10-1-1992

Padmanabh S. Jaini. *Gender and Salvation-Jaima Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women*

Korsi Dogbe

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

**Recommended Citation**


Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol27/iss27/14

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
the Black elite as a mere microcosm of the global situation, itself, which is the macrocosm. The saga, alas, has not yet been completed, as Harvey had hoped. We are all caught up, it seems, in the throes of civilizational encounters, the results of which have not been the same for all people, nor yet fully studied, discussed, analyzed, and documented. I propose that the ISCSC be the first venue for the discussion and analysis of the results of such catastrophic civilizational encounters.

But a solution suggested by a member of the Black elite can be quite gratifying for the moment. He envisions and is working for the formation of a "beloved community" for the twenty-first century where "justice and peace are priorities" in "the global village."

This is, obviously, a powerful book, must reading for all civilizationists and students of the comparative sociology of the elite.

Korsi Dogbe

COMPARATIVE SALVATION


The author of this invaluable scholarly work is a Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of California in Berkeley. Gender and Salvation is a modern introduction to the debates in the Jaina religion of India between the religion's two main sects, the Digambaras, also known as the "sky-clad," and the Svetambaras, also known as "white-cloth-clad." The debates are basically about whether or not women have the same qualities as men to attain moksa, that is, spiritual salvation.

To have a clear civilizational understanding of these complicated debates, I suggest that the reader first peruse thoroughly the lucid essay, written by Professor Robert P. Goldman, which was published as the Foreword, before delving into the debates themselves. In this essay, Goldman helps the student to place the debates within "the context of the broader social history of traditional India."

In addition to the Foreword, Jaini's Gender and Salvation has a Preface, an Introduction, six chapters, an Appendix, Glossary of Sanskrit and Prakrit Words, a Bibliography, and an Index of Names. Jaini's general Introduction of the entire debate, itself, is extremely enlightening. The glossary and index of names sections are particularly helpful to the least tutored reader in such Indian words and names. But even with constant reference to these names and words, this reader still had some difficult moments with the text itself.

Jainism, a philosophy and a religion, is one of three ancient religions in India, called the three heterodoxies. The other two are Buddhism and Ajivikism. The central ethical concept in Jainism is ahimsa, meaning "noninjury to all living creatures." And the attractive thing about
their logical proposition of *anekantavada* is its meaning, "the many sid-
edness of reality." But as Professor Jaini will later show in *Gender and Salvation*, this laudable logic which, invariably, must accept opposite realities and contradictions as complementary truths, is incapable of or unwilling to grant women the possibility of attaining spiritual liberation, *moksa*, which is also known as *nirvana* or *mukti*. The Digambaras, in particular, "vehemently have insisted that one cannot attain moksa, emancipation of a soul from the cycles of birth and death (samsara), as a female," while the Svetambaras "have steadfastly refused to claim exclusively male access to the liberated state (Arhat or Siddha) of the soul."

Jaini provides the reader with a picture of the Jaina cosmology in a general introduction to the debates. "The Jaina universe consists of three spheres, the upper heavenly abodes (svargaloka), the lower hellish abodes (narakaloka), and the tiny area between called the middle abode (madhyaloka, the earth), wherein dwell human beings and animals."

...There are a variety of heavens situated one above the other, abodes of ever increasing happiness. The highest heaven, called Sarvarthasiddi (lit. Accomplishment of All Desires), was considered the highest point of worldly happiness and was achievable only by the highest kind of meritorious (punya) deeds. Similarly, there are seven successive hells, their misery increasing as one descends. The lowest hell, called Mahatamahprabha (lit. Pitch Darkness), was attained only by those beings who commit the most inauspicious (apunya or papa) actions. Beyond the heavens but within the habitable universe (called lokakasa, beyond which movement was not possible) was an area where the Jaina believed that emancipated souls called Siddhas, once freed from their karmic burden and all other forms of embodiment, rose automatically and abided forever in their omniscient glory. The summit of the universe was called the Siddha-loka.

To the Jainas the Madhya-loka, which is the middle realm and is, therefore, the earth which is the locus of all human beings and animals, is also "the center of gravity of the rebirth process and the springboard to rebirth in other sphere." A person who has attained Siddhahood cannot descend to the lowest hell, called narakaloka, and vice versa. Humans have "volitional impulses," called *dhyana*. Good volitional impulses could either be *dharma* (righteous) or *sukla* (pure). Evil volitional impulses could be either *arta* (sorrowful) or *raudra* (cruel). The Jainas believe that (1) "The cultivation of the (purest concentration) led to wholesome destinies, culminating in the highest heavens." (2) Women "are incapable of experiencing the most extreme form of unwholesome (evil) volitions; consequently, they are incapable of being reborn in the lowest, the seventh, hell." The Digambaras use this belief to disqualify women from attaining *moksa*, and what is stated below is a summary of their thinking:
If women are not capable of entertaining the most impure forms of concentration, then they are not capable of entertaining the purest forms of concentration. If they cannot entertain either form of concentration, then they cannot be reborn in the lowest hell, or attain Siddhahood. Therefore, women cannot be born in the highest heaven.

This line of reasoning, and the contra version of the Svetambaras, are hotly debated, using “scriptural authority, logical inferences, linguistic interpretation, and direct observation” of social and natural phenomena. The six chapters that discuss these debates have numerous verses and are very repetitious. But it is astonishing how much we learn from each of them about “the roots of misogyny,” “patriarchal anxiety,” and “gynophobic” representation of the female body and its natural processes.” A few quotes from some of these chapters may be in order:

In Chapter One, “taken from the Prakrit Suttapahuda... is the first extant Jaina text” written by Kundakunda, the main author of the Digambara text. Jaini states that it is the first text “that not only challenges the mendicant status of the clothed . . . mendicants but also denies women access to the holy path explicitly on account of their biological condition.”

What is the biological condition of women? Verses 7 and 8 go like this:

In the genital organs of women, in between their breasts, in their navels, and in the armpits, it is said [in the scriptures that] there are very subtle living beings. How can there be the mendicant ordination (pravrajya) for them [since they must violate the vow of ahimsa]? Women have no purity of mind; they are by nature fickle-minded. They have menstrual flows. [Therefore] there is no meditation for them free from anxiety.

If women violate the vows of ahimsa (noninjury to living creatures) through menstrual flows and other natural bodily processes, then they cannot enter heaven, the Digambara theologians reasoned.

Against this fundamental belief of the Digambaras are all kinds of counterattacks by the Svetambaras, which are found in all five remaining chapters. What may be considered a representative counterattack is as follows:

If being a woman alone were to obstruct the dharma [of accepting the mendicant restraints], then the twenty defects that prevent ordination would have included “being a woman,” as it did “being a child” . . . and would not merely have said “being pregnant” or “having a child.”

Later some of the debates are about homosexuals, which some of us modern people may find bizarre or absurd.

But one interesting civilizational point is that the Jainas could engage
in a debate like this while the Buddha was quite willing to go along with the assertion that women were capable of "attaining nirvana." Another interesting civilizational point is that while the three heterodoxies were founded in opposition to the caste-promoting, racist, and sexist Brahmanical movement in traditional Indian society, Jainism could turn around and promote some of the same prejudices against women. One wishes that Professor Jaina clearly explained how these original concerns of equality got lost to concerns about the hellish status of women, and their biological inferiority. However, it is amazing how similar some of the teachings about the status of women by the so-called historical, organized religions of contemporary society are to those of the Jainas.

As civilizationists we are being constantly challenged to join contemporary feminist scholars in investigating how we have historically used language to teach ourselves "that all life is constructed on the principles of the human patriarchy" rather than the human matriarchy even in the face of new, contrary archeological and other scientific discoveries. Professor Jaini's *Gender and Salvation* may provide us with something with which to begin. Therefore, a roundtable on the civilizational evolution of the female may be an idea whose time has come.

Korsi Dogbe

COMPARATIVE LEGALITY


Since work of all kinds is basic to society, it is also basic to civilization. Work takes place within a political and economic context that is imbedded within a civilizational context. Laws and the institutions that apply law are certainly part of the context of work.

The heart of David Ziskind's book, *Labor Laws in the Middle East, Tradition in Transit*, summarizes constitutional provisions, statutes, conventions of the International Labor and Arab Labor Organizations signed by some of the countries, and the United Nations covenants to which the countries have agreed, relating to employment, remuneration, hours of work and leisure, occupational safety and health, unionization, collective bargaining, strikes, settlement techniques, and agencies worker housing, worker education, and human rights affecting labor. There is a chapter on special classes of labor, and one on the status of labor. There are summaries of how much actual conditions conform to the law, a useful overall summary chapter, and an appendix with chronological lists of selected labor statutes. The author's goal has been to be factual, but his decency and benevolence shine through. He is explicitly aware of the relevance of civilization; he does address the issue; but he does not offer a thorough civilizational interpretation.