

The Gift of Giving

Changing Practices of Charity Work and Donation in the Contemporary Jain Diaspora

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Abstract

The leaflet announcing the 2017 *National Seminar on Engaging Jainism with Modern Issues* at Jain Vishva Bharati Institute rightly described humanity at a cross-roads, with the marvels of science and technology on the one hand, and paradoxically, increasing inequality, violence and suffering on the other. With these changes and challenges of the modern world, come developments in the way charity work is organized, the place it has in religious praxis, and the kind of projects that are supported. In Jain cosmology and doctrine, the interrelation of souls is a well-established fact, as illustrated by the much quoted Tattvārtha Sūtra verse *parasparopagraho jīvānām* (TS V.21). For many Jain practitioners, the concepts of *seva* (service) and *dāna* (donations) follow logically from this interrelation. Based on data gathered as part of a broader research project on the contemporary Jain diaspora in the Western world, this paper will look into charity practices in three distinct locations: Antwerp (Belgium), London (UK), and Columbus (Ohio, USA). First, it will give a description of the changing practices of charity work and donations of the Jain organizations active in each of these locations, with special attention to the share of local and India-based charities, the type of charities, and the type of participation (donation of money/time/other resources). Second, it will compare these different locations, looking for common trends and trying to account for regional differences. In conclusion, some general trends and good-practices in *seva* and *dāna* in the Jain diaspora will be highlighted and put forward for further discussion.

Introduction: seva (service) and dāna (donations) in Jainism

The primary tenet of Jain philosophy is AHIMŚĀ or non-violence. This is used in the widest possible sense of the word and applies in any form to any living being. Mindfulness not to cause hurt to any living beings in thought, speech or deed is therefore the first duty of a Jain. This is a passive expression, and this was not the intention of the Jain elders when they codified the sacred texts (especially in respect of the Jain laity). To take its real meaning, one is expected to behave in such a way as to not cause discomfort and to do what one can to alleviate pain and suffering. How does one achieve this? The two ways that immediately come to mind are seva and dāna . Service to the deserving and charity to the needy.¹

This excerpt of text, written by the deputy chairperson of the Institute of Jainology in London and posted on a blog on the occasion of National Sewa Day in 2010, is a good starting point as it introduces the key theme of *seva* (service) and *dāna* (donations) in Jainism that this paper wishes to address, and at the same time admits that opinions differ about the place *seva* and *dāna* should have in Jainism, depending whether one adopts an active interpretation of *ahimsā* (non-violence), or a passive one. In this introduction I will briefly go into these different interpretations of *dāna* and *seva* in Jainism, based upon doctrinal scripture and existing scholarly literature. Afterwards, this paper will go on to describe practices of *dāna* and *seva* in different diasporic Jain communities, and examine common points of discussion touching upon these practices of organized giving.

When we look for guidance on practices of giving in Jain doctrinal literature, important early texts that give elaborate accounts of the duties of lay-people when it comes practices of giving are *Tattvārtha Sūtra* by Umāsvāti (2-5th century CE, a work on the fundamentals of Jain philosophy and conduct, recognized by both *Śvetāmbara* and *Digambara* groups), and Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* (12th century CE, a manual detailing the ideal way of life for the *Śvetāmbara* lay Jain).² From *Tattvārtha Sūtra* we learn, for example, that “Compassion towards

¹ Excerpt of a text by Dr Harshad N Sanghrajka of the Institute of Jainology, London. Retrieved from: <http://nationalsewaday.blogspot.be/2010/09/concept-of-seva-or-service-in-jain.html>.

² I refer to these *sūtras* as they are two of the most accessible doctrinal works in Jainism. Because of this, scholarly discussions on this topic have been centring on these scriptures. For the purpose of this paper I have used Olle Qvarnström's translation of Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra*, and Shugan Jain's translation of Umāsvāti's *Tattvārtha*

living beings in general and the devout in particular, charity, self-restraint with attachment etc., contemplation of mind, equanimity, purity etc. are the causes of the influx of pleasant-feeling-karma.”³ A gift is thus considered a way to potentially enhance the influx of positive karma for the donor. As such, it should be clear from the outset that *seva* and *dāna* have traditionally been set in the domain of the lay-person only. For ascetics, who are closer to the ultimate aim of *mokṣa* (liberation), it was traditionally the norm that action should be kept at an absolute minimum, so as not to accrue any karma at all.⁴ But already in this verse from Tattvārtha Sūtra, we see that not all gifts are considered equal in their potential for accruing merit: Only an appropriate gift, made with the proper intent to a proper recipient, ensures a positive outcome for the donor. The Yogaśāstra and similar manuals for ideal Jain lay behaviour provide more details about what constitutes proper intent, what may be considered an appropriate gift, and who is a proper, or worthy recipient.

As for ‘the proper recipient’ Tattvārtha Sūtra specifies that he or she is preferably a devout, religious person. So although the verse above does imply that gifts to others are acceptable, a bifurcation emerges between gifts to the ascetic community and gifts to others (including non-Jains). Both John Cort (Cort 1991, 394-395) and Maria Heim (Heim 2004, 77) note how Hemacandra negotiates this bifurcation in his description of a *mahāśrāvaka* (good layman). The *mahāśrāvaka*, says Hemacandra, not only gives his wealth out of devotion (to fellow lay Jains, Jain ascetics, and to further the Jain religion (e.g. to (help) compose and copy texts, and construct temples and icons)), but also out of charity and compassion to the needy, in which case he should not worry about the suitability of the recipient.

The interrelated tensions between these two ways of giving I briefly illustrated here; namely giving out of devotion vs. giving out of charity (tension of intent), and giving to ascetics and religious establishments vs. giving to whomever needs it most (tension of recipient), have been at the core of the bulk of scholarly work on the topic of *dāna* in Jainism in the past few decades. I say these tensions are ‘interrelated’, because these two dyads can be brought together into one dichotomy. Examining different forms of giving, Sean Bevis synthesizes both the tension of intent and the tension of recipient in his discussion on ‘philosophical’ and ‘sociological’ manifestations of *dāna*. (Bevis 2010) Torkel Brekke talks about the same categories, but refers

Sutra.

³ “*bhūta-vratyanukampādānaṃ sarāgasamyamādi yogah kṣāntiḥ śaucam iti sadvedyasya*” (VI. 12).

⁴ There have probably always been exceptions to this rule. See the subchapter on engaged ascetics later in this paper.

to them as ‘the gift as a form of sacrifice’ and ‘the charitable gift’ (Brekke 1998), and Acharya Mahapragya uses the terms *patra-dāna* and *karuna-dāna*⁵ (Mahapragya n.d.). In the case of the sociological manifestation / charitable gift / *karuna-dāna* the donor’s good intentions are emphasized, and the suitability criteria of the recipient loosened or forgotten. In the case of the philosophical manifestation / gift as sacrifice / *patra-dāna*, the qualities of the recipient are the decisive factor in the attribution of positive karma or merit.

To explain these tensions, John Cort goes on to note the hierarchy of different value systems that can be seen at work in Jainism: the *mokṣa-mārg* (path to liberation) values, focusing on ascetics on the one hand, and the more worldly *śrāvaka* (lay) ethics of the lay practitioners on the other. (Cort 1991) Other scholars have elaborated on these two different value-systems with regard to practices of giving, mostly arguing that the *mokṣa-mārg* values are hierarchically considered superior to the worldly applied ethics of the *śrāvaka*. (e.g. Laidlaw 1995; Jain and Kripal 2009), and that “while the lay Jain may be free to participate in compassionate actions, these are not understood, even by the laity, to contribute to spiritual development. Asceticism alone leads to progress toward moksha.” (Jain and Kripal 2009, 205)

But is this the case? Do lay-Jains today set social charity apart from spiritual development? The excerpt of the text written by Harshad Sanghrajka seems to deny this, as it conceptualizes *seva* and *dāna* as active ways of engaging with Jainism’s core value of *ahiṃsā*.⁶ Is the *mokṣa-mārg* value system, comprising the ideal of minimizing actions, still generally considered superior? In theory perhaps, but as many laypeople as well as an increasing number of ascetics claim that reaching *mokṣa* in our era is not possible, alternative goals and methods emerge. This paper does not make any further claims on the position of *seva* and *dāna* in Jain doctrine, nor does it consider one interpretation of doctrine superior. Rather, the aim is to explore some practices of *seva* and/or *dāna* in diasporic Jain communities, and take a closer look at the discussions that preceded and surround them. These discussions ‘from the field’ will then be linked back to the doctrinal/scholarly views and tensions just described.

⁵ Perhaps the best translation of the terms used by the Acharya is ‘the gift that centres on the [worthiness of the] recipient’ for *patra-dāna* and ‘the gift that is motivated by feelings of compassion [on the part of the donor]’ for *karuna-dāna*.

⁶ As a matter of fact, others (e.g. Sean Bevis) relate *seva and dāna* to another cornerstone of Jain conduct and spiritual progression: the value of *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness).

Practices of Charity in Three diaspora communities

This paper examines organized ways of giving within three different Jain communities in the diaspora, and will focus on instances of *seva* and *dāna* that occurred between December 2015 and December 2016. The data used are part of the larger corpus of data gathered for the ongoing research project *Online religion in a transnational context. Representing and practicing Jainism in diasporic communities (2015 - 2018)*.⁷ Throughout the interviews and focus groups I conducted, I have encountered many cases of *seva* and *dāna*. Apart from instances of organized giving to charity, I also encountered many cases of individual philanthropy and volunteering, in the field of education (sponsoring classes on Jainism for example) and different kinds of social work (medical care, animal welfare, homeless shelters, etc.).⁸ Also, many Jain centres and temples are themselves registered charities, depending on donations of members for their activities and the maintenance of their infrastructure. These funds are gathered through donation boxes, sponsored meals, *gheeboli*⁹, and general donations. However prevalent individual philanthropy and donations for temple maintenance may be, this research focusses on organized giving to charity (sociological manifestations of giving / charitable gifts / *karuna-dāna*).

Jains in Columbus (Ohio, USA)

In 1981 delegates of different Jain organizations that had formed in North America got together to form an umbrella organization: Jain Associations in North America (JAINA). Ever since, JAINA sets out the guidelines and formulates the mission for Jains in North America. It has developed a growing number of committees (of which '*jivdaya* - animal welfare', 'World community services', and '*ahimsak* eco-vegan' relate closest to the topic at hand), and has a very active youth wing: Young Jains of America (YJA). Since the 1990s, JAINA has been seeking to expand the humanitarian role of Jainism. (Salgia and Salgia 2004, 368) Of course, individual Jain organizations differ in the extent to which they take up these guidelines. The Jain Centre of Central Ohio (JCOCO), which is the focal point of Jainism in and around the city

⁷ This research project is conducted at Ghent University in Belgium, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Eva De Clercq, and was made possible by a research grant of the Flemish Research Council, FWO.

⁸ Different researchers and some of my respondents have proposed that the amount of money involved in individual, often anonymous, donations is higher than the amount involved in organized fund-raising.

⁹ *Gheeboli* is the practice of bidding for the right to sponsor and/or perform part of a ritual. The money thus raised most commonly goes towards the maintenance of the temple or institution organizing the *gheeboli*.

of Columbus, was opened in 1991 as one of four Jain centres in the state of Ohio¹⁰, and serves around 200 families¹¹. The *pratiṣṭha* (consecration) of the temple at JCOCO was celebrated in 2012. JCOCO is a registered charity in its own right: Funds for both the establishment of the centre, and the construction of the temple were raised primarily through donations. Naturally, donations for temple maintenance continue to be an important part of JCOCO's fundraising activities.

In the period under scrutiny here, JCOCO organized or participated in different charity events. Through their participation in the local interfaith movement, they have been involved with the local shelter for the homeless¹². JCOCO motivates its members to donate and occasionally gathers a team to help staff the soup kitchen and serve meals. This collaboration has been established since a number of years. Additionally, JCOCO participated in a nationwide used clothing collection organized by YJA.

Jains in London (UK)

The greater London area is home to a thriving community of some 30.000 Jains. About 80% of them are Oswals (members of a select group of families with a distinct region of origin), a lot of them twice migrants that came to the UK from East-Africa. There is no umbrella organization such as JAINA that sets out a vision for Jains in the UK. This, together with the greater geographical proximity (as opposed to the vast distances between communities of Jains in the US), has resulted in a much larger number of active Jain organizations, each with their own priorities and vision. Jains in London can pick and choose what organizations to join or get involved in. We will briefly look at the practices of organized giving in two of the major Jain organizations active in London.

As the largest organization (based on the number of registered members), the Oswal Association UK (OAUK) was able to raise funds for the building of the first purpose built Jain temple in the UK, which was opened near Potters Bar (North-London) in 2005.¹³ Apart from continued fundraising for temple maintenance and further construction, OAUK actively organizes events with a social welfare focus for members of the Jain community itself. Aside

¹⁰ The centres in Cleveland and Cincinnati were opened in the late 1970s. The first Jain idol was installed in the Toledo Hindu-temple in 1989. The first Jain temple in Ohio was inaugurated in Cincinnati in 1995. (Salgia and Salgia. "Jainism": 377).

¹¹ Estimate by my local respondents.

¹² <http://www.csb.org>

¹³ For more on the Potters Bar temple and the community it serves, see Shah et al. 2012.

from this, in the past year, they collected used clothing for internally displaced people in Syria, and second-hand school books to be sent to Kenya.

Another very active Jain organization is Young Jains UK (YJUK), established in 1987 and registered as an independent non-profit making charitable organisation. In the period under scrutiny, they supported 'Crisis', a national charity for homeless people, by regularly sending volunteers to help distribute food, and by raising awareness and collectively participating in 'Crisis at Christmas' (additional support and services to the homeless in the holiday period).¹⁴ Additionally, YJUK raised funds in support of Hugletts Wood Farm Animal Sanctuary, and co-organized a tree-planting event together with the Veerayatan-inspired SCVP school¹⁵. YJUK tends to be more geared towards active volunteering and less towards donations. All the charities and activities they were involved in were based in the UK, and none of them are specifically 'Jain'.¹⁶

Jains in Antwerpen (Belgium)

The vast majority of Jains in Belgium live near the city of Antwerpen, which has been the European centre of diamond trade for decades now. The community is small (estimated 2000 people), but it is the only real Jain community to speak of in continental Europe. Perhaps not surprisingly as the community is so small, an umbrella organization such as Jaina in North America has not materialized here. Currently, there are two Jain organizations active in Belgium: A branch of the Śrīmad Rājchandra Mission Dharampur, and the Jain Cultural Centre of Antwerp (JCCA). The JCCA was formally established in 1992, and is the organization that started raising funds for the construction and maintenance of the elaborate temple that was opened in the suburb of Wilrijk in 2010. When it comes to giving for charity, the JCCA is famed to have sponsored a wing of the local children's hospital some years back, but my respondents report that charities in India have been the main recipients in recent years.

¹⁴ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/current-opportunities-london.html>

¹⁵ Shri Chandana Vidyapeeth (SCVP) is the longest running Jain *pāthśālā* in London, established in 1996 under the guidance of Sadhvi Shilapiji and other ascetics of the Veerayatan group. The school is English-medium, non-sectarian, and provides classes to children and adults of different ages and levels. Just like Veerayatan, the school builds its activities around three philosophical pillars: *sādhana* (spiritual development), *śikṣa* (education) and *seva* (humanitarian service) See also <http://scvp.info/site/index.php>, and <http://veerayatan-intl.org/>.

¹⁶ However, very recently, YJUK have decided to donate a small amount to an ongoing temple-building project at Jain Centre in Colindale.

Every year, the local Śrīmad Rājchandra Mission raises funds for a charity near the ashram in Dharampur, India. This action is broadly coordinated by the ashram in India, but practically organized and embedded¹⁷ by local volunteers. Aside from supporting such an Indian cause on a yearly basis, their ‘Spiritual Touch’ *pāthśālā* (religious class) group also raised funds for a local homeless shelter and organized an Indian-themed party for the attendees. Again, as we saw when discussing YJUK, active involvement and *seva* is considered important. According to the volunteer teachers, the amount of funds raised is not a priority, but the active and enthusiastic participation of the students is.¹⁸

Internal discussions regarding charity

From the descriptions above the reader can see that all three communities that are part of my research setup are involved in different types of organized giving. During my interviews and focus groups, I asked my respondents how they (or rather, the organization(s) they are involved with) decide which charities to support, and what kind of support to give. This led to interesting insights into the discussions that precede and structure organized giving.

Non-Intervention in the karmic life of others

We should leave each individual to work through their karma on their own. In essence, you cannot help.[S., London]

This explanation of a respondent in London is perhaps the clearest enunciation of the individuality of the spiritual path (*mokṣa-mārg*) in Jainism, and the concomitant passive interpretation of *ahimsā*. Although all Jains are aware of this viewpoint, not all agree. This leads to the most basic discussion on the question whether or not a Jain organization should engage in fundraising or voluntary work for charity. Two arguments pro-charity that are often raised will be analysed below.

The first ‘pro-intervention’ argument that is often raised is that seeing suffering and not doing what you can to alleviate it reflects badly on one’s own spiritual progress. This interpretation accepts the spiritual path as essentially individual. However, it then links *karuna-dāna* to the

¹⁷ For the past few years, the *pāthśālā* participants have combined their fund-raising with participation in a local, rather mediatised, sports event called ‘the Antwerp 10 miles’.

¹⁸ These activities and the vision behind them is based on the Śrīmad Rājchandra Love and Care program. See also http://www.shrimadrajchandramission.org/seva_activities/sr-love-and-care-461.htm.

spiritual progress of the individual. Although it seems to imply that such gifts do not directly impact upon the spiritual position of the recipient, many do add that gifts that enable a person to be free from preoccupation with primary needs (i.e. fed, clothed, and out of immediate danger), do in fact entail the consequence that the recipient will then be in a better position to start working on their own spiritual progress.

The second position pro-charity is perhaps more strategically PR-related. When we analyse following statement by a middle-aged professional in the US, we see that his prime concern is not the spiritual growth or the eradication of social injustice. Rather, the aim is the branding of Jainism as a socially relevant and positive force in society. Many believe that this will attract the younger generations to their tradition, and inspire non-Jains.

I think ethics are becoming more important in Jainism. Although the Jain teachings tell us that it doesn't matter, you are only responsible for your own salvation, and the rest can go to hell so to speak. But what is happening now, I think Jainism is gaining strength now, from human rights, animal rights, environmentalism,... [N., Ohio]

Gifts causing *hiṃsā*: the responsibility chain

People say 'what if he buys alcohol with it, and that causes harm to him and his surroundings?' And then I think: 'yes, but what with your karma if you see this need, and you do nothing?!' [Sb., London]

The above quote by a young woman justifying her gift of two pounds to a beggar on the street nicely illustrates the argument that *karuna-dāna* does impact upon the spiritual advancement of the giver, and introduces a second point of discussion regarding organized practices of *dāna*: What happens if your gift causes *hiṃsā*? In all three communities I visited, this discussion occurred when it came to supporting soup-kitchens for the homeless. Many feel that sponsoring a non-vegetarian meal is not a good way forward. However, in practice, both the cooks and the recipients are often used to getting a meat-based meal. They may not be comfortable preparing and/or eating a (Jain-) vegetarian meal. In one place, this problem was overcome by not donating a lump sum of money, but donating all Jain-vegetarian ingredients to the kitchen. They could then add other ingredients as they saw fit. In another, vegetarian caterers were hired to take over from the regular soup-kitchen cooks for a few sessions. Whereas sponsoring non-veg

meals was generally considered problematic, many agree that the karmic repercussions of a gift that ends up causing *himsā* for the donor are either nonexistent, or at least negligible compared to the good karma accrued based on the intentions of the donor. In his analysis of religious gifts and charity, Brekke notes this when he writes that “The good qualities of the recipient ensure the merit in an act of sacrifice, whereas the bad qualities of the recipient do not affect the merit in an act of charity.” (Brekke: 1998, 290)

Pinjrapole vs Soup-kitchen

The older generations prefer to donate for charities in India. Temples, pinjrapoles, goshalas, and facilities for pilgrims are popular with them. But our younger generation does not like this. They think our priorities should be in helping the poor and eradicating injustice here [in the US]. They do not agree with the circumstances in the pinjrapoles in India. [N., Ohio]

There are a number of possible ways to construct a hierarchy of giving, and of deciding what organizations or causes to donate to. Within discussions about *dāna* and *seva* in different groups, we see different, sometimes complementary, sometimes opposite, values surfacing. Faced with the possible karmic repercussions of a ‘wrongly’ bestowed gift, some argue that it would perhaps be easier to donate exclusively to religious institutions (facilities for pilgrims, maintenance of temples) or animal welfare institutions (*pinjrapoles*, *gośālās*) run in accordance with Jain doctrine in India, which are perceived as less risky in these respects. Others prefer gifts to India-based social charities because they feel the need to give back to their ancestral community, or because of the continuing low level of access to educational and medical facilities in rural India.

However, many in the diaspora emphasise the need to prioritize the poor and disadvantaged in the broader local community or prefer gifts to internationally active NGO’s working to create a greater awareness in the areas of environmental challenges, animal welfare, or social justice. This group also tends to underline the importance of active *seva*, as opposed to just donating money. Although gifts and voluntary work to local social organizations have seen a marked rise in the past decade, discussions on what charities to donate to most often end up with ‘a little bit of column A, a little bit of column B’.

Engaged Ascetics

In the introduction I wrote how *dāna* and *seva* have traditionally been confined to the realm of the lay-person (who tries to accumulate good karma), whereas the ascetic community is traditionally said to be solely focused on minimizing the karmic influx, and thus uninvolved with such worldly practices. This division of labour was perhaps never complete. In their role as advisors and teachers to the lay community, there have most probably always been those ascetics that encouraged broader interpretations of *dāna*, and aid for the needy. In recent years, a number of ascetics (*sādhūs*, *sādhvīs*, *samanīs*, and *bhattāarakas*) and spiritual teachers have profiled themselves, either individually or as a group, as more engaged and keen on worldly interventions than others, and have interpreted the doctrine accordingly.

Religion, particularly the religion of the nuns, is often seen as passive and unconcerned with the world. In Veerayatan, the reverse is true.[...]The mission works on this motto, given by Mahavira in his last sermon, recorded as the Uttaradhyayana Sūtra: “Let friendship be our religion, not only in our thoughts but in our actions as well.” (Shilapi 2002, 166)

Veerayatan, the organization Sadhvi Shilapi, who wrote the lines quoted above, is one example of a highly visible, engaged group of ascetics. They engage in many different types of projects, mostly with a strong environmental undertone. Another example of a socially very engaged and highly visible group is the Śrīmad Rājchandra Mission Dharampur. Their current lay-guru Rakeshbhai has launched a ‘love&care program’ (SRLC), which also clearly links ‘love and care’ to the ideal of individual spiritual progress.

At SRLC, we believe in working towards the objective of self-transformation; as one turns within, the natural outcome is to extend outward through selfless service for others. When there is love within, it flows naturally in the form of care.¹⁹

The interpretations of Jainism of Veerayatan and the different Śrīmad Rājchandra groups are by no means uncontended, as they entail quite radical challenges and changes to core practices in traditional Jainism. However, they are quite influential and popular in the diaspora (not just with their own core devotees, but also more generally), and often turn out to be the motor behind

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/srloveandcare/about/>

the larger fund-raisers and activities.

Coming back to our analysis, these engaged ascetics that have formed their own charity organizations, or tied their name to other environmental and social development projects, challenge the very basic bifurcation of religious gift and charitable gift described at the outset of this paper. They have, in a sense, bridged the gap between the religious gift to the ascetic and the charitable gift to the needy.

Concluding remarks: Then and now, here and there

The above-mentioned practices of organized giving have made clear to us that within different Jain groups and organizations, lay-people continually explore what practices of giving can lead to an engaged lay praxis that is both in accordance with Jain doctrine, and with their personal feelings and worldview. The outcomes of such explorations differ. However, from the prevalence of practices of giving, it is obvious that passive interpretations of *ahiṃsā* are challenged, both in day to day practice, and in scholarly literature. Many classical scholarly accounts describe the ideal of *ahiṃsā* as inherently passive, causing Jains to quarantine themselves from the violence in the world around them. (ethic of quarantine, see Laidlaw 1995, 153-159) This perspective, with its heavy resonance of the *mokṣa-mārg*, has been criticized by those studying, or indeed engaged in practices of charity in the contemporary context. Researchers such as Brett Evans, Brianne Donaldson, and Anne Vallely claim that social interpretations of *ahiṃsā* are in fact more prevalent, and indeed more important to many contemporary Jains. Anne Vallely describes: “The ascetic basis of Jainism - its traditional core - is decreasing in significance among a large segment of the Jain immigrant community, particularly the youth. A worldview which emphasizes quiescence and renunciation is commonly seen as ‘old fashioned’.” (Vallely, 2002, 203) My research confirms that at least part of the diaspora is experiencing a turn towards a more humanitarian, active stance. Indeed, many of my respondents, especially of those who are second or third generation *diasporians*, do emphasise *ahiṃsā* as a social and environmental imperative rather than as an ethic of quarantine. From their geographical and ideological position, diasporic Jains living in the West have easy access to both ‘traditional’, ‘Jain’ *dāna* and Western styles of giving, writes Eck. (Eck 2013) To this can be added the hybrid formations I described when discussing ‘engaged ascetics’.

To a certain extent, all these modes of giving are also available to Jain communities in India.

Judging from my personal experience, and the descriptions of researchers and organizations active in Indian Jain communities, it seems safe to say that broad interpretations of *dāna* and *seva* that allow for, or indeed demand, active social engagement are not necessarily limited to the diaspora (cfr. Evans 2014). What is specific to the diaspora, I argue, is that, having established themselves and thrived in a new place, many of my respondents in the diaspora communities feel compelled to ‘give back’ to their local community through donations, but also increasingly through voluntary work and hands-on engagement. This propensity for *seva*, together with the accessibility of their leading figures, seems to be a key factor in the popularity of groups such as Veerayatan and Śrīmad Rājchandra Mission Dharampur in the diaspora.

Note of Gratitude - I wish to thank all my respondents in the US, the UK, Belgium, and India, who remain nameless throughout this paper for reasons of privacy. More than any textbook ever could, they convey to me aspects of what ‘Jainism’ is, in all its complexities and diversities. As always, I hope my work does them justice. For any mistakes, *micchāmi dukkaḍaṃ*.

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