

Article

Jain Veganism: Ancient Wisdom, New Opportunities

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Abstract: This article seeks to elevate contemporary Jain voices calling for the adoption of a vegan lifestyle as a sign of solidarity with the transnational vegan movement and its animal rights, environmental protection, and health aspirations. Just as important, however, this article also seeks to present some of the unique features of contemporary Jain veganism, including, most specifically, Jain veganism as an ascetic practice aimed at the embodiment of non-violence (*ahimsā*), the eradication (*nirjarā*) of karma, and the liberation (*mokṣa*) of the Self (*jīva*). These are distinctive features of Jain veganism often overlooked and yet worthy of our attention. We begin the article with a brief discussion of transnational veganism and Jain veganism's place within this global movement. This is followed by an overview of Jain karma theory as it appears in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, an authoritative diasporic Jain text. Next, we present two case studies of contemporary Jain expressions of veganism: (1) The UK-based organization known as "Jain Vegans" and (2) The US-based organization known as "Vegan Jains". Both organizations have found new opportunities in transnational veganism to practice and embody the virtue of *ahimsā* as well as Jain karma theory. As we will show, though both organizations share the animal, human, and environmental protection aspirations found in transnational veganism, Jain Vegans and Vegan Jains simultaneously promote *ahimsā* to varying degrees in service of the Jain path to liberation. We conclude the article with a brief reconsideration of Marcus Banks's diasporic "three tendencies" model to demonstrate how contemporary manifestations of Jain veganism compel us to revisit our understanding of diasporic expressions of Jain religious belief and praxis.



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Veganism is embraced by some, misunderstood by many, and resisted by others in the Jain community. And yet, the primary tenet of Jainism is ahimsa. Bhagwan Mahavir's message in the Acharanga Sutra is clear, "all breathing, existing, living, sentient, creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. The central philosophy of Jainism and veganism are not only similar, but also complimentary" (Jain 2016, p. 116)

Dr. Sulekh Jain, *An Ahimsa Crisis? You Decide*

1. Introduction

The Jain Center of Southern California (est. 1979) passed a resolution to become a fully vegan institution in 2018 under the leadership of its then-president Dr. Jasvant Modi. From that moment forward, no food made from animals would be served on the premises, indefinitely. The transition caused quite a stir within the local Jain community, with both supporters and opponents. Those in favor saw veganism as a logical and necessary evolution toward *ahimsā* (non-harming);¹ those opposed were in favor of retaining what they perceived to be appropriate and long-standing Jain dietary practices. At the center of these disputes was the question as to whether or not Jains should be consuming dairy, the primary non-vegan ingredient that the Center would now relinquish from its menu.



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The Jain Center of Southern California's transition to a vegan menu was rooted in Dr. Modi's own adoption of veganism only a few years prior. When he learned of the violence inflicted upon animals in the dairy industry, as well as the environmental damage it causes, he no longer felt it was possible to justify his consumption of dairy products in light of Jainism's fundamental commitment to *ahiṃsā*. Soon thereafter Modi began to experience personal health benefits from giving up dairy, which only deepened his commitment to spreading the message of a vegan lifestyle to Jains and non-Jains alike. Since then, he and a growing number of Jains in the North American diaspora have begun to try to convince other Jain centers and institutions to transition to a fully vegan menu in recognition of *ahiṃsā*, compassion, and, increasingly, the intricate Jain karma theory undergirding both. This vegan trend appears to be happening all over the world in the Jain diaspora. In fact, the initial motivation to write this article sprang from a conversation the first author (C.J.M.) had with a Jain friend who lives in Europe, who conveyed that their primary motivation for becoming vegan was to avoid and eradicate karma following Jain karma theory.

Alongside Jain philosophy, Jains such as Dr. Modi and the first author's friend in Europe who decide to become vegan actually do so under the influence of what this article defines as "transnational veganism". As a result of this influence, diasporic lay Jains—and, increasingly, ascetic Jains in India—are finding new opportunities to practice their Jain values in tandem with the popular motivations found in broader transnational vegan discourse. These motivations are primarily the environmental, animal welfare, and health advantages of animal-free consumption. While these motivations for transitioning to veganism are certainly not uniquely Jain, they are being instrumentalized by some Jains to fulfill soteriological goals that are central to the Jain tradition.

Accordingly, this article presents some of the unique features of contemporary Jain veganism, including, most specifically, Jain veganism as an ascetic practice aimed at the embodiment of non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), the eradication (*nirjarā*) of karma, and the liberation (*mokṣa*) of the soul (*jīva*). Following some brief methodological considerations, we begin the article with a discussion of transnational veganism and diasporic Jain veganism's place within this global movement. This is followed by an overview of key textual sources undergirding diasporic Jains' fundamental commitment to *ahiṃsā* and Jain karma theory. Next, we present two case studies of contemporary diasporic Jain expressions of veganism: (1) The UK-based organization known as "Jain Vegans" and (2) "Vegan Jains" in the United States. While each of these forms of Jain veganism is distinct, jointly they represent another adaptation of *ahiṃsā* inspired by Mahāvīra's foundational insight paraphrased in the epigraph of this article that is today being put to the task of reducing the violence inflicted upon animals, the environment, and human bodies. We conclude the article with a brief reconsideration of Marcus Banks's diasporic "three tendencies" model to demonstrate how contemporary manifestations of Jain veganism compel us to revisit our understanding of diasporic expressions of Jain religious belief and praxis.

2. Methodological Considerations

This study makes a preliminary attempt to understand the growing phenomenon of Jains who decide to become vegan. To understand their motivations and to corroborate our findings, we have undertaken informal interviews with a number of leaders and practitioners who practice veganism. Nevertheless, we gleaned the most significant amount of our hard data from an anonymous survey shared in the Jain Vegans' WhatsApp group in 2021 (see Appendix A) as well as from the public information available on various websites espousing Jain veganism (primarily veganjains.com, jainvegans.org, and affiliated websites). Details regarding the anonymous survey, its contents, and what it revealed are shared below in the section discussing UK-based Jain Vegans and in Appendix A. As readers will see, the pool of survey participants was limited to the 79 members of the Jain Vegans WhatsApp group, and we only received 33 responses total. We freely acknowledge that the pool of participants was small, and we hope to survey a larger pool in a future study.

With this limitation in mind, we have presented our research publicly in major academic forums and have shared the results with the global Jain vegan community, who have to date expressed their support and have conveyed that their views are being accurately and respectfully presented. This anecdotal evidence does not suggest that our findings are absolutely conclusive, but it does suggest to us that the varying motivations for Jain veganism we have outlined here may in fact reflect fairly and accurately the opinions and motivations of the Jain vegan community worldwide. To certify this claim, however, more studies of Jain veganism in the diaspora need to be conducted—this is but a first step.

3. Jain Veganism in Transnational Veganism

While the existence of a unified global vegan movement is questionable, indubitable is the unifying momentum that has been generated by myriad local movements promoting the mass abstention from animal-derived products (i.e., veganism). This loosely-organized collaborative endeavor explicitly operates to combat one of the most anthropocentric, racist (Harper 2010; Ko and Ko 2017), sexist (Adams 1990), classist (Grabell 2018; Nicole 2013; Pachirat 2011; Ribas 2015), dangerous (Wasley et al. 2018), polluting and climate change-inducing (Clark et al. 2019; Gerber et al. 2013; Weis 2013) systems in the world: factory farming.² Motivations for adopting and promoting veganism may differ from place to place and person to person, but ultimately the effect is the same—namely, boycotts of the meat, dairy, egg, wool, and other animal-exploiting industries (Hahn 2014). In short, no matter how else it is described, veganism is fundamentally a practice, something one *does* rather than something one *believes* (Dickstein et al. 2020; Dutkiewicz and Dickstein 2021). This fact permits us to label the phenomenon of “transnational veganism” even in the absence of a standardized or universal ideology. As such, we offer the following working definition:

Transnational veganism is a global practice movement composed of innumerable, often uncoordinated groups and individuals abstaining from animal-derived products. Worldviews and motivations undergirding the practice vary widely, but the effect remains the same—an abstention on the personal level and a boycott on the structural level.

Notably, Donald Watson, the co-founder of The Vegan Society and coiner of the term “veganism”, originally defined veganism in exclusively practice-centric terms, despite maintaining and expressing very strong and specific motivations for refusing animal products. As early as 1944, Watson presented the following conduct-oriented definition: “Veganism is the *practice* of living upon fruits, nuts, vegetables, grains, and other wholesome non-animal foods” (Watson 1944, p. 2, emphasis added). Shortly thereafter, Watson’s definition was critiqued by colleagues who insisted that the *-ism* of veganism should signify an ethos or ideology and not merely a pattern of behavior (Cross 1949). Yet regardless of the details and outcomes of this early debate over the definition of the term, in addition to the logical plausibility of “veganism” signifying anything *but* a practice (Dutkiewicz and Dickstein 2021), fast-forward seventy years and the original practice-centric definition still remains the most common understanding (now with “diet” extending to medicines, clothing, and other consumables).

Categorizing veganism as fundamentally a practice—that is, a “doing”—is key for accepting Jain veganism as a “real” veganism within transnational veganism, despite the fact that its anchoring in distinctive religious metaphysics is generally ignored, rejected, or unknown to the non-Jain vegan world. For whether Jains adopt veganism to reduce the suffering and slaughter of animals and/or, as will be discussed below, to avoid karmas that postpone their own liberation, the external effect of their abstention is, once again, the same. Moreover, despite the pitfalls of global consumer spirituality and its faith in subversion through “buying (the right) stuff” (Jain 2020, p. 30), consumer abstentions such as veganism still matter because, in fact, boycotts influence supply chains (Friedman 1999; McMullen and Halteman 2019). Hence, when conceived as a boycott, veganism, whether Jain or not, constitutes one of many powerful political tactics aimed at preventing this

mass suffering and creating a more just world (Dickstein et al. 2020). While appearing, and at times even self-advertising, as an individual and/or individualistic pursuit, diasporic Jain veganism remains a *collective* endeavor nested within the broader transnational vegan movement aimed at longstanding structural change.

Moreover, even if Jain veganism is inflected by unique metaphysics, Jain (and other South Asian) traditions routinely stress how the fundamental ethical problem is not the physical intake of meat itself but rather the fact that procuring and eating meat contributes to the “making” of even more meat, that is, to processes of breeding, harming, and killing.³ The emphasis on future harms is common to transnational veganism as well, for one’s abstention from animal products hardly ever prevents harm to existing animals—as these animals are either already dead or soon-to-be—but it will help reduce the number of future animals bred, harmed, and killed for human consumption. It is for this reason, among others, that Jains assert that one should not partake in actions that propel these cycles of violence, whether they be performed by oneself (*krta*) or by others on one’s behalf (*kārīta*) or act in ways that express approval for such violence (*anumata*).⁴

In short, while Indian ascetic traditions occasionally denounce meat qua meat for the substance’s intrinsic disvalue,⁵ they much more often stress this link between animal consumption and animal production and killing, and therefore the relevance of consumption to the ethic of non-harming.⁶ As Valley (2004) writes: “Jain dietary discourse is simply a culinary expression of the philosophy of *ahimsa* (non-violence); ethics is made concrete through dietary practice” (p. 8). The initial and fundamental acknowledgement and indictment of consumers as one of the major causes of avoidable future violence mirrors how transnational veganism (conceived as a collective consumer abstention) functions as a form of leverage to avert the violent exploitation of future—not existing—nonhuman (and human) animals. In addition, the world’s most widely exploited animals, that is, domesticated “food animals” (including or excluding sea creatures), are “five-sensed” beings according to Jain theory (Wiley 2006; Mahias 1985, pp. 93–95). Five-sensed beings (human beings included) purportedly maintain a heightened capacity for experiencing pain and suffering, a fact that both triggers profound compassion and warns Jains of the elevated karmic consequences of harming them. As such, this concern aligns Jain veganism with, at minimum, the “livestock-centric” concerns and motivations within the broader transnational vegan movement.

Finally, historically speaking, perhaps it should come as no surprise that there exists both functional and principled consonance between Jain veganism and transnational veganism, despite some of the former’s distinctive religious features. Indeed, as Stuart (2007) has clearly shown, Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist dietary philosophies and practices have significantly influenced and encouraged Western practices of vegetarianism—and eventually veganism—since at least the first centuries BCE onward (p. 40).⁷

Jains have been migrating out of South Asia for centuries, and it is currently estimated that diasporic Jains, most of whom are in North America and Europe, comprise 5% of the total global Jain population (Cort 2018, p. 256). A much smaller percentage of this diasporic population (for which we have no hard data to determine its exact size) are vegan, and thus the current study considers the dietary and lifestyle praxis of a minority of Jains primarily outside of South Asia. Nevertheless, Jain veganism is gaining momentum in the organizations we feature and continues to find a notable presence in Jain conventions, online, and in print media around the world as part of the development of a “universalized Jainism”⁸ that promotes the path of liberation (*mokṣamārga*) as a globalized Jain modernity (Cort 2018, p. 262). There are a number of categories of belief and practice that contribute to this “universalized Jainism” (see Cort 2018). This article limits itself to the categories of “food and diet” and “*ahimsā*” (ibid.) and most specifically considers Jain vegans’ diasporic interpretations of karma and the path to liberation as they pertain to both.⁹

4. Ahimsā, Karma, and Liberation in the Jain Tradition

Jain veganism is rooted in the foundational insight of the tradition's 24th *tīrthaṅkara*,¹⁰ Mahāvīra. The *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* paints a detailed picture of this insight that would ultimately lead Mahāvīra, the Jain tradition's 24th *tīrthaṅkara*, to dedicate himself to a life of complete non-harming (*ahimsā*):

Thoroughly knowing the earth-bodies and water-bodies and fire-bodies and wind-bodies, the lichens, seeds, and sprouts, [Mahavira] comprehended that they are, if narrowly inspected, imbued with life, and avoided to injure them . . . Mahāvīrā meditated (persevering) in some posture, without the smallest motion; he meditated in mental concentration on (the things) above, below, beside, free from desires . . . (Jacobi 1884, pp. 80–81, 87)

In addition to inspiring intricate Jain karma theories in later texts such as the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* and the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, Mahāvīra's fundamental insight identified here has inspired Jain communities both past and present to reinterpret and advocate for countless new forms of correct conduct. These reinterpretations of conduct in light of the Jain tradition's core textual resources have been, as all religious adaptations have been throughout history, constructed according to particular cultural and historical conditions. This article focuses on one such contemporary transnational adaptation of *ahimsā* and Jain karma theory in recent diasporic Jain movements advocating for the adoption of veganism.

As our survey data below will show, in addition to the need to practice non-harming (*ahimsā*), diasporic Jains often invoke karma theory as a significant reason for adopting veganism as a way of life. Though there are a number of sources that discuss Jain karma theory, more often than not Umāsvāti's¹¹ *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (ca. 450 CE) serves as the authoritative source for contemporary diasporic Jain understandings of how karma works on the path to liberation. Diasporic Jains' ubiquitous use of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* to study Jain karma theory has its origins in Nathmal Tatia's publication of an English translation of the text in 1994 in the United Kingdom. Tatia was sponsored by select Jains residing in the United Kingdom to translate the text as part of the "Sacred Literature Series of the International Sacred Literature Trust"; this series sought to "promote understanding and open discussion between and within faiths and to give voice in today's world to the wisdom that speaks across time and traditions" (Tatia 2011, p. vii). Because this article focuses on veganism in the anglophone Jain diaspora where the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* remains the primary source of textual authority, it is to this text that we can turn to gain an understanding of the particular logic of karma at play in the Jain vegan diaspora.¹²

At the beginning of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (1.2), Umāsvāti emphatically states that "[t]o possess the enlightened world-view is to believe in the categories of truth" (Tatia 2011, p. 6). The "categories of truth" to which Umāsvāti refers are known in Sanskrit as the *tattvas* and are listed in a subsequent verse (1.4):

- (1) "jīva" or "Self"
- (2) "ajīva" or "not Self"
- (3) "āsrava" or "the inflow of karmic particles to the soul"
- (4) "bandha" or "binding of the karmic particles to the soul"
- (5) "saṃvara" or "stopping the inflow of karmic particles"
- (6) "nirjarā" or "the falling away of the karmic particles"
- (7) "mokṣa" or "liberation from worldly (karmic) bondage"

(adapted from Tatia 2011, p. 6)¹³

These seven *tattvas* systematically outline the process by which karma adheres to the soul (*jīva*) and thus ensnares this soul in the world of suffering (*ajīva*).¹⁴ The *tattvas* also describe, however, how one might subsequently eliminate their karmas through spiritual practice.

According to the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, when one commits *any* action (*yoga*) on account of attachments of the senses and the mind, whether meritorious (*puṇya*) or not meritorious

(*pāpa*), and whether in body (*kāya*), speech (*vāc*), or mind (*manas*), one causes karmic particles to flow toward (*āsrava*) and adhere to (*bandha*) their soul. With regard to diet specifically, the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* proscribes the consumption of any being that has more than one sense (one can essentially only eat plants, and even then only certain plants and in accordance with strict rules) because to do so would cause a significant amount of unmeritorious karma to adhere to one's soul. Meritorious actions are of course preferred over unmeritorious actions, although eventually a spiritual practitioner must cease *all* activity because even good acts cause the soul to be bound to the world of suffering (*saṃsāra*), birth after birth. Indeed, if karma remains adhered to one's soul at death, they are bound to be immediately reborn into another life as a human, hell-being, celestial being, animal, or plant depending on the particular configuration of their karma. This process of rebirth does not necessarily happen in a linear fashion. For example, even those who earn abundant meritorious karma in a current life may be reborn lower in the chain of life or in a hell realm on account of karma from a previous life that still needs to be absolved.¹⁵

The process of stopping the inflow of karma to one's soul, *saṃvara*, is an intentional practice of reducing one's harmful and injurious (*hiṃsā*) action in the world through the adoption of the five vows of non-harming, honesty, not stealing, sensual restraint, and non-possessiveness. Umāsvāti writes in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (7.1), "Abstinence from violence, falsehood, stealing, carnality, and possessiveness—these are the vows" (Tatia 2011, p. 169). In rare circumstances, the mind and senses come under complete control due to the adoption of these vows, and all actions, whether good or bad, cease—so too then does the influx of meritorious and unmeritorious karma to one's soul.

In addition to stopping the inflow of new karma, one must of course eliminate the old karmas bound to their soul from prior action. This process of elimination is known as *nirjarā* and results from inner heat (*tapas*) produced by spiritual practitioners on account of their austerities and commitment to their vows. Critically, the first four out of the six "external austerities" (*bāhyaṃ tapaḥ*) prescribed by the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (9.19) involve varying degrees of dietary restriction that in many ways accommodate, as we shall soon see, extant transnational vegan practice:

- (1) fasting
- (2) semi-fasting or reduced diet
- (3) voluntarily limiting the variety and the manner of seeking food
- (4) giving up delicacies or a stimulating diet
- (5) lonely habitation
- (6) mortification of the body

(adapted from Tatia 2011, p. 232)

Once one has eliminated all of their karma through the ongoing implementation of *nirjarā* through these and other internal austerities enumerated in the text, the rare and exalted state of liberation (*mokṣa*) from the world of suffering ensues.

With its requirement to ultimately eliminate all action to achieve liberation, the Jain tradition is often stereotyped as advocating the most extreme forms of spiritual practice in the South Asian religious landscape. As Bronkhorst (2007) writes regarding the logical end of Jain ascetic practice:

Activity being the source of all unhappiness, the attempt is made to put a stop to it. This is done in a most radical way. The monk abstains from food and prepares for death in a position which is as motionless as possible. (p. 18)

While there is some truth to the stereotypes that emphasize the severity of Jain ascetic practice, these stereotypes emerge from texts that focus on the ascetic lives of monks and nuns that did not take into account the quotidian lives of the vast majority of lay householder Jains whose lives required reduced—though no less sincere—commitments to the perfection of non-harming and the elimination of karma (cf. Dundas 2002, pp. 1–11). Though we will discuss the recent rise of authority among vegan Jain ascetics, the focus of this article is on the lay Jain because it is largely contemporary lay Jains who promote

veganism as a householder path aimed at reducing one's karma while living in mainstream society.

If Jainism is understood as a spiritual practice that theoretically requires the reduction and eventual cessation of all violence and activity, Jain karma theory and vegan praxis appear to be a natural pairing. That is to say, though it still involves consumption and therefore action, Jain veganism first and foremost constitutes a contemporary expression of renunciation of a particularly unmeritorious karma-producing activity encountered all-too-often in contemporary society: the consumption of violated and slaughtered animals and their extracted secretions. Thus, the abstention from animal products near-seamlessly elides with the *tattoas* of *saṃvara* and *nirjarā* by not only distancing one from harmful activities, thereby preventing the accrual of new karma, but also by potentially eliminating old karma by means of the dietary austerity often associated with the abstention itself (Vallely 2004).¹⁶ The two contemporary case studies presented in the following section concretely illustrate the elision between Jain karma theory and veganism in contemporary Jain diasporic life.

5. Contemporary Jain Veganism: Jain Vegans and Vegan Jains

5.1. Jain Vegans (United Kingdom)

As their website indicates, UK-based Jain Vegans (JV) is “helping the Jain community transition towards a low-himsa vegan lifestyle” (Jain 2020a). From 2008 to 2018, the group did so by focusing its efforts on educating the UK Jain community through educational events, cooking demonstrations, and vegan food tasting stalls at community events. In more recent years, the community has extended its influence via the internet and a WhatsApp group to speak to an international audience in Europe, North America, and India.

Most notably, JV runs an annual “give up dairy for Paryushan” campaign during the Jain holy festival of Paryushan. “In light of the violence in milk production,” states JV’s campaign website, “we invite Jains to consider giving up dairy this Paryushan” (Jain 2020b).¹⁷ The call to give up dairy is a common plea in the transnational vegan movement, though for Jains Paryushan is a particularly fitting venue for such a campaign. Indeed, Paryushan is the auspicious time of year during which Jains take time out of their busy lives to reflect on, and to ask forgiveness for, the violence they have inflicted upon all living beings in the world. Because the festival involves fasting as a form of purificatory and penitent austerity (*tapas*), JV asks the international Jain community to consider giving up the consumption of dairy specifically on account of the “significant violence” directed at dairy cows and their offspring in the dairy industry. JV highlights how many Jains already do not eat certain root vegetables (to avoid the violence this inflicts on minute beings), yet still consume dairy foods that are directly connected with severe forms of harm inflicted on millions of five-sensed animals—namely, cows, goats, and sheep. The types of violence highlighted by JV are identical to those elevated in transnational vegan discourse, such as the painful and forceful artificial insemination of female cows, the routine separation of male calves from their mothers at birth, the subsequent slaughter of these calves due to their uselessness to the dairy industry, and the early “retirement” and slaughter of non-milk-producing female cows.¹⁸ Furthermore, while JV’s Paryushan campaign focuses first and foremost on the violence inflicted on cows in the dairy industry, it includes additional reasons to forego dairy that are stock-in-trade to transnational vegan rhetoric, such as the heavy environmental impacts and health implications of consuming dairy foods (*ibid.*).¹⁹

5.2. A Note on Dairy and the *Abhaksyas*

An intriguing aspect of this recent movement away from dairy within the global Jain community is that not only have dairy products not been forbidden by Jain communities in the past but also that other traditionally “forbidden foods” besides meat have recently been downgraded relative to dairy or sidelined altogether. In this context, Vallely (2004) discusses the Jain *abhaksyas*, or “foods not fit to be eaten” (pp. 14–20; Williams 1963, pp.

110–13) and their reinterpretation in the diaspora.²⁰ While traditional lists of *abhakṣyas* include predictable items such as flesh, eggs, and honey (among others), they also include “secondary” items such as “*bahu-bija*, i.e., fruits with many seeds, such as pomegranates; *mulakanda*, i.e., root crops, such as potatoes and onions; and *ratri-bhojana*, foods eaten at night” (Vallely 2004, p. 15). However, many diasporic Jains eschew the “secondary interdictions” prohibiting these items, while alternatively identifying dairy products (as well as gelatin, casein, etc.) as part of a “new [secondary and apparently important] category” of *abhakṣya* (p. 17).

Jain philosophers and laypeople have routinely used and consumed dairy products for millennia, and one may wonder how much they acknowledged (even without confessing) the harms involved in milk extraction from nonhuman mammals. While beyond the scope of this inquiry, the assumption that dairy products are “non-*hiṃsīc*” potentially owes to their accepted indispensability for ritual and nutritional purposes, the non-killing of milch cows even beyond their lactating age (and *ahiṃsā* has periodically been understood as “non-killing” rather than “non-harming”), and the pan-Indic affection for a discourse of consent when it comes to milking nonhumans—merely consider how cows are described as “giving” or “offering” their milk to humans rather than humans “extracting” or “taking” it.²¹

Regardless of the historical plausibility and persuasiveness of these rationalizations, recent decades have evidenced notable skepticism—in India, Western nations, and elsewhere—around the acceptability of even non-lethal forms of animal use. Animal advocates typically condemn not only animal slaughter but also the various harms preceding slaughter, including those prevalent in the dairy industry. Explicit concerns for animals’ well-being have both influenced dietary and marketing shifts from “vegetarian” to “vegan”²² (for only the latter eschews direct animal use) and simultaneously catalyzed non-veg[etari]an insistences on “cage-free”, “pasture-raised”, and “cruelty-free” products. This shared and widespread focus on the *welfare* of animals reveals at least some concern for the quality of their lives prior to their eventual killing.

With this welfare concern in mind, Vallely maintains that “the logic of these ‘abhakṣyas’ [i.e., the newer ones involving dairy milk, butter, etc.] is not self-control but compassion; not renunciation of the abstract and reified ‘worldly existence,’ but the renunciation of very tangible forms of animal exploitation” (2004, p. 17). The diasporic Jain pushback against dairy thereby stems from “compassion” toward exploited cows, who are regularly harmed during their lifetimes and ultimately killed. However, considering Vallely’s conclusion, it is challenging to understand how or why this “new” motivation of compassion applies to dairy foods but would not also apply to the aforementioned traditional, “secondary” items increasingly ignored by diasporic Jains (e.g., seeded fruits, root vegetables). According to the traditional Jain worldview, the production and consumption of these non-animal foods also threaten sentient organisms with harm and death and thus also—at least conceivably—constitute sites of “animal exploitation”. Therefore, why would these organisms not too be objects of compassion? Even ancient Jains—whose sustenance was much more uncertain than it is for diasporic Jains—avoided these secondary foods in their diets whenever possible; for them, the secondary interdictions were not the highest priority but nevertheless still valued and observed. As such, why then do contemporary lay Jains, who may rightly prioritize “livestock” and other five-sensed beings, not *also* observe the traditional secondary interdictions out of compassion, especially given the abundance of alternative foods at their fingertips?

Vallely seems to suggest that the diasporic jettisoning of the secondary interdictions owes to either a lack of knowledge about them or to the fact that they are only “central to Jain dietary distinctiveness in India” (p. 15, citing Mahias). The latter phenomenon owes to the presence of the mendicant community in India and not abroad. But given Vallely’s emphasis on the strong influence of Western ideas, culture, and social movements on diasporic Jain thought and action, we must also seriously consider that many Jains have simply rejected—or at least questioned—the philosophical and biological conjectures that

produced these secondary interdictions. European and American animal rights movements (themselves influenced by Western philosophy and science) have generally marginalized moral concerns for bivalves, insects, and other “gray area” animals, in addition to rejecting assertions of plant sentience and corresponding moral standing. Accordingly, more-progressive diasporic Jains seem to have adopted more “modern”, “rational”, and “scientific” classificatory *and practical* stances, eschewing concerns for less-sensed sentient beings that traditional Jain taxonomies would be more hesitant to neglect. Moreover, perhaps the focus on cows and chickens rather than oysters and insects is simply more palpable, assumedly what Valley means by “*very tangible forms of animal exploitation*”. Yet we contend that it is not necessarily “tangibility” that convinces diasporic Jains, or at least exclusively, but rather the fact that they may now doubt the ethical relevance of these other beings whose sentience is *scientifically* questionable. We present the influence from mainstream Western philosophy and science as but another explanation for why secondary interdictions receive little attention outside of India.

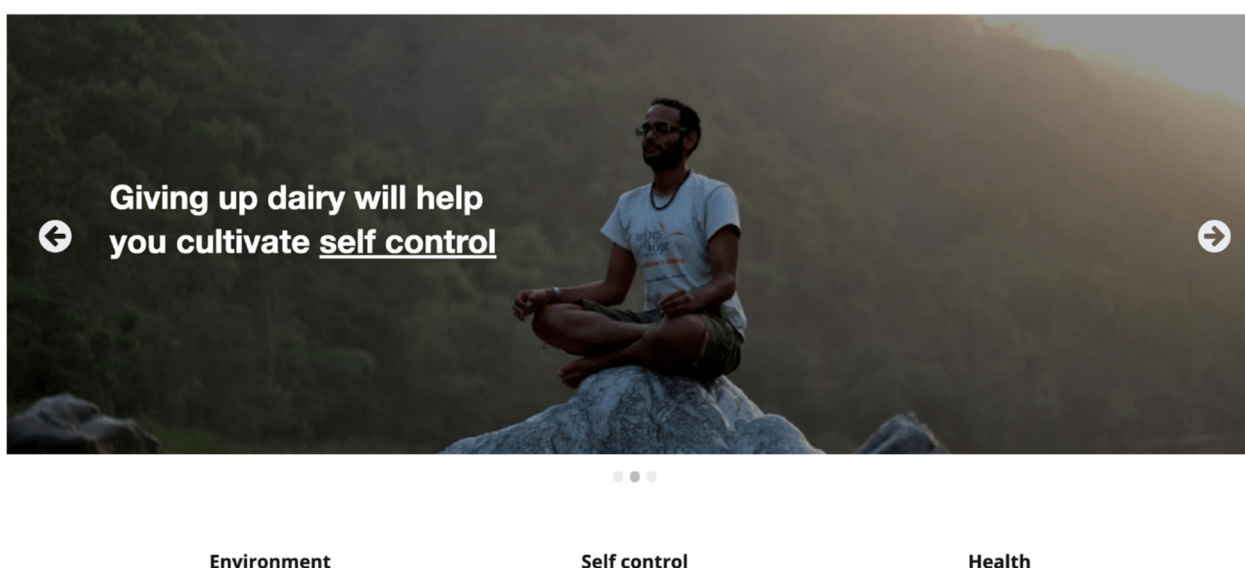
Despite the Westernizations and modernizations of Jain *ahiṃsā* and veg[etari]anism emphasized by both Valley and ourselves, we diverge from Valley significantly in contending that not only are *all* of the *abhakṣyas* grounded in compassion in some way (i.e., it is not a “new” motivation)²³ but that diasporic Jains, while not renouncing worldly existence, also carry vestiges of the old “logic of self-control” in addition to their “socially-motivated *ahiṃsā*” (Valley 2004, p. 17). We expect the two case studies in this chapter will help illustrate this point.

5.3. Back to Jain Vegans

Returning to JV’s “give up dairy for Paryushan” campaign, in addition to concerns for animals, health, and the environment, the campaign’s website also emphasizes the benefit of “self-control” (*saṃyama*) as one of the major “good reasons for giving up dairy” (ibid.; See Figure 1). A detailed article titled “SELF CONTROL (SAMYAMA)” regarding the meaning of self-control in the Jain tradition is provided, according to which, “Self-control may be defined as the discriminative restraint of the adverse inclinations of the senses and the mind with a view to self purification in life” (Atmanandji 2020). As we will recall, following the logic of karma theory as presented in the *Tattoārtha Sūtra*, it is precisely “the adverse inclinations of the senses and the mind” that cause karmic particles to move toward (*āsrava*) and bind (*bandha*) to the soul. In order to inhibit (*saṃvara*) this karma-attracting process and, ultimately, eliminate (*nirjarā*) one’s karma, “Self-restraint [*saṃyama*]” (Tatia 2011, p. 22) is required. As Nathmal Tatia writes regarding karma theory in the *Tattoārtha Sūtra* specifically, self-restraint involves “abstaining from all activities which injure any form of life” (ibid.). Thus, from a Jain perspective, JV’s recommendation to give up dairy on Paryushan as a form of *saṃyama* has soteriological implications insofar as it aims to encourage karma-eliminating self-control and thus to bring Jains one substantial step closer to “abstaining from all activities which injure any form of life” (ibid.).

In 2021, the first author sent out an anonymous questionnaire in JV’s international WhatsApp group to assess the ways in which its members understood their veganism to fit within the teachings of the Jain tradition. The group had a total of 79 members from around the world when the questionnaire went out, and a total of 33 members (42%) responded. The ages of respondents ranged from 19 to 84, while the average respondent age was 48 years. When asked for their gender identity, 13 respondents answered “female” and 20 answered “male”. Respondents were living in the United Kingdom (21 respondents), the United States (9 respondents), Switzerland (1 respondent), Kenya (1 respondent), and United Arab Emirates (1 respondent). Closely reflecting their geographical location, respondents’ self-reported nationalities were British (21 respondents), American (7 respondents), Indian (4 respondents), and Kenyan (1 respondent). All respondents were born into Jain families and self-identified as Jain.

There are other good reasons for giving up dairy



Environment

Self control

Health

Figure 1. Jain Vegans co-founder Sagar Shah in meditation to illustrate how giving up dairy represents a form of self-control (*samyama*) (Source: jainvegans.org).

All participants, unsurprisingly, considered *ahimsā* to in some way be central to their decision to be vegan. What was surprising, however, were responses to the question “Does the Jain concept of karma relate to your decision to be vegan? If so, how?” Of the 33 respondents who replied, 18 (55%) indicated that karma was, to significant degrees, a factor that related to their decision to be vegan. The age range of these respondents was 19 to 84 years old (the average age was 50 years old), while the self-reported gender identity makeup was 11 males and 7 females. Further, these respondents were from the United Kingdom (12 respondents), United States (5 respondents), and Switzerland (1 respondent), while their nationalities were British (11 respondents), American (5 respondents), and Indian (2 respondents).

A number of these respondents elaborated on how they understood their vegan lifestyle to relate to karma. Consider the following sampling of responses:

“Related to Ahimsa, non-vegan diet brings a plethora of bad karma.”

—19, UK, Male

“Karma and nonviolence are inherently linked.”

—30, UK, Female

“We have learned that if you are violent you are attracting papa karma. If you are vegan you are far less violent to animals and the environment than a vegetarian and attract far less papa karma. I became vegan for this reason.”

—39, UK, Female

“One of the best ways to reduce existing karma and control influx of new karma is by living a life that causes least harm to all 6 types of living being (bodies). (Prthvikaya—earth, JalaKaya—water, Agnikaya—fire/electricity, Vayukaya—air, Vanaspatikaya—vegetation, Trasakaya—insects, animals, human).”

—44, CH, Male

“Being good reduces buildup of bad karma.”

—68, UK, Male

“Himsa causes asrava and bandha (bondage) of Papa (bad, harmful) karmas. Animal derived food is the cause of many epidemics and also since earth, water and air resources are limited, animal-based diets lead to wars and starvation too.”

—84, USA, Male

All of these answers are compelling insofar as they illustrate one of the key arguments in this article; that is, the contemporary diasporic practice of Jain veganism, while clearly situated within the broader transnational vegan movement, retains uniquely Jain soteriological concerns worthy of our careful consideration.

Those who answered in the negative to the question as to whether karma relates to their decision to be vegan (45%, or 15 respondents) ranged in age from 31 to 67 (the average age was 45 years old), while the self-reported gender identity makeup of this group was 9 males and 6 females. Finally, these respondents were from the United Kingdom (9 respondents), United States (4 respondents), United Arab Emirates (1 respondent), and Kenya (1 respondent), while their nationalities were British (10 respondents), American (2 respondents), Indian (2 respondents), and Kenyan (1 respondent). Consider some of the elaborations on these respondents’ answers to the question, “Does the Jain concept of karma relate to your decision to be vegan? If so, how?”:

“Not for me personally. I try to focus on the process rather than the result.”

—39, UAE, Female

“Not at all. I consider myself to be a secular Jain. The soul, reincarnation, and karma are beautiful concepts and offer great insights into how to think about what to do in certain situations. But I do not believe in them literally, and so do not see a karmic benefit (or avoidance of pap) through going vegan.”

—34, UK, Male

“No in this case it did not. I can tell you that they are linked according to Jainism.”

—49, UK, Female

“This wasn’t something I’d considered when I became vegan, and I’m unsure right now.”

—49, UK, Male

“That is a tough one. I didn’t think about karma until now. But it is my good karma that my husband opened my eyes to the killing and separation of mother and her baby.”

—49, UK, Female

For those who answered “no”, we can see some ambivalence and consideration of karma as a factor nonetheless and can also take note of the fact that some respondents still understood how Jain karma could theoretically apply to the practice of veganism even if they themselves did not “believe” or “consider” karma theory in their own decision to be vegan.

In sum, what we can see from the questionnaire results in this section is a near even split in opinion regarding whether or not karma was an influencing factor in diasporic Jains’ decision to be vegan. Furthermore, the age ranges and average age of both groups (i.e., those who answered “yes” and those who answered “no”) closely reflect one another, as do the proportions of gender identities, nationalities, and geographical locations. Even if not overwhelmingly so, the majority of Jain vegans in the WhatsApp group indicated that karma theory was a factor relating to their decision to be vegan and in some cases provided more elaborate descriptions as to why this was the case. For those respondents who did not see karma as a factor in their decision to be vegan, some were still able to make the clear theoretical connection between Jain karma theory and veganism, while others expressed forms of ambivalence indicating that this is something they might now consider in some way even though it did not relate to their initial decision to become vegan.

5.4. Vegan Jains and Ahimsak Eco-Vegan Committee (United States of America)

California-based Vegan Jains (VJ) was founded in 2010 by Jina Shah and Christian Kohler. Jina is an American-born member of the Jain community who, while in college training to eventually become a family doctor, turned vegan “after learning about the ways that the dairy industry is connected to the meat industry and inextricably linked to animal suffering and death”. VJ’s website features information pertaining to veganism and the Jain tradition and refers to veganism as “renouncing the use and abuse of animals in all forms, and especially in food”. They consider veganism “as a modern expression for ahimsa” (Vegan 2010).

Jina Shah is also the committee chair of the Federation of Jain Associations in North America’s (JAINA) “Ahimsak Eco-Vegan Committee” (AEVC). Following many of the trends discussed throughout this article, AEVC,

... as an expression of ahimsa, supports veganism which we understand to mean not eating, wearing, or using animal products because we object to both animal suffering and animal killing. We do not support animal use that is supposedly “humane” and we do not support the marketing of animal products labeled as “humane”. We support the reduction and elimination of activities such as material and energy overconsumption contributing to harm of all life, global climate change, and destruction of the planet. (JAINA 2021)

AEVC’s concerns here align the Jain principle of *ahimsā* with animal rights and environmental concerns and in doing so make veganism one of JAINA’s concerns. JAINA was founded in 1981 as the governing body of the now 72 Jain temples, centers, and groups in North America, and AEVC has brought veganism into full focus within this community by presenting at the community’s biennial convention and by promoting veganism within and outside the Jain community more broadly (ibid.). AEVC shares its news on VJ’s website, which also cross-posts and collaborates to varying degrees with UK-based Jain Vegans, shares Jain philosophy, and promotes other Jain-specific content as they call visitors’ attention to a number of other vegan organizations and spokespeople outside of the Jain fold.

What is perhaps most interesting about VJ’s work for our purposes here is how they have begun to highlight Indian Jain ascetics’ promotion of veganism and/or dairy-free diets as a source of religious authority to encourage Jains to adopt veganism. It is not typical for lay or ascetic Jains in India to consider a vegan diet, although in recent times veganism as a form of dietary praxis has gained traction in India and now within the Jain community. In India, ascetics have a significant amount of influence over the lay community and lay religious praxis, whereas in the diaspora the lack of ascetics has created a power vacuum often filled by other lay Jain leadership who do not wield the same amount of religious authority as their Indian ascetic counterparts. Given the influence ascetics have traditionally held over the lay community in India, the broader impact of VJ’s engagement with these ascetics on diasporic dietary practice is yet to be seen and is a development that will be interesting to follow. We highlight here some of these recent ascetic teachings as presented on VJ’s website in the paragraphs that follow.

On 16 May 2020, VJ released a video post of Jina Shah interviewing the famous Shree Charukeerthi Bhattarak Panditacharyavarya Swami at JAINA’s biennial convention who, when asked how he learned about veganism, responds, “Lord Mahāvīra says . . . absolutely about Jain veganism. Vegan means non-violence . . . Try, try, try. Do not give up. That is my message for everyone . . . So [those] who are respecting non-violence, they must become vegan” (Vegan 2020). Interestingly, Shree Charukeerthi mentions both the health benefits of veganism while also situating it within the initial stages of *sallekhanā*, the Jain ritual fast unto death, wherein an ascetic or layperson slowly though systematically relinquishes all food and soon thereafter water as the highest expression of non-violence and as an attempt to eradicate their remaining karma (ibid.).

Similarly, VJ's website features the Śvetāmbara ascetic Labdhi Sagar Maharaj Saheb, a long-time vegan himself, who combines notions of health and animal cruelty with those of *tapas* for the eradication of karma as reasons to adopt a vegan diet. He says to his audience,

You need to bring such foods in the house that are healthy, nutritious, help you think clearly and help you reap the benefits of tapas. Until now, you have heard of non-veg foods, root vegetables but today I want to talk about milk, curd/yogurt and ghee that you buy. I want to tell you about how bad or harmful these milk products are. (Vegan 2018)

In addition, VJ highlights a talk by Digambar ascetic Muni Ji Shri Vihar Sagarji Maharaj, produced with the Delhi-based animal protection organization Fauna Police.²⁴ Here, the Digambar ascetic first explains the violence involved in consuming dairy and connects this violence with the influx of karma and our own future suffering that ensues as a result (Vegan 2014). While framing the need to relinquish dairy from the Jain diet according to Jain principles, the Digambar ascetic nevertheless learned of the violence in dairy farming from the Fauna Police who themselves are part of what we are describing in this article as a broader transnational vegan network.

More recently in February 2021, VJ spotlighted Śvetāmbara ascetic Padmasagar Maharaj, who spoke in 2019 during *cāturmāsa* (the four-month monsoon period during which ascetics take time to teach the lay community) to the Maharashtrian Jain community about giving up dairy on account of the blood and pus contained in dairy milk. In this video, he interprets a *śākāhārī* ("plant-eater/taker," usually translated simply as "vegetarian") diet as dairy-free and apparently influenced many among the "650+" lay Jains gathered to either give up dairy or to try doing so for at least three months. As VJ highlights, he emphasizes health benefits of a dairy-free diet and, as an alternative to dairy "reminds them that mung beans and other legumes are very nutritious and a staple of the Jain diet" (Vegan 2021).

Finally, VJ's website features the Jain nun Sadhvi Vaibhavshree, who underscores the textual authority proscribing dairy for ascetics found in the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, another popular and authoritative Jain text concerned with karma theory and soteriology.²⁵ Paraphrasing the text, she says: "It is mentioned that such [dairy] products cause sexual desires so a spiritual seeker should avoid them. An ascetic consuming milk or yogurt cannot remain an ascetic and will become sinful" (Vegan 2019). While her appeal begins with this textual reference, Sadhvi Vaibhavshree then more generally maintains that Jain tradition *in fact* discourages dairy due to how dairy processing causes immense harm to mother cows and their calves, a point similar to that made by the UK-based Jain Vegans. Sadhvi Vaibhavshree even goes so far as to reference "the West" for inspiration: "Today, in the West, veganism is spreading fast. People are stopping to eat meat and even becoming vegan. They do not consume any dairy product" (ibid.).

As we can see, VJ's website has begun to build an important—albeit to-date modest—authoritative bridge between Indian ascetics and lay diasporic Jains, particularly with regard to proper Jain diet. Jain ascetics are certainly drawing from the arguments and insights from transnational veganism but are also explicitly connecting these concerns with Jain principles of *ahiṃsā* and karma. We might therefore understand the phenomenon of Indian Jain veganism as indicative of the "pizza effect"²⁶ (with non-dairy cheese, we might add), wherein Indian Jain ascetics are re-adopting forms of *ahiṃsā* shaped in the crucible of transnational veganism, which as we have already discussed was at least in significant part itself shaped by Jain principles (see Bharati 1970; c.f. Stuart 2007). As John Cort (2018) writes regarding these relationships between Jain diasporic veganism and Indian Jain veganism,

Jains in the diaspora . . . have found that publicly being vegetarian fits into public discourses on diet, environment, and health. These discourses have increasingly advocated a vegan diet that eschews all dairy products. This is not a diet with which Jains in India have been familiar, but as more politically minded Jain

vegetarians in the diaspora have adopted a vegan diet, there is a small but growing interest in veganism in India. (p. 264)

Transnational vegan discourse is thus finding its way back to India and into ascetic discourses, intersecting with authoritative teachings on *ahimsā*, *karma*, and the *mokṣamārga*.

6. Conclusion: Revisiting the Jain Diaspora

As we can see in both of the case studies presented here, Jain Vegans and Vegan Jains represent a creative combination of transnational veganism's environmental, health, and animal welfare related concerns with the karmic concerns of the Jain tradition. Both organizations understand veganism to be a way of life that has soteriological as well as practical implications for some of global society's most pressing concerns. The activities of both organizations thus suggest that in contemporary diasporic Jainism, the individualistic pursuit of liberation can and should be tethered to broader social and environmental issues and, most significantly, that the division between "orthodox" and diasporic understandings of *ahimsā* and asceticism are no longer as clearly distinguishable as previously thought (Vallely 2002).²⁷

As a transnational movement, veganism frequently (though not exclusively) encourages a dietary and lifestyle praxis aimed at eliminating—or at least minimizing—harm against animals, the environment, and the human body. This minimization of harm is enacted through a thorough relinquishment and avoidance of particular foods and consumer products made from the bodies and secretions of non-human animals. It is no wonder that many within the Jain diaspora, concerned as they are with the paramount virtue of *ahimsā*, and, as we have seen in many cases, *karma*, have found new opportunities to express their tradition in the fast-growing transnational vegan movement in order to reach their own soteriological goals. Moreover, and admittedly a truism by now, perspectives and practices within religious communities—ascetic, lay, and diasporic—are far from static and routinely change over time, and Jain attitudes toward foodways (and consumption more broadly) are no exception. With this in mind, we conclude by briefly considering how the preliminary findings in this article speak to our past understandings of Jain diasporic expressions of non-violent diet, animal protectionism, and environmentalism and, in these regards, their invocation of values and use of rhetoric both old and new.

Scholars have proposed various models to categorize the varieties of religious ideology and praxis in Jainism. These models are useful, and of course, like Jainism, forever subject to further development and transformation. We will briefly consider Marcus Banks's (1992) three "tendencies" of Jain diasporic belief and praxis in light of the two case studies we have presented in this article. In doing so, we qualify Banks's model for understanding Jain diasporic practice in light of current Jain diasporic social realities.

In his well-known study of the Jain diaspora in Leicester, England, Banks defines three "tendencies" through which Jain "varieties of religious belief" might be understood and categorized, which include the orthodox, heterodox, and neo-orthodox (Banks 1991, p. 246; cf. Banks 1992, p. 200). On the one hand, orthodoxy involves both belief and praxis and refers to "traditional Jainism, rooted in sectarianism and ritual" that is "exemplified by ascetics who hold knowledge and hence power" (Banks 1991, p. 248). Heterodoxy, on the other hand, refers to a particular viewpoint amongst diasporic Jains that "was adopted by most of the Sramanis in Leicester for most of the time" (Banks 1991, p. 249). Heterodoxy involved innovative "compromise and opportunism . . . not always recognized by its followers" (Banks 1991, p. 255), the most prominent of which was for Banks Jains' belief in a supreme god and Jains' self-acknowledgement of their lack of "sufficient knowledge" to devote themselves "to 'true' (orthodox) Jainism" (Banks 1991, pp. 251–52). Banks considers the heterodox tendency as "syncretic" insofar as it incorporates features of orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy and yet is somehow considered to be a "compromise" (Banks 1991, p. 255). Finally, Jain neo-orthodoxy attempts to adapt Jainism to modern times (Banks 1991, p. 254), and thus "some of its features are predicated upon a rejection of other positions" (p. 256) as well as the outright rejection of orthodoxy on account of its being "'traditional',

‘old-fashioned’, and ‘narrow-minded’” (p. 201). As a result, according to Banks, it “for the most part ignores the Jain ascetics” and is “not so much a system for achieving salvation” (Banks 1991, p. 252), but rather “a science for the individual in his present situation: the strict dietary restrictions are essential for a healthy body; the meditations and other austerities bring about a healthy and peaceful mind” (Banks 1991, p. 252). Furthermore, the neo-orthodox perspective has global ambitions for Jainism and thereby understands that the “aim of religion is to secure individual/societal peace” (Banks 1991, p. 255).

Banks suggests that the diaspora in Leicester, England, is composed of Jains exhibiting neo-orthodox and/or heterodox tendencies, while the orthodox tendencies of Jainism are to be found primarily in India (Banks 1991, p. 247). However, we would like to suggest that Jain veganism complicates Banks’s three-part model insofar as diasporic Jain veganism is being interpreted in light of intricate Jain theories linking karma and *ahiṃsā*, and at times under the authoritative influence of Indian ascetics. Thus, rather than a “compromise”, and though certainly often described in the “scientific” discourses of transnational veganism, Jain veganism in fact represents a legitimate and self-aware transformation of what Jains consider to be “orthodox” or correct Jainism, rather than a choice made out of ignorance (Banks’s heterodox tendency) or under some perceived lack of ascetic influence.²⁸ We acknowledge that diasporic Jains’ de-emphasis and abandonment of traditional rituals, in tandem with their adoption of a more modern and scientific “belief structure”, problematize the claim of their alignment with Jain orthodoxy (or Banks’s conception of it). However, under Banks’s model these two features—ritual and belief structure—account for only half of those situating orthodox Jains *as* orthodox. The other two—the supreme valuation of ascetics and the goal of liberation—may not be as pronounced in the diaspora as in India, but diasporic Jains are still interacting with (and even influencing) ascetics in India, as well as expressing karmic motivations behind their turns to veganism.

We acknowledge that Banks’s analysis is now three decades old, and since the date of its publication, significant generational, technological, and cultural developments have impacted the Jain diasporic landscape. These interrelated developments include the fact that there are now more young second- and third-generation Jains in the diaspora who have access to new digital communication technologies and are not subject to the same barriers to international travel (e.g., high travel costs and COVID-19 notwithstanding) as first-generation diasporic Jains. Hence, our contribution is not a refutation of Banks’s model but rather a recalibration dictated by shifting times and circumstances. Diasporic Jains, we therefore suggest, are finding an *opportunity*—rather than making a compromise—in transnational veganism to embody and practice Jain karma theory and *ahiṃsā*, and thus we see a fluid continuum between what Banks calls “neo-orthodox” diasporic Jain belief and the “orthodox” tendency he identifies from India that is particularly manifest in Jain dietary praxis (though, we acknowledge, without consideration of orthodox sectarianism and ritual, the other two components of what Banks defines as “orthodox”). Even if, from a scholarly perspective, a “true” orthodox Jainism is not actually identifiable in any real way (i.e., we cannot identify any singular “original” Jainism), the fact is that diasporic Jains do themselves see their beliefs and practices as constituting an educated continuity between the ancient and the modern as well as between ascetic authority and diasporic practice—rather than as an uneducated, “heterodox” corruption.

The two contemporary examples of Jain Vegans and Vegan Jains demonstrate site-specific scenarios wherein diasporic Jains are in fact expressing *both* the Jain ascetic ideal grounded in *ahiṃsā* and karma theory *as well as* a clear expression of their commitment to the more proactive, protective dimensions of transnational veganism and its concomitant concerns for animal rights, the environment, and human health. Understood from this standpoint, Jain vegans embody the tradition’s core principle of non-harming, as they have found a renewed opportunity to do so in transnational veganism, but also, from an equally traditional karmic perspective, they embody a transnational dietary regimen that is simply much better for the soul.

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Appendix A. Jain Veganism Anonymous Questionnaire

1. Do you self-identify as Jain? Y/N
2. Were you born Jain, or did you “convert” to Jainism? Y/N
3. What is your age?
4. What is your gender identity?
5. What is your geographical location (city, state/province, and country)?
6. What is your nationality?
7. Do you self-identify as vegan? Y/N
8. How do you define veganism?
9. What are your primary motivations for being vegan?
10. Does the concept of ahimsa inform your decision to be vegan? If so, how?
11. Does the Jain concept of karma relate to your decision to be vegan? If so, how?
12. Do you have any other Jain-specific motivations for being vegan not already mentioned?
13. Do you have any other non-Jain specific motivations for being vegan not already mentioned?
14. Is there anything else you would like us to know about Jain veganism?

Notes

- 1 On the literal definition of “*ahiṃsā*” as “non-harming” or “non-violence” rather than “the wish/desire not to harm”, we side with Bodewitz’s (1999) conclusion: “Some scholars have misinterpreted *ahiṃsā* as ‘the wish not to kill’ or ‘the absence of the wish to kill’, i.e. they take it as the negation of a desiderative derived from the root *han* ‘to kill’. This is obviously untenable since the real desiderative of that root is *jighāṃsati* and a corresponding adjective **himsu* (or **ahimsu*) is missing. The verb originally was *hinasti* rather than *himsati*. Moreover *ahiṃsā* in pre-Upaniṣadic texts means ‘security, safeness’, which cannot be connected with the desiderative. For the formation (*a*)-*hims-ā* see Wackernagel-Debrunner II, 2 1954: 246; 248” (pp. 17–18). In addition, throughout the article we opt for “non-harming” over “non-violence” as the least confusing translation for *ahiṃsā*, following Houben and van Kooij (1999).
- 2 While it is true that veganism typically promotes the abstention from all animal products and not only those traceable to factory farms, factory farms *overwhelmingly* dominate the industry. The EPA defines an Animal Feeding Operation (AFO) as an “agricultural operation where animals are kept and raised in confined situations . . . a lot or facility (other than an aquatic animal production facility) where the following conditions are met: animals have been, are, or will be stabled or confined and fed or maintained for a total of 45 days or more in any 12-month period, and, crops, vegetation, forage growth, or post-harvest residues are not sustained in the normal growing season over any portion of the lot or facility” (EPA 2020). A “factory farm,” or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO), is an AFO that is “concentrated” owing to the number of animals present and/or existing methods of discharge for manure or wastewater. According to The Sentience Institute, in the United States, for example, factory farms CAFOs (of various sizes) account for over 99% of all farmed animals (excluding sea animals; Reese 2017, note 4). Therefore, regardless of whether or not “humane” animal products exist outside of factory farms *and* are accessible, some argue that it is simply more prudent and pragmatic to forego animal products altogether. As Peter Singer (2016) suggests: “Going vegan is a simpler choice that sets a clear cut example for others to follow.” (p. 54)
- 3 Dating and authorship questions aside, the composer of the *Tirukkural* summarizes the dynamic well: “We eat the slain, you say, by us no living creatures die; Who’d kill and sell, I pray, if none came there the flesh to buy?” (Pope 1886, p. 256). As Dundas (2000) also notes, distinct from concerns for the animal killed for their flesh, and for oneself owing to the flaws intrinsic to meat itself as a comestible, there is an additional concern for the microscopic organisms present in flesh who arise and die when it is cooked (p. 102).

- 4 See *Tattvārtha Sūtra* 6.9 in (Tatia 2011). Also see *Ratnakaraṇḍaka Śrāvakācāra* 53 and 72 in (Bollée 2010) (“*mananāt*” is used at 53 and “*anumodana*” at 72). While not a Jain text, cf. “*anumoditā*” at *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 2.34 in (Bryant 2009).
- 5 “In addition, the fear and pain that an animal suffers during slaughter is believed to be, in some way, contained within its flesh and transferred to the one who consumes it, creating a latent and deleterious effect in the mind.” (Vallely 2004, p. 11)
- 6 The history of alms-taking by Jain ascetics is sorted, for in pre-medieval times Jain monks seem to have accepted and consumed flesh as alms, with no blanket prohibition on meat-eating (Dundas 2000, pp. 100–2). Early Indic *śramaṇa* traditions most likely shared this general sense of indifference to flesh-containing alms provided by the laity. As is well-known, Buddhist monks have traditionally been permitted to consume meat insofar as the meat satisfies three specific conditions that allegedly remove it from the cycle of *hiṃsā*. An oft-quoted passage from the *Jīvaka Sutta* (MN 55, Horner [1957] 2002) depicts a follower of the Buddha asking the latter how he (the Buddha) can consume animal meat knowing that it requires—and thus causes—the killing of animals. The Buddha responds by denying that he has caused or approves of causing harm to animals, for accepting meat as alms is permissible insofar as one has not seen, heard, or has had any other reason to suspect that the meat has come from animal killed *purposely* for the alms. The “threefold purity” guides some Buddhist monastic practice today but has ceased to be permissible in Jain traditions ever since the early medieval period.
- 7 Two contemporary anecdotal examples of diasporic Jain influences on the practice of transnational veganism include the American Vegan Society (est. 1960) founded by Jay Dinshah (Vegan Society 2014) and Luvin Arms Animal Sanctuary (est. 2015) founded by Shaleen and Shilpi Shah in Colorado (Luvin 2021). Both of these organizations significantly contribute to the practice of transnational veganism due to their far-reaching media influence and social impact, and though they were founded by Jains, they are not by self-definition “Jain” institutions.
- 8 See Cort (2018) who discusses Marcus Banks’s notion of a universal Jainism in the diaspora (p. 262).
- 9 According to Cort (2018), six primary components of “Jain modernity” are: “environmentalism”, “food and diet”, “*anekāntavāda*”, “*ahiṃsā*”, “Mahāvīra to create a Jain quasi-montheism”, and “*prekṣā dhyān* as a commodified and individualized religious practice” (pp. 262–63).
- 10 The Jain tradition espouses the existence of 24 *tīrthaṅkaras*, or “Fordmakers”, who periodically bring the universal teachings of Jain Dharma to the human realm during the moral downturn (*avasarpinī*) of each cosmic time cycle. Mahāvīra (ca. 499–427 BCE) was the 24th and final of these Fordmakers to come to earth and was likely a contemporary of the Buddha. The historical existence of the remaining 23 *tīrthaṅkaras* cannot be verified, though most Jains believe in their existence according to the Jain cyclical notion of cosmic time.
- 11 Umāsvāti (also referred to as Umāsvāmi) was a renowned scholar of Jain thought who synthesized much of Jain philosophy in his *Tattvārtha-Sūtra* in the aphoristic writing style typical of other important classical South Asian religious texts.
- 12 Though the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* has risen to prominence amongst diasporic Śvetāmbara and Digambara Jains as a source for learning karma theory, Digambaras have in the past more traditionally drawn from Nemicaandra’s *Gommaṭasāra Karmakāṇḍa*, while Śvetāmbaras have drawn from Devendrasūri’s *Karma Grantha*. Nemicaandra’s text is not easily obtainable in English, while Devendrasūri’s text has not been translated into English. Therefore, both texts are therefore largely unknown to Jains in the diaspora. Those wishing to understand how Jains have traditionally studied karma theory in South Asia are encouraged to read Wiley (2020a) and Wiley (2020b). We thank our anonymous peer-reviewer for pointing out these important details regarding textual authority and availability in the diaspora.
- 13 While *jīva* is rendered as “soul” in Tatia’s translation, *ajīva* is rendered as “non-sentient entities”. However, because we are translating terms from the South Asian religious landscape, we find it more appropriate to use a non-Christian term to translate *jīva* that is more aligned with South Asian soteriological traditions and therefore render *jīva* as “Self”. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the privative “a” suffix in *ajīva* indicates that the term is everything that the *jīva* is not. We therefore render the term *ajīva* as “not-Self”.
- 14 Though the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* posits seven *tattvas*, this is a minority position within the broader Jain philosophical landscape. More typically, nine *tattvas* are espoused (cf. *Uttarādhyana Sūtra*, an authoritative Śvetāmbara text), where *puṇya* and *pāpa* karmas are added to the current list to distinguish between meritorious (*puṇya*) and unmeritorious (*pāpa*) karma. The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* uses the terms *puṇya* and *pāpa* to describe the nature of karma but does not include them as *tattvas*.
- 15 Mahāvīra is a good example of the non-linear nature of rebirth described here. Indeed, before being born as a human fit for pursuing liberation and teaching Jain Dharma, he lived many previous lives including as a lion, a celestial, and a hell-being. For a fuller description of Mahāvīra’s rebirths in wider context, see Dundas (2002, p. 21).
- 16 We say “often” here to indicate that Jain veganism can be construed as a form of austerity (*tapas*) aimed at the eradication of karma (*nirjarā*) in some circumstances, though not all. For example, and as we will see in the next section, when Jains adopt vegan practices as an alternative form of fasting or penance during the festival of Paryushan, they have effectively done so in the spirit of eliminating karma. Nonetheless, Vallely (2004) does assert that “Of course, dietary restrictions are not merely symbolic; they are believed to be among the most effective methods for removing karmic ‘debris’ and for attaining a state of mental equanimity” (p. 1), a claim that would support the suggestion of veganism as a method of karma eradication. Special thanks to Steven Vose and Ana Bajzelj for highlighting the limited scope of conceiving of Jain veganism as a form of austerity during the writing of this article.

- 17 It is interesting to consider JV's "give up dairy for Paryushan" campaign in light of other religious traditions wherein particular foods are given up or avoided. For example, Catholics give up meat on Lent, and Muslims fast during Ramadan. It is also, however, interesting to consider traditions of abstention in more secular transnational vegan movements such as Meatless Mondays and Veganuary, where in the latter case people around the world are encouraged to give up all animal products for the entire month of January.
- 18 See Gillespie (2018) for a recent description of the many harms intrinsic to dairy production. Some assert that milk production that "does not entail any harm to the animals or land" is possible (Ahimsa Dairy Foundation 2016). However, not only is this claim highly contestable (e.g., owing to the brute realities of confinement, manipulation, breeding, and milking, even manual milking), but it is largely moot since virtually all cows live on significant harm-inducing farms, coupled with the practical fact of the inability of the farms like Rutland Ahimsa Eco-Dairy to scale.
- 19 Note that "vegetarianism prohibits the most notable non-vegan low-carbon foods (fish) but permits non-vegan high-carbon foods (cheese)" (Kortetmäki and Oksanen 2020). However, carbon emissions is only one—albeit prominent—aspect of the environmental effects of industry, animal-centered or not.
- 20 While relatively inconsequential for the present discussion, and deriving from an analysis of Hindu Dharmśāstras, Patrick Olivelle (2002) helpfully distinguishes between foods that are *abhakṣya* and those that are *abhojya*. *Abhakṣyas* or "forbidden foods" are intrinsically inappropriate and "completely forbidden; they cannot be eaten except under the most dire circumstances" (p. 346). *Abhojyas* or "unfit foods" are not intrinsically inappropriate, but "refer[s] to food that is normally permitted but due to some supervening circumstances has become unfit to be eaten" (p. 346). Valley translates *abhakṣyas* as "foods not fit to be eaten", but Olivelle's suggestion of "forbidden foods" seems more appropriate and facilitates a precise distinction from *abhojyas*. Mahias's (1985, p. 95) translation as "*aliments interdits*" ("forbidden foods") is consistent with Olivelle and is utilized in a Jain context. Notably, while Valley cites Williams for their own translation, the latter elsewhere translates the term as "prohibited foods" (p. 39).
- 21 Which is not to say that those who use, kill, and consume cows (or other animals) necessarily do not care, even very deeply, about these animals (cf. Govindrajan 2018; Staples 2020). However, these acts and attitudes of care do not erase the facticity of the harms of domestication.
- 22 Data would help support this claim, but it is immediately apparent the moment one enters any major grocery store, at least in the United States and Europe. "Vegan" has largely replaced "vegetarian" on those product labels whose contents also satisfy as vegan, and "vegetarian" restaurants have virtually disappeared, either shifting to fully vegan menus or offering both vegan and non-vegan options.
- 23 On a technical note, Christopher Framarin (2014) presents a very convincing argument that the basic pan-Indic logic of *ahiṃsā* requires an acceptance of the "direct moral standing" of animals due to their sentience. For the present inquiry, the importance of this claim is twofold: first, somewhat contrary to Valley's contention that "Jains believe that all living beings humans, animals, plants, and single-sensed beings—have a soul worthy of respect, and deserving of compassion" (p. 9, emphasis added), it is not the Self (i.e. "soul") that is the logical object of compassion but rather the sentient being's mind/body complex owing to its capacity (and not the Self's) to experience pain and suffering; second, even if one is not intentionally concerned with others' well-being in their practice of *ahiṃsā* but is narrowly focused on self-control and their personal "karma account", their intention does not change the fact that the karmic logic of *ahiṃsā* assumes moral consideration, or *compassion*, toward all sentient beings for its very functioning.
- 24 <http://faunapolicy.blogspot.com/> (accessed 1 June 2021).
- 25 Because dairy is not generally prohibited in Jain dietary textual traditions, the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* makes a break from orthopraxis that is often overlooked.
- 26 Regarding the "pizza effect", Bharati writes, "Officially, Western things are not desirable in the Indian cultural universe; but neither are the themes and the works of the tradition which is thought reactionary and obsolete. Yet, one and all, they gather momentum and respect through a process of re-enculturation. I have coined the facetious-sounding term 'pizza-effect' for this pervasive pattern." (Bharati 1970, p. 273).
- 27 We acknowledge that the notion of a traditional or "orthodox" Jainism is problematic and only use the term "orthodox" here in a heuristic sense to acknowledge that there are key, inevitable transformations that occur when South Asian forms of Jain praxis enter into new cultural, diasporic settings (cf. Valley 2002). As Dundas writes, "It is impossible to demonstrate the existence of some original, pristine form of Jainism, but the oldest sources available, the first books of the *Ācārāṅga* and *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, do suggest what was most significant in Mahāvīra's teaching and how, as a path to deliverance, it linked up with the broader Indian thought world." (Dundas 2002, p. 41). The current article looked at how the "broader Indian thought world" influences and is influenced by particular diasporic settings.
- 28 We would like to thank our anonymous peer-reviewer for suggesting that we consider how Banks's three-part model might be problematized in light of what we have revealed regarding Jain veganism. We could have also considered how the practice of Jain veganism might problematize Flügel's (2000) four distinct and primary types of Jainism: canonical (kanonischer), traditional (traditioneller), Protestant (protestantischer), and post-Protestant (post-protestantischer). Canonical, traditional, and Protestant forms of Jainism tend to relate to the development and current practice of the Jain tradition in India and the development of

lay autonomy therein. The forms of global diasporic Jain veganism we have considered in this article would thus seem to fit squarely into the category of “post-protestantischer Jainismus” (post-Protestant Jainism) (Flügel 2000, p. 37) where diasporic lay autonomy is paramount in the absence of ascetic authority. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the boundaries between the more traditional ascetic path to liberation, karma theory, ascetic authority, and diasporic lay practice are fluid in Jain veganism.

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