaccha monk Merusundaragaṇi, Vose argues that the preponderance of themes in the collection highlight the benefit that comes to Jain laywomen for adhering to principles of sexual chastity, especially marital fidelity, seemingly against all odds. Vose concludes that collections like this evince a shift in

the work that Jain monastic intellectuals did to connect the possibility of women reaching *mokṣa* to their adherence to family and, by extension, to caste purity concerns.

Finally, the Global-Critical Philosophy of Religion Unit hosted a book panel for the launch of *A Sourcebook in Global Philosophy* (Equinox, 2025), edited by Mohammed Rustom. A first-of-its-kind collection of translations, writings, and conversations by sixty leading contemporary philosophers and translators, the volume features some of the major ideas, themes, and arguments in nearly one hundred philosophical texts of Africana, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Islamic, Jain, Jewish, Latin American, Mesoamerican, Native American, and Taoist philosophy. It includes translations from sixteen different languages on topics including metaphysics, cosmology, epistemology, philosophy of language, logic, ethics, storytelling, philosophy of religion, selfhood, death, and freedom. Marie-Hélène Gorisse (University of Birmingham), a contributor to the volume, was one of the panelists.