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The Tensions of Karma and Ahimsa: Jain Ethics, Capitalism, and Slow Violence

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE TENSIONS OF KARMA AND AHIMSA:
JAIN ETHICS, CAPITALISM, AND SLOW VIOLENCE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Anthony Paz

2016

To: Dean John Stack
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Anthony Paz, and entitled *The Tensions of Karma and Ahimsa: Jain Ethics, Capitalism, and Slow Violence*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 31, 2016

The thesis of Anthony Paz is approved.

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Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
THE TENSIONS OF KARMA AND AHIMSA:
JAIN ETHICS, CAPITALISM, AND SLOW VIOLENCE

by

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Florida International University, 2016

Miami, Florida

Professor Steven M. Vose, Major Professor

This thesis investigates the nature of environmental racism, a by-product of “slow violence” under capitalism, from the perspective of Jain philosophy. By observing slow violence through the lens of Jain doctrine and ethics, I investigate whether the central tenets of ahimsa and karma are philosophically anti-capitalist, and if there are facets within Jain ethics supporting slow violence. By analyzing the ascetic and lay ethical models, I conclude that the maximization of profit and private acquisition of lands/resources are capitalist attributes that cannot thrive efficiently under a proper Jain ethical model centered on ahimsa (non-harm, non-violence) and world-denying/world-renouncing practices. Conversely, karma and Jain cosmology has the potential to support slow violence when considering their philosophical and fatalistic implications. Furthermore, by connecting the theory of slow violence with the theory of microaggressions, I assert that, while resolving microaggressions, Jainism’s highly individualistic ethical system can hinder confronting slow violence.

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The doctrine and philosophy of the Jain tradition predates any discourse or present understanding of capitalism in the 21st century by over two millennia. Still, many Jain thinkers today believe that Jainism contains a salient critique of the violence inherent in our current economic practices. Western critics have argued that recent policy changes in the United States that eased restrictions on corporations and privatized previously public sectors have led to “environmental racism” through such practices as toxic waste disposal and dirty energy practices in low-income communities of color (Bauman et al. 2011). I see these as intersectional issues and by-products of what Rob Nixon (2011) calls “slow violence.”

This thesis aims to bring the Jain ethical principles of *karma* (action) and *ahimsa* (non-harm, non-violence) into conversation with slow violence and its theoretical critiques of capitalism in the United States. In order to do this, these Jain tenets are first subjected to critical analysis. Here, my primary question is: are the central tenets of *ahimsa* and *karma* in Jain doctrine philosophically anti-capitalist? If not, are there any facets of Jain ethics within the framework of *ahimsa* and *karma* that support systemic violence and inequality (environmental racism) under the structural fabric of capitalism? After textual and theoretical investigation, I conclude that the answer is *both*. When interpreted through and implemented into the framework of Nixon’s theory of slow violence, Jain *ahimsa* is philosophically anti-capitalist and has the potential to contain within it the tools necessary for addressing and confronting slow violence and environmental racism; Jain *karma* theory, on the other hand, has the capacity to support

the practice of slow violence and structural inequality such as environmental racism. Furthermore, by connecting Nixon's slow violence with Derald W. Sue's (2010) theory of *microaggressions*, I conclude that Jainism's very individualistic ethical approach to addressing violence can hinder responding to slow violence which works at a systemic level while effectively addressing microaggressions which works on an individual level but eventually results in systems of class marginalization when unaddressed.

As we shall see, this central question brings many other aspects of Jain ethics to the foreground that are necessary to investigate in order to see the philosophical tensions I argue exist between the principles of karma and ahimsa. To articulate these tensions, I will investigate how karma and ahimsa work within the Jain soteriological system, and what problems arise when these concepts are translated into ethical discourses. What are the existing tensions in terms of theory and function between the doctrines of karma and ahimsa within the Jain tradition? How are these doctrinal tensions reiterated when observing the actual structural demands of Jain society, which is largely mercantile? Can we have a capitalism that is non-violent through an understanding or application of Jain ahimsa? How can Jain ascetic principles and the doctrines of karma and ahimsa be beneficial to capitalist and anti-capitalist agendas? These are the central ideas to be dealt with in this thesis.

Jain ethics assert that individuals create violence individually. In this context, it is clear who the person is who causes violence and reaps the (immediate) fruits thereof. Jain karma theory has precise and clear explanations for such forms of individual violence. However, we can see that violence in society does not always function on an individual-to-individual level. There are systems in place that create violence collectively—in Jain

terms, over a large collective of *jivas* (souls). In this context, it is not entirely clear who the person is (or group of people are) causing the violence and reaping the fruits of the violence, when it appears to be perpetuated by a system as opposed to an individual. In this particular case, the “system” perpetuating the slow violence of environmental racism and microaggressions is neoliberal capitalism, which is embedded in the very fabric of our history and culture. In this regard, Jain texts are not entirely clear about how to address this context. Furthermore, can we say that there are elements within the philosophy of karma that deem its function as fatalistic? For instance, under the principle of karma, it is thought that we have individual autonomy over the violence we choose to inflict on others, but are we capable of escaping the violence or injustice we may be about to receive? Is all violence or pain we are to receive in the future the result of karmas, and therefore, inevitable? If violence is a form of spiritual injustice, is all the violence we receive just from the perspective of karma? How can we distinguish one from the other?

Jain ethics certainly have the capacity to both influence and to be inspired by those outside of the tradition. As we shall see, efforts have been made by Acarya Tusli’s *Anuvrata Movement* to influence and inspire non-Jain folks to observe the Jain ethical principles of non-violence and self-control for the betterment of one’s personal wellbeing and their communities. Contemporary social justice movements and environmental thinkers in the last quarter of the 20th century have emphasized a degree of intersectionality and interconnectedness of all life as the foundation for developing a social an environmental ethic. As Chapple (2002, xv) states, “The ethics of non-violence as developed by the Jains looks simultaneously inward and outward. The only path for

saving one's own soul requires the protection of all other possible souls. Jainism offers a worldview that in many ways seems readily compatible with core values associated with environmental [and social] activism." This research seeks to push Jains to make greater commitments toward these causes.

Structure of the Study

Chapter 1 provides the background to understand how and why capitalism creates, maintains, and reinforces "slow violence." Nixon (2011) argues for widening the parameters of how we understand and discuss violence by explaining how the process of global-environmental domination by Western countries such as the United States and the implications of a capitalist "free market" have given leeway to corporate colonialism to thrive at the expense of "disposable lands" and "disposable people." Dorcetta Taylor (2014) provides a succinct history of the environmental justice movement and case studies that evince environmental racism. I will briefly point to one of the best studied cases relating to the environmental justice movement and environmental racism, Kettleman City, California's battle with Chemical Waste, Inc. I will then reflect on these issues within the context of Jain doctrine and ethics to highlight how Jain ethical discourses currently do or do not discuss such issues. Another manifestation of slow violence under capitalism falls under the theory of "microaggressions." Microaggressions are "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue 2007, 218). They participate in a slow process of structural narrative imposition resulting in long-lasting effects which are essentially violent in nature because

they perpetuate marginalization of certain persons by determining the way we relate to and organize select social groups.

Chapter 2 investigates karma and ahimsa in Jain philosophy. Through an analysis of karma and ahimsa, I aim to answer the central question of this research addressed in Chapter 3: are the central tenets of ahimsa and karma in Jain doctrine intrinsically anti-capitalist, or do they support racialized structural violence and inequality? We will take a look at what some of the leading scholars in Jainism today say and refer to primary texts such as the *Tattvartha Sutra* and *Acaranga Sutra* to find contributions and answers to the central issues of this research. Bronkhorst (2011) provides a detailed analysis of the meaning and process of karma in Jainism and other traditions, which will guide my readings here. Paired with Bronkhorst is Jaini (1980), who points out a potential conflict within early Jain doctrine of ahimsa and karma doctrines. Laidlaw (1995) addresses the notion that asceticism (including a lay ascetic ethos) is fundamentally opposed to capitalist production. Furthermore, the impetus for liberation while centered on self-preservation requires that the ethics of ahimsa look both inward and outward since the only possible method for self-purification, and ultimately, liberation from karmic existence demands one to protect all other *jivas*. Cort (2001) argues that the “laypeople as merely inadequate ascetics” is a misrepresentative model of what it means to be a Jain in society. This critical perspective is a central facet to my analysis of ahimsa and karma. What happens when we look at the Jain philosophy and tradition as an ascetic-oriented soteriology as opposed to a lay-oriented theology of responsibility? What are the philosophical challenges we are faced with when seeing Jainism largely through the ascetic model? It seems that karma and ahimsa look very different between both social

groups in terms of philosophy, practice, and even intention. Such sociostructural implications largely affect the way karma and ahimsa is to be understood and put into practice.

Chapple's (2002) edited volume provides a range of opinions on the role *ahimsa* plays in ecology and environmentalism—both textually and in practice among the Jain community. These bodies of literature will be my primary source in addressing the role of ahimsa in relation to environmental justice and action. These [various] texts detail Jain theories about the nature of the universe, which have provided Jains an ecological interpretation of the tradition. I will point out some challenges in the process of developing and interpreting their environmentalist ethic, and discuss contemporary Jain adaptations of ecological ideas through participation in western discourses of ecology—particularly among diaspora Jains. Can karma and ahimsa as Jain monastic and lay conduct be transferred into a global ethics—particularly an ecological one? Does Jainism inherently promote sound ecological practices? To see how Jains have modernized their soteriological doctrines into a broad social ethic, I analyze Jain reformer Acarya Tulsi's (1914-1997) Anuvrata Movement, giving a brief background of their organization and vision as twenty-first-century Jains and their discourse on the relationship between the theory of karma and systems—social, political, economic, etc.

Chapter 3 will be a dialogue among all elements discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, wherein I suggest some ideas regarding how Jain ethics can contribute to the conversation on slow violence under capitalism. After a critical analysis of the primary and secondary texts discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, I will engage in discussing the causality and responsibility of violence and karma on oneself or another and the nature of intent versus impact in Jain

ethics. Therein, I critically examine karma and ahimsa in the various Jain texts, including integrating the *Pratikraman Sutra*'s self-reflection rituals into an action-oriented, Jain approach to ethics in within the context of addressing and dismantling slow violence—be it environmental, institutional, or microaggressive—while addressing the philosophical, doctrinal, and practical tensions existing within the Jain ethical principles of karma and ahimsa in its efforts to address slow violence under capitalism is the final conclusion of this research. The *Pratikraman Sutra*, I argue, helps us to address microaggressions with an action-oriented ethos of conscious living to reduce or eliminate harm to others through a self-reflexive, individualist ethic of karma.

The Implications of Slow Violence Under Capitalism

Rob Nixon's (2011) *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* provides a framework for widening the parameters of how we understand and discuss violence. He argues that globalization has created a platform for global-environmental domination by Western countries. Their notions of "free market" capitalism have allowed corporate-colonialism to thrive at the expense of what we describes as "disposable lands and disposable people" in developing countries. As opposed to conventional models of violence such as those "customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space," slow violence has greater implications that are perpetually dismissed given that this form of violence "occurs gradually and out of sight; [it is a] violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not typically viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2011, 2).

One particular strategy that contributes to the repudiation of slow violence arises from supporting the collective ideals of living in a "post-conflict" society in time and

history. A post-conflict narrative is a strategy for creating the temporal distance necessary to turn away from the structural violence to which they contribute. Through the post-conflict narrative, “humans have long relied on a combination of verbal, geographical, technological, and temporal distance to shield themselves from the [reality of the violence they inflict]” (Nixon 2011, 221). Thus, these post-conflict narratives make it easy for members of society who do not receive the burden of structural oppression and violence to participate in and condone such acts of violence—intentionally or unintentionally. It is, knowingly or unknowingly, a collective engagement in violence. Of course, given that slow violence has never fully presented itself, or at least is too slow to recognize is happening at all, “so too the post is never fully post.” In these so-called post-conflict societies, “leaders may annually commemorate, as marked on the calendar, the official cessation of hostilities (inflicted by, say, unexploded landmines or carcinogens from an arms dump), while ongoing intergenerational slow violence may continue hostilities by other means” (Nixon 2011, 8). Such commemorations of “past events” do not address current long lasting violent effects on the environment and communities inhabiting those environments.

Thus, Nixon presents the theory of slow violence from an international perspective where the co-creators of slow violence via corporate colonialism are byproducts of Western politics and enforcement. I extend his perspective of slow violence by applying his theory to a domestic framework. For example, in the United States post-conflict narratives are traditionally commemorated which intend on passing down histories of how far we have come as a nation; slavery and segregation is banned and therefore racism is over; women have achieved suffrage and therefore gender

equality is certain; gay marriage is now legal so LGBTQs no longer have to face violence, homophobia, transphobia, and social and economic discriminatory practices against them. These post-conflict narratives do not fully address the historical backlash of centuries of oppression and physical, economic, and psychological and generational inheritance; they do not address the long-lasting effects on African-Americans in structured “post-segregation” communities, and unequal pay or other discriminatory policies based on race, religious faith, gender or sexual orientation in the workforce. The underlying message given by post-conflict narratives is that it is no longer happening. For example, on December 1st, 2013, the Republican National Committee posted a tweet to commemorate civil rights leader and activist Rosa Parks by saying, “Today we remember Rosa Parks’ bold stand and her role in *ending racism*” (GOP, Twitter post, December 1, 2013 [6:58 a.m.], accessed December 1, 2014, <https://twitter.com/gop>, emphasis mine). As we shall see in this analysis of structural racial oppression as slow violence, these irresponsible statements demonstrate that if we cannot see the violent repercussions of racism today revealed in forms other than as disruptive and immediately palpable realities and experiences, post-conflict narratives will continue to insist that slow violence manifested as oppressive racialized systems is not happening at all.

Domestically, slow violence presents itself as a process of incremental unseen violence occurring in seemingly targeted and unambiguous locations within developed countries such as lower-income communities of color in the United States. This form of structural violence is the least visible type and is the “outcome of many years of decision making by those in positions of power. [It] occurs when people are harmed because they lack access to resources available to others” (Chasin 2004, 15). Thus, slow

violence directly or indirectly occurring in many of these communities has resulted in a system of structural violence and inequality known as *environmental racism*.

Environmental racism is the process by which geographies of environmental violence exist in low-income communities of color at rates much higher than middle-upper class predominantly white communities.

[A]ny policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race [and class]. Environmental racism combines with public policies and industry practices and have historically and statistically resulted in providing benefits for upper-class predominantly white communities while shifting industry costs to lower-income predominantly communities of color. It is reinforced by governmental, legal, economic, political, and military institutions (Bullard 1994, 98).

It is a process by which violence is outsourced and internalized—leaving communities in turmoil and those outside to reap the benefits of such corporate malpractices. It also denotes a form of modern racial/economic segregation Nixon calls *displacement without movement*—that is, “a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (Nixon 2011, 19). This is how environmental racism as slow violence has managed to operate until today.

Environmental racism is the most pertinent element of slow violence relevant to this research.

One of the most prominent case studies which defined the environmental justice movement and the realities of environmental racism is that of Kettleman City in California’s San Joaquin Valley. In a farm-worker community of about 1,100 residents, Chemical Waste Management, Inc. (Chem Waste), the largest chemical waste dumping company in the country, created a toxic waste dump site approximately three and half miles from town in the late 1970s without the community’s knowledge, participation, or

consent. This issue did not remain hidden for too long, as Kettleman City residents refused to be kept in the dark when Chem Waste decided to implement a toxic waste incinerator at the dump site in 1988. Residents, local leaders, and community organizers united in opposition to the proposed waste incinerator, filed a lawsuit, and ultimately won their campaign to halt the proposal as Chem Waste announced they would be withdrawing its application to build the waste incinerator on September 7, 1993 (Forster 2001, 9).

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was a report issued by Kings County Board of Supervisors in the process of approving the proposed incinerator which was about 1,000 pages long, written in English. After various dismissed complaints from Kettleman City residents, Chem Waste finally agreed to create a condensed five page executive summary in Spanish which was met with disapproval by Kettleman City residents. To have a 1,000-page report condensed to five pages by the very company that is doing everything in its power not to have Kettleman City residents participate in the process of having the proposed waste incinerator approved was met with unanimous disapproval. By leaving the Kings County Board of Supervisors in charge of passing the proposed waste incinerator (who were all white and lived on the northeast end of Kings County, 40 miles away from the Chem Waste dump site) rather than those who would be directly impacted by it is a clear example of the “verbal, geographical, technological, and temporal distance” being created by Chem Waste and the Board of Supervisors in their attempts to shield themselves from the reality the of violence they inflict (Nixon 2011, 221).

What made this historical event particularly significant to the social and political discourse of environmental justice and slow violence were the findings that emerged in the process of this battle to overturn the proposed waste incinerator. Local leaders and community organizers created an organization called “El Pueblo,” which investigated and discovered something major; there was a study conducted several years earlier which was paid for by California taxpayers known as the 1984 Cerrell Report which suggested to companies seeking proposed sites for garbage incinerators that

the communities [and localities] that would offer the least resistance to such incinerators were rural communities, poor communities, communities whose residents had low educational levels, communities that were highly Catholic [generally of Spanish-Latino background], communities with fewer than 25,000 residents, and communities whose residents were employed in resource-extractive jobs like mining, timber, or agriculture (Cole and Foster 2001, 3).

In addition to this, El Pueblo found that Chem Waste’s strategic implementation of toxic waste dumps sites—in alignment with the 1984 Cerrell Report—indicated a pattern of behavior that was deeply class and race oriented. As indicated in the case study, 95% of Kettleman residents were of Latino background, 70% spoke Spanish at home, and 40% were monolingual Spanish speakers. In addition to this, their largest waste dump facility was located in Emelle, Alabama (95% Black); another facility was located one on the southside of Chicago (79% Black and Latino), one in Port Arthur, Texas (80% Black and Latino), and another in Sauget, Illinois (surrounding communities are 95% Black) (Cole and Foster 2001, 4).

“How do we bring home—and bring emotionally to life—threats that take time to wreak havoc, threats that never materialize in one spectacular explosive, cinematic scene?” (Nixon 2011, 14). This is precisely the problem of slow violence Nixon is pointing to. How do we bring to the light that which is invisible? How can we be ethical

toward what cannot be seen and therefore that which seemingly does not exist in our minds? One of the ways in which Nixon tries to reveal the realities of slow violence is by placing importance on the role of environmental literature. He poses the question: “As American writers, scholars, and environmentalists, how can we attend more imaginatively to the outsourced conflicts inflamed by our unsustainable consumerism, by our military adventurism and unsurpassed arms industry, and by the global environmental fallout over the past three decades of American-led neoliberal economic practices?” (ibid., 35). Nixon also challenges the simple solution of being a “responsible individual” in addressing slow violence and calls for institutional (collective) action (ibid., 39). This is what the environmental movement is all about. As we shall see, this stance by Nixon challenges Jainism’s ethic of ahimsa by critiquing its very individualistic approach to addressing slow violence.

Violence is at the epicenter of the problem addressed when discussing environmental racism as an integral manifestation of capitalism. However, to be more specific we should use the term slow violence. Violence is a term which has gradually lost its depth and impact in meaning. We can see violence clearly when a man is shot in the street but not so much when hazardous waste is dumped into a river that an entire community depends on for water, or when hydraulic fracturing is practiced beneath the lands of residing low-income communities giving rise to frequent earthquakes in Oklahoma and Texas, and contaminating water in various neighborhoods of Pennsylvania. For this reason, I think slow violence is a more accurate and comprehensive approach in assessing the issues brought forth. This term will fit quite

well in discussing the nature and qualities of violence when presenting them into a conversation on Jain doctrine and ethics.

When there are systems in place which disproportionately impact select groups in society without any explanation or justification, it begs the question: is capitalism to blame for the structural slow violence targeting specific regions with specific classes of people and what can we do to address it? It is in my view that capitalism is the driving factor out of which geographies of violence exist which disproportionately impact low-income communities of color (environmental racism) and through the mass-deregulated free-market, dangerous energy and waste practices end up occurring in the backyards of vulnerable communities with minimal social, economic, and political, influence to point out their issues. Furthermore, because these dangerous practices by industries are not taking place in predominantly privileged upper-class communities, it creates a large sense of apathy and distance from the violence facing other communities. To no avail, these communities then fail to see the realities of slow violence taking place on behalf of the capitalist model beginning with the fact that these privileged communities, aside from not having to endure corporate and industrial violence, profit and benefit from the practices of enterprises destroying the lives and environments of those “other” communities. Therefore, what we begin to see is a society which, under a capitalist social and economic structure, some regions benefit at the expense of other regions in society. What we end up with is a collective society with two very different realities—one with minimal environmental degradation, good infrastructure, high levels of wealth and status, strong political influence and participation, and access to clean and safe resources (air, water, crops); and the other with higher risk of polluted soil, water, and air, poor infrastructure,

incredible poverty (and therefore more policing enforcement and criminalization), little to no political influence and participation, and difficult access to healthy food choices (the term “food deserts” has been designated to describe many of these zones).

CHAPTER 1

KARMA AND AHIMSA

Origins of Karma

I shall now investigate whether Jain ethics are capable of handling and engaging slow violence as environmental racism under capitalism. Through an analysis of Jain ethics and doctrine, we shall determine whether the Jain ethical practice and philosophy of ahimsa is intrinsically anti-capitalist, and if the doctrine and rhetoric propagated under Jain karma theory perpetuates and upholds systems which enable and justify slow violence. First, I will introduce the primary ethical theories of karma and ahimsa, which serve as the philosophical and functional foundations for Jainism—and the complementary principles that follow from them such as *samsara* (cyclic rebirth), *moksha* (release from *samsara*), and *anekantavada* (non-absolutism). I will begin by clearly defining and explaining the origins of each theory, and then how each is applied (or can be applied) to the established problem of slow violence under capitalism. In light of these Jain concepts, I will proceed to show both the action-oriented nature of Jain ethics as well as what in my view can be their doctrinal and functional shortcomings to the extent that they have been applied thus far by Jains.

On the origins of karma and ahimsa, we begin with the sacrifice. Sacrifice has always been central to Vedic thought and practice and remains central to the contemporary Vedic devotional philosophies thriving today. We can see how the historicity of the nature and intention behind the sacrifice begins to evolve as a result of *shramanic* (ascetic) Jain and Buddhist influences beginning to take hold in Indic society, particularly during the flourishing era of Buddhist imperial kingship. Buddhist and Jain

stupas and monasteries, their notions of image worship (*puja*) and devotion (*bhakti*), and their ethical and philosophical ideals of karma, ahimsa, and liberation from samsaric existence created a platform for old Brahminic ideals to reemerge as contemporary Hinduism (Inden 2006, 89-101). Let us investigate how this came to be.

Karma finds its origins in the *Rig Veda* (c. 1500-1200 BCE), the earliest text of the Vedic tradition. It can be translated simply as “action.” The hymns found within the text deal with the Vedic practice of sacrifice wherein the term karma is most commonly used within the context of the ritual of sacrifice; the term itself denotes the actions performed in the sacrificial rituals. Oblations are made for the purpose of inviting the gods (primarily Indra) to partake in the sacrifices offered. Such engagements by Brahmins (priests) allowed for the maintenance of cosmic order and the sharing of power between gods and men. This is the duty of Brahmins within *varnashrama-dharma* (duties of one’s caste and stage of life). *Varnashrama-dharma* is neither governed nor justified by any idea or institution of karma. There is nothing in place textually in the *Rig Veda* to legitimize and defend the position and authority of *varnashrama-dharma* as existing on the basis of some notion or theory of karma. Karma was simply the action taking place within the sacrificial process. There is neither the proposition of the concept of rebirth nor karmic retribution in the *Rig Veda* and therefore the nature of and striving for enlightenment and liberation within the Vedic milieu does not exist until the emergence of the *Upanishads* (800-300 BCE) when the sramanic traditions and philosophies were also quickly developing and interacting with Vedic society (Bronkhorst 2011, 35). It is during this period that we begin to notice the Vedic narrative and philosophical

underpinnings beginning to evolve with the emergence of *shramanic* Buddhist and Jain ideology and practice, thereby revolutionizing and conceptualizing the term of karma.

As the *shramanic* traditions of Jainism and Buddhism began to interact with Vedic society, contemporary Vedic philosophy began to evolve over the centuries and later adopted karma as a governing principle to *varnashrama-dharma* as portrayed in devotional Hinduism (*bhakti*) like that of the Vaishnava, and Shaiva traditions. This shift in the understanding and philosophy of karma begins to unfold and appear in the region of “Greater Magadha” (northeast region of present-day India) where we find the earliest literature of Jainism and Buddhism (Bronkhorst 2011, 3). As a result of these cultural and regional interactions between traditional Vedic philosophy and the *shramanic* traditions of Jainism and Buddhism thriving in Greater Magadha, the practices of modern Brahminical traditions generally regarded as Hinduism gradually evolved from sacrificial practices of animals solely for the purpose of manipulating the gods, acquiring boons, and maintaining cosmic order, to a largely non-violent sacrificial practice in the form of image worship and the offering of fruits, flowers, and grains—although animal sacrifices to certain gods and goddesses are still done to images of deities today. Furthermore, what also shifted was the intention behind the act of sacrifice which was now centered on devotion toward a god or goddess in a soteriologically-oriented formality like that of the *shramanic* traditions of Jainism and Buddhism: salvation from suffering, from karmic retribution, and from the endless cycle of rebirth, old age, disease, and death (*samsara*). The following verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* express this reorientation of Vedic practice and karma in this formative period of Hinduism:

I am the enjoyers and ruler of all sacrifices. But they do not recognize me in reality, so they fall. (9.24)... Leaf and blossom, fruit and water: from the one who offers these to me with devotion, the one whose self is pure, I take that offering of devotion. Son of Kunti, all that you do, all that you eat, all that you take, all that you offer, all that you give, all that you strive for, in heated discipline (*tapasya*) – do that in offering to me. You will surely be freed from the bonds of action (*karma*) and its fruits, the pure and impure. With your self free, joined to the yoga of renunciation, you will come to me (9.26-28)...Son of Pritha, those who seek refuge in me, even those who come from evil wombs, or women, *vaishyas*, even *shudras*, they, too, go on the highest path (9.32) (Patton 2008, 99-100).

This hybridization of sramanic Buddhist and Jain principles and Vedic tradition revolutionized the philosophy and structure of Brahminical thought and may very well have been one of the significant contributing factors to the decline in Buddhist imperial kingship. Thus, a competitive and structural transformation took place whereby Vedic civilization reemerged as Vaishnava, Shaiva, and other devotional Hindu traditions resulting, in part, from Buddhist, Jain, and other *shramanic* impressions. In addition, this new Vedic narrative refuted the *shramanic* notion that *varnashrama-dharma* was an unnecessary imposition to society. By simply redirecting one's activities (*karma*) in a state of love and devotion (*bhakti*) for God (Krishna, Shiva, etc.), one can be free of karmic retribution and the burden of rebirth; liberation is possible—even for a *shudra* (worker class). Therefore, one need not leave the *varna* system to assigned at birth. You only have to perform all prescribed activities to glorify God to be liberated. Thus, change in the pre-established social system is not necessary, only change in the intention behind the activity. In this school of thought, God created *varnashrama-dharma* for society to have individual souls placed in specific social classes that justly correspond to one's past karmas.

Karma functions and is understood as a Jain and Buddhist principle—not a Vedic one, since there is no philosophy around the notion of karma contained within its texts. Contemporary devotional Hinduism sought to change that and use karma to support

varnashrama-dharma. However, even though the sramanic traditions of Jainism and Buddhism rejected the Vedic caste, karma as explicated by Jainism and Buddhism can be seen as an alternative to the social structuring of caste in terms of how this universal principle guides and justifies the social order of all lifeforms via their individual karma. In the textual and liturgical narratives presented by devotional Hinduism, karma is interpreted negatively as any thought, word, or action performed which is not done in the service of God. The notion of freedom from karma became one that is centered on love of and devotion for God; it is possible to stop karmic inflow through observance of *bhakti*. This ideological foundation of karma became one which was under the supervision and control of a sovereign God in charge of disseminating each individual soul their due based on their various activities; those performed for self enjoyment versus those performed for the enjoyment of God. Specifically, this philosophy used its notions of karma to reinforce and maintain *varnashrama-dharma* in light of the ascetic movements gradually mobilizing and influencing communities to seceding from traditional Vedic culture and thought. One need not leave or reject their *varna* but should rather act and move through this world offering every thought, word, and deed in a manner which is passionless, and non-possessive to glorify God. This became the contemporary Vedic path to liberation.

Conversely, both Jainism and Buddhism describe the process of karma and rebirth as autonomous functions that play themselves out without the necessity of a sovereign God. Thus, Jain cosmology describes the universe as one which functions as an eternal karmic machine for justice to play itself out endlessly. With no beginning or end in Jain cosmology, the tradition does not demand for a God or creator. Buddhism shares a

somewhat similar stance on the function of karma in that it neither claims nor negates (or even speculates) the existence of a creator God. Within its historical context, Jainism was in direct opposition to Hinduism's caste system and Vedic scriptures. As opposed to Hinduism's Brahmanism, Jainism is a heterodox sramanic system which calls the seeker to transcend this world as a renunciate, instead of working within the framework of this world having inherited a particular socially imposed occupation such as the *varnashrama-dharma* system out of which Jainism emerged.

Both Jainism and Buddhism share parallel depictions on the role of karma and its effects on the individual. Within the sramanic traditions, karma in its most fundamental terms can be interpreted as something you acquire based on the merit of your actions, which determines your present and future existence. For Buddhists, karma, driven by “the three roots of unwholesome action”—that is, greed, hatred, and delusion—leads the individual into the hellish realms within *samsaric* existence. Karma generated by the opposite traits (wholesome action) leads to heavenly realms of existence. However, neither realms of existence are ultimately favorable for the individual, since both realms are unsuitable for the possibility of liberation. It is in this realm of existence where one is reborn as a human being that the opportunity is promising enough (more accurately, male-bodied humans) for the continuous pangs of material existence and suffering to cease (Appleton 2014, 20-21). Both Jain and Buddhist doctrines agree on the concept of an individual's karma in relation to their position in cosmic existence. Where they differ lies in their specific theories on the nature of karma and the actual skills and methods required in pursuit of freedom from karma. Buddhist philosophy asserts that wholesome activities free from desire and attachment ultimately eliminate one's karma and attains

arahantship, also known as *nirvana* (cessation). When one attains arahantship, the monk or nun continues to engage in worldly activities but in a state of undisturbed non-attachment. Furthermore, the ascetic practice of an arahant is that of sitting, eating, and walking. Reaching the end goal of Buddhist soteriology and free from karma, the arahant continues to engage in ordinary affairs. One can thus visibly conclude that the arahant's activities do not seem to differ in any way from the ordinary activities of a layperson, and yet he or she is fully realized. Buddhist literature also shares stories of laypeople who have attained arahantship which thereby confirms that enlightenment is not a possibility only for monks and nuns within the framework of Buddhism. These are no means ordinary laypeople, but rather extraordinary followers of the Buddhist path who were committed to living a life of purity and wholesome activities. *Siha*, a female Buddhist laywoman, after seven years of struggling with attachment to adornments and charms "took a noose, hung it [a]round the bough of a tree and fastened it around her neck. Thus, she succeeded in impelling her mind to insight which grew within and she won Arahantship." Having succeeded, she removed the rope and returned to the hermitage in peace (Law 1927, 90). Thus, like *Siha*, anyone has the spiritual capacity to attain liberation fully in this life. As we shall investigate, this is not the same case with Jainism.

Jain Karma and Cosmology

The doctrine of karma in Jainism is the most unique and detailed of its kind among the Indian philosophies. It provides an explanation of the seemingly inescapable phenomena of the cycles of birth and death, happiness and suffering, inequalities in mental and physical attainments, and the existence of diverse forms of living beings expanding

eternally across the universe. Jain karma theory contains within it all knowledge on the nature of reality and existence, and therefore Jain cosmology itself. According to Jain cosmology, the entire universe is comprised of two existing elements: *jiva* and *ajiva*. *Jiva* is the formless and eternal soul which inhabits a temporary living material form (*ajiva*) and the binding to such form is dependent upon the degree of one's karma. There are an innumerable number of *jivas* (and an inexhaustible supply of potential new *jivas* coming into existence) in the universe, each one's existence being entirely independent of the other, although it is in my view that the thriving of any one *jiva* largely depends on the support, service, and cooperation of other *jivas* via family, community, society, spiritual guidance from ascetic *jivas*, etc. In contrast to Buddhism, which asserts that both soul and material form are not real, and Vedanta (and many contemporary Hindu theologies), which asserts that soul is real but material form is not, Jain doctrine asserts that both soul and material form, *jiva* and *ajiva*, are real and interdependent.

Furthermore, unlike every other discourse on karma theory in India, karma in Jainism is regarded as a physical form or substance which latches on to the pure and formless *jiva*, the energy force that animates all life, and itself is the driving factor out of which the process of rebirth and retribution perpetually endures until liberation (Dundas 2002, 97). The *jiva*'s karma is a result of all past and present activities. Thus, one is situated in the universe based on one's level of binding to karma. From a Jain perspective, karmic retribution behaves in the following manner: "my future is dependent upon what *I do*. [If what I do leads to] rebirth, and I don't want to be reborn, the obvious remedy is to abstain from all activity" (Bronkhorst 2011, 9-10, *emph. in orig.*). In Jain karma and cosmology, the very act of *acting* (walking, moving, breathing) in the world *is*

karma, generates karmic particles, and guarantees continued existence in the realm of *samsaric* impermanence.

Consider the following metaphor in describing the Jain cosmological platform. Imagine a room full of balloons. Each balloon is bound by various weights tied to their strings. Some have more weights than others, which influence a balloon's areal position in the room. Some balloons have several large weights creating a heavy gravitational pull and keeping the balloons firmly situated close to the ground. Many others have just a few small weights and are floating gently in the middle of the room between the roof and the floor. A few balloons are not bound by weights and have floated all the way to the top making contact with the roof. In this metaphor, the weights are karma which hold the balloon down in the *samsaric* existence of the ground or middle of the room (hellish, earthly, or heavenly realms), *jiva* is the balloon, and when the weights (karma) are removed, *jiva* attains *moksha* and, like a balloon without a weight being released into the sky, the *jiva* effortlessly releases itself from the shackles of karma and travels upwards to the highest abode in the cosmic manifestation (the roof)—never to be reborn again and eternally dwelling in the *siddha-shila*. This is the place where all the Jinas (the “victors”) and *jivas* who have conquered karma, and therefore the perpetual existence of *samsara*, rest and abide in eternal perception, power, knowledge and bliss.

Karma is most commonly characterized in Jainism as dust that covers and weighs down the *jiva*, keeping it in bondage to the endless cycle of rebirth and karmic retribution (Dundas 2002, 97). Literally speaking, karma is a physical substance that collects, binds, and weighs down as a subtle form of matter on the formless *jiva*, making it heavy and grounded in the realm of continuous *samsaric* existence. According to Jain karma theory

in the *Exposition of Explanations (Vyakhyana-prajñapti Sutra)*, there are eight different types of karma which are divided into two categories of four: the harming karmas and the non-harming (or life sustaining) karmas. The first and most harmful of the harming karmas is ‘delusory’ karma (*mohaniya*); this karma “brings out the attachment to incorrect views and the inability to lead the religiously correct, Jain life” (Dundas 2002, 99). This is the foundation upon which the remaining three harming karmas stand. The next harming karma is ‘knowledge-obscuring’ karma (*jnanavaraniya*) and can be thought of as a cloud or screen which blocks the “sun of omniscience”; this karma interferes with both the intellect and the senses, including the natural omniscience inherent in every jiva. The third harming karma is ‘perception-obscuring’ karma (*darshanavaraniya*); this karma is a step further from the blockages of a jiva’s mental and intellectual capacity to the perception and sense-organs. The final harming karma is *antaraya* karma (‘obstacle’); this karma becomes a blockage for the energy force inherent in the jiva. The first of the four non-harming karmas is *vedaniya* karma (‘feeling’); this karma regulates the psycho-emotional responses of the jiva’s experiences as pleasant or unpleasant, enjoyable or unenjoyable. The second non-harming karma is *nama* karma (‘name’); this karma “determines what sort of rebirth is attained, as well as the state of one’s senses and spiritual potential.” The third non-harming karma is *ayus* karma (‘life’); this karma determines the lifespan of an individual jiva which depends on the species the jiva has been born into due to past karmas. The fourth and final non-harming karma is *gotra* karma (‘clan’) which determines one’s “status, high or low, within a species and thus, like name karma, has a bearing on an individual’s ability to progress on the spiritual path” (Dundas 2002, 100).

In my view, what makes the harming karmas “harmful” is the fact that these karmas largely affect one’s spiritual capacities necessary to understand and observe proper Jain knowledge, faith, and conduct for the purpose of liberation. On the other hand, the non-harming karmas seem to reflect more so those karmas which largely affect one’s social and worldly capacities. These non-harming karmas, which bind to a soul at a particular point near the end of the previous life, can be mitigated based on one’s daily life and actions, and take an entire lifetime to work off. On the other hand, the harming karmas can affect rebirths for many births to come. Thus, these karmas can certainly limit one’s spiritual mobility, but nonetheless remain less centered on the notion of bondage from liberation. For this reason, I wish to pay particular attention to the final three non-harming karmas. The level of physical and spiritual abilities granted to an individual *jiva* for the past decisions from a previous life depends on one’s *nama* karma. Therefore, this karma presents two notions on the nature of karmic reality. First, it claims that by virtue of the proper *nama* karma granted in accordance with one’s past life decisions, one inherits a certain degree of physical potentiality. Next, it claims that by virtue of the proper *nama* karma granted in accordance with one’s past life decisions, one inherits a certain degree of spiritual potentiality. Thus, this karma acknowledges the existence of two spectrums of individuals; from the more spiritually inclined to the spiritually dead, and from the full able-bodied individual to the disabled individual. This karma further provides the explanation for their physical and spiritual capacities and limitations—they are the result of one’s past karmas. Thus, by virtue of one’s previous uninvestigated thoughts, words, and deeds, over a collection of infinite rebirths throughout the existence of an individual *jiva*, one receives the proper body and mind, which provides the degree

of physical and spiritual capacities suitable for them. *Ayus* karma determines the longevity an individual *jiva*'s lifespan depending on one's past karmas. This can be quite difficult to understand given that this karma expresses a calculated approach to one's lifespan based on an individual's past actions, whereas it can be observed that one's lifespan is largely dependent upon the social conditions surrounding one and the present actions in *this* life. Finally, one's *gotra* karma which is based on the inheritance of past karmas grants the *jiva* with a body and mind suitable to a particular status, class, or species.

All of these karmas provide an overall philosophical and functional approach to understanding the social hierarchy of all living beings within the established cosmic platform. Accordingly, the theory of karma in Jain cosmology creates a structured system which explains *who*, *when*, and *where* individual *jivas* are placed in cosmic existence, and Jain doctrine provides the *how* and *why*. That is, in order to understand one's current state of existence, the *jiva* must have knowledge of one's position within the cosmic ordering system, come to understand how one has ended up in such current state, how to get out of it through the proper knowledge of Jain karma and then for what purpose one must live—the *why*. *Moksha* is considered to be the central and perennial goal of Jain soteriology; this is the *why*. It is the cessation of all suffering, the end of *samsara*, the highest spiritual pursuit.

Liberation from Karma

The process of entirely breaking away from bondage to karma is centered on three central practices. The first one is the observance of the Jain vows; the *mahavrata* (great vows) for ascetics, and the *anuvrata* (small vows) for the laypeople. All of the vows are

centered on the various aspects of embodied and enacted ahimsa. For ascetics, proper observance of the mahavrata allows for the complete ceasing or minimizing the inflow of newly accrued karmas. The second one is *tapasya* (“heat”), which is practiced throughout a monk or nun’s lifetime and taken up ceremoniously and less rigorously (although still quite demanding) by the lay followers during particular religious observances or ceremonial events. Fasting is one of these methods, which is done regularly by laywomen, both during holidays and as weekly observances. *Tapasya* is the process of burning or shedding old accumulated karmas of the past—both *su* (positive) karma and *duh* (negative) karma. Through the practice of *tapasya*, the ascetic performs meditative postures such as standing upright for extended periods of time (*kayotsarg*); these postures literally generate heat in the body—burning off old karmas and halting the accrual of new karmas.

The practice of *tapasya* is an internal re-characterization of the Vedic sacrifice. The sacrifice is characterized as the Jain ascetic in whom karma is gradually burned off through the fire of *tapasya*. One who has eliminated all old karma and ceases to accrue new karma attains omniscience, or enlightenment (*kaivalya*). This is not to be confused with liberation (*moksha*) which is the aim of Jain ascetic practice. One is also said to attain liberation after having destroyed the four non-harming karmas (Mahapragya 2000, 28). As in Jainism, there is a general consensus among Indian thought regarding the notion that one’s state of mind and current karmic position at the moment of death determines an individual’s next birth. This aim is achieved through the third and final process called *sallekhana* (voluntary death); it is the perfection of ahimsa (also referred to as “immobility asceticism” [Bronkhorst 2011]) and is observed in the final stages of a

monk or nun's life until their moment of death. Some laypeople are observing *sallekhana* as well, and in increasing numbers. Its observance is an effective means for shedding off old karma and ceasing to accrue any new karma in one's final attempt to acquire the most fortunate rebirth possible, but liberation is mainly granted to the ascetic who has devoted an entire lifetime in preparation for *sallekhana*. The *Acaranga Sutra* speaks of the karma-free development from the ascetic practitioner in the following passage: "One should mortify (one's flesh) in a low, high, and highest degree, quitting one's former connections, and entering tranquility. Therefore a hero is careful, a person of pith, guarded, endowed (with knowledge, &c.), and always restrained. Difficult to go is the road of the heroes, who go whence there is no return (final liberation [moksha]). Subdue blood and flesh" (Jacobi 2008, 59). This passage illustrates the point that the Jain process of *sallekhana* is one of gradual and controlled severe fasting and immobility asceticism to the eventual point of zero consumption and action where upon the final moments of one's life, the mind can fully and uncompromisingly focus on matters of liberation. When this final stage in Jain asceticism is properly executed, the striver is said to have burned off all their previous karma, ceased all future incoming karma, attained omniscience, and broken free from karmic bondage; fully liberated, and joining the Jinas and all the liberated *jivas* who dwell eternally and blissfully in the *siddha-shila* (abode for liberated souls). This practice should not be mistaken for some form of "religious suicide." Suicide is one of the most condemned actions by the Jain tradition. There is a very high karmic price to pay for ending one's life; even the mere thought of suicide reaps very negative and heavy karma. *Sallekhana* is the final stretch—the moment every devout Jain ascetic has spent a lifetime preparing for, whereby he or she works on burning off all final past and present

karmic inflow in order to attain liberation. Such is the outcome of *sallekhana* and the ultimate aim and goal of the Jain tradition for all jivas.

Ascetic vs. Lay Ethics

Given this description and background on karma and its implications on the individual jiva, we can and should conclude that karma is to be perceived in a theoretically negative way. In the *Exposition of Explanations*, “the idea of binding particles of karma is hardly found at all... nor is any interest shown in the effects of a morally positive karma” (Dundas 2002, 97-8). While the accumulation of *papa* or *duh-karma* (negative/unwholesome karma) is clearly a hindrance to liberation, to accumulate karma in general is not preferential, even if it is *punya* or *su-karma* (positive/wholesome karma). As seen in Chapter 6 of the *Tattvartha Sutra*, Umasvati (1994) also holds the same position. Nevertheless, both are necessary aspects of karmic theory and are discussed in great detail. As we shall see, this is not reinforced in practice by the whole of Jain society (the lay community) whose emphasis are in practicing su-karmic activities and the rituals involving *punya* and merit transfer. As opposed to Buddhism, intentional living by *actively moving* through the world in an “egoless” state and free from passions does not liberate you in Jainism; it will loosen its karmic grip on you but will not eliminate your existence from samsara. When liberation is achieved, passions are removed, but so are worldly engagements as immobility asceticism is strictly observed. Adhering to proper Jain lay ethics may loosen the karmic grip on one’s soul and gradually progress you toward a more prosperous and fortunate rebirth by reaping positive karmic benefits but it ultimately cannot *free* you.

By analyzing Jain karma theory, we understand that karma is not something to be sought after in order to provide a more suitable future existence. Rather, its philosophical components are learned in order to eliminate it and avoid any and all future existences in samsara. Participating in the world yields karmic accrual. One must understand karma for the purpose of avoiding it in order to halt samsaric existence, rather than participating within it in a more ethical or responsible manner. In other words, wholesome karmic activities are neither an ascetic, renouncer ethos of liberation, nor are they taken up as a standard on social ethics per se. While it espouses ethical behavior, it seems difficult to build a social ethics that could guide collective action toward a just society from the doctrinal texts, which primarily speak to and function for an ascetic audience.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that the ideals of wholesome karmic engagements and liberation are mutually exclusive. Although the canonical texts generally are not about the progress along the path of social, environmental, and overall planetary wellbeing, there is a core message which speaks to the lay community about how to properly conduct themselves and what the natural social and environmental results come out of as a result of Jain lay ethical behavior reflecting “proper conduct.” For example, the third jewel after “proper view” (*samyak-darshan*) and “proper knowledge” (*samyak-jnana*) is “proper conduct” (*samyak-caritra*). The perfection of the three jewels (*ratnatraya*) of Jainism results in *moksha* (Cort 2001, 7). Nevertheless, when we look at the breakdown of Jain society, the answer is clear that these texts are not for everyone. If liberation is the aim of these texts, then they must have been produced and shared to those who were striving for liberation—the ascetic order. It must be considered within the framework of these texts that Jain philosophy is centered on asceticism for the purpose of liberation

when discussing the nature and role of karma and ahimsa. It is not a standard on Jain social ethics (although it can attempt to resonate with the lay community as we shall investigate) or even an ethical basis for how to relate to and care for the environment (even though it may sound suggestive toward such matters). There are texts which do in fact lay out a proper Jain social ethics for laypeople.

Our current existence is the very evidence of the presence of karma. This existence can be accurately understood as bondage—from liberation and to samsara. By definition, liberation in Jainism is the exact opposite of karma—“release from all karma” (Dundas 2002, 104). Bondage to karma (*samsara*) and liberation from karma (*moksha*), like *jiva* and *ajiva*, are two sides of the same coin. They depend on each other for their purpose and existence. Like day and night, you cannot have one without the other.

The number of liberated *jivas* is infinite: it both remains constant and increases through a steady influx of newly liberated *jīvas* which in the case of the current period of the world era will come from one of the parallel regions of Jambudvipa where fordmakers are at present teaching. Despite the fact that these *jivas* interpenetrate each other and are all possessed of the same qualities, Jainism fiercely resists the possibility of their constituting a unified world-soul of the non-dualistic variety found in Hinduism... Despite the infinitude of liberated *jivas*, the world of rebirth (samsara) will never become empty, for liberation is regarded as having validity *only if its opposite continues to exist* (Dundas 2002, 105, *emph. mine*).

The natural cycles of the universe are that of spiritual progress and decline—liberation (*moksha*) and bondage (karma). Though it is clear in Jain philosophy that the eventual aim of all *jivas* is to attain liberation, in a universe where both realms must exist, one is not more important than the other since they are equally dependent on the each other. Without bondage, there is nothing to liberate, and vice-versa. From this perspective, both the nature and role of karma and liberation are equally significant. One does not hold higher priority over the other. To be clear, this is not to say that most lay Jains would admit to seeking further bondage, but rather, that liberation is simply not on their list of

priorities in this lifetime and therefore gladly engage in karmic activities. We must conclude that if it is evident both doctrinally and in practice that liberation is a process solely for the monastic order, then it must be that wholesome karmic activities, both doctrinally and in practice, is a process for the laity portion of the Jain community. The qualities of one's karmic accrual via meritorious action can be perceived as a legitimate lay pursuit.

At the heart of these existing ascetic-lay philosophical and functional tensions we find in Jainism, this is what I ultimately want to bring up: *Jainism is a tradition of duality*. Like day and night or male and female, the entire cosmic make up, and therefore Jain doctrine, depends on a philosophical understanding of difference—liberation and samsara. Ahimsa finds its fullest expression as immobility asceticism; it is effortless action, inactive movement, and complete non-interference with the unfolding process of life by virtue of gradually eliminating any and all mental, verbal, and physical movement. But by the same token, it is a necessary function of Jain cosmology (and therefore society) to have a Jain lay path intended to acquire good karma, incrementally burn off bad karma, but not eliminate all karma. It would be *un-lay* to do so. As Dundas points out: “Despite the infinitude of liberated *jivas*, the world of rebirth (*samsara*) will never become empty, for liberation is regarded as having validity only if its opposite continues to exist. This may well be a metaphysical reflex of practicality of Jain society, namely that, despite the ascetic community by its example and teaching continually urging the lay community to renounce and become monks and nuns, the possibility of all lay people becoming ascetics, or even of the laity being outnumbered by ascetics, cannot be countenanced since support in the form of alms and shelter for the ascetic community

would no longer be forthcoming” (2002, 105). As such, liberation depends on the existence of karma and *samsara* just as much as the lay community depends on the ascetics for guidance and the ascetics depend on the existence and function of a lay community to support them in their striving. The ascetic community cannot observe their vows without the support of the lay community. The lay community cannot thrive and progress spiritually as a society without proper ethical guidance from the ascetics. There is a mutual interdependent support between two universal sources that complement each other; they “inter-are.” Since both are entirely dependent on the existence of the other, we should be careful not to undermine or give less value to one by prioritizing the ascetic presence within the tradition over the lay community. For this reason, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive understanding on the nature of reality and the necessary roles all sentient beings must play in Jainism. One way to do this is by rethinking the position of the lay community through the Jain academic and Western scholarly contributions presenting Jainism; that is, without recourse to the “lesser-ascetic” paradigm, and seeing the lay community for who they are. John Cort delineates this by explaining both the importance of not labeling the lay community as merely imperfect or lesser-ascetics, but rather, by seeing who they are collectively as a majority within the tradition. Thus, the dichotomy of the Jain ascetic-lay ethical model portrays the “interaction between the ‘realm of wellbeing’ (laity) and the ideology of the ascetic path to liberation (*moksha-marg*).” He explains,

[The realm of] wellbeing involves what Glenn Tocum has described as ‘how human beings negotiate and cope with life’s quotidian difficulties ... the mundane, ordinary stuff - aspects of everyday life that are probably shared by almost all human beings.’ Whereas *moksha-marg* involves the increasing removal of oneself from all materiality in an effort to realize one’s purely spiritual essence, wellbeing is very much a matter of one’s material embodiment...the ‘goal’ of this realm (wellbeing)...is a state of harmony with

and satisfaction in the world, a state in which one's social, moral, and spiritual interactions and responsibilities are properly balanced (2001, 6-7).

In practice, we can see their equal and necessary value side-by-side with the ascetic order. When we are open to interpreting Jainism from this perspective, it creates constructive dialogue within the academic field and diaspora Jain communities. Through such cooperation, the philosophy of karmic existence and their imperative role in society through the observance of their ethical lay principles, Jain laypeople can contribute to contemporary social and environmental issues in a monumental way. In choosing not to take up the ascetic life, liberation from karma is not the intention, ethical or religious priority of a layperson. Therefore, at that point it becomes their religious duty to engage in *punya* and su-karmic activities for the betterment of one's spiritual *progress*; by avoiding harming others through the proper observance of Jain lay ethics, a more just society is unintentionally created. Nonetheless, proper observance of Jain knowledge, faith, and conduct depends on the presence and support of the ascetic order—for the prospect of a future rebirth more suitable for a higher possibility of striving for the path to liberation. The Jain philosophical and structural disagreement with and rejection of the Vedic caste system (*varnashrama-dharma*) and incorporation of the 'fourfold assembly' (*caturvidha-sangha*), comprised of monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, includes "both ascetics and laity [to] point to an acceptance of their interdependent relationship and shared aspiration to an ideal goal, however distant it might be" (Dundas 2002, 151). The ascetic path is the embodiment of Jain doctrine and practice, revealing and guiding the final stages of an individual *jiva*'s karmic existence in *samsara*. The lay path is the expression of supporting the ascetics' striving for liberation while observing Jain ethical

precepts designed to nurture one's spiritual progress but which also in effect supports their community, the lives of others, and create a more able environment for living beings; especially for those who choose to take the ascetic path and are now granted the opportunity by living in a community that would support them. Thus, Jain ascetic ahimsa being liberation-oriented, tends toward isolation from the world, whereas Jain lay ahimsa is socially engaged and oriented toward the accumulation of su-karma or *punya*. There is a simple explanation for this social order: if there were no laypeople to engage in karmic activities, there would certainly be no hope of acquiring proper karmic reward to have a more desirable future life with the possibility of pursuing the ascetic path. Truly, there would be no future for Jainism without engaged su-karma by the lay community, since to engage with and support the ascetic community is itself su-karma. Jain ascetics cannot be ascetics without lay support. For Jain laypeople not to engage in su-karma and participate in the world puts their society, environment, and *tradition* in peril.

Ahimsa

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Strictly speaking, no activity is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we need to do is *minimize* it to the greatest extent possible" (Jaini 2002, 151). As previously stated, any act (walking, moving, breathing) in the world *is* karma and *generates* karma; it guarantees continued existence in the realm of samsāric impermanence. Umasvati (1994, 151-52) regarded the threefold action of *yoga* (physical, mental, and verbal activity) as the "cause of the inflow of karma":

The operation of body, speech, and mind (*yoga*) is action (*karma*). [This] threefold action is the cause of inflow of karma. Good actions cause the inflow of beneficial karma. Evil actions cause the inflow of harmful karma. The activities of a person driven by passions

cause long-term inflow (bondage), while the activities of a person free of passions cause instantaneous inflow (bondage).

This passage implies that all activity causes more inflow of karma. While the inflow of beneficial karma resulting from activities free from passion is better in terms of its promises for a more desirable and fortunate rebirth and the acquisition of positive karmic outcomes, the text itself does not actively promote engaging in such karma-generating activities. Rather, both activities are perceived with equal vision since both still reap bondage from attaining *moksha*.

The results of such karmic inflow manifest as the *five causes of bondage*: “deluded world-view, non-abstinence, laxity, passions and the actions of the body, speech, and mind” (Umasvati 1994: 189). These causes of bondage lead to the careless and violent lifestyle that is incapable of accessing or realizing proper view and knowledge of the true nature of reality and one’s position in it; it thereby causes much suffering – of self and other. Dundas argues however, that the four passions (*kashayas*) which are “anger, pride, deception, and greed” as responsible for the causes of the inflow of karma which result in the five causes of bondage (Dundas 2002, 98). Therefore the practice and antidote for violence are the Jain precepts centered on ahimsa. Jain doctrine agrees with Gandhi’s view on violence.

The very nature of living includes dying. If we look at nature, we see life being reborn out of dying and decomposing elements on the ground. In order to have life, death is also required. However, when one is careless and ignorant of oneself and others, violence is inflicted more often than necessary. In my view, practice of ahimsa serves a double purpose:

1. It is the ability to preserve the production and process of life to its greatest extent possible without interfering with it for *one's own* personal and spiritual benefit.
2. It is the ability to preserve the production and process of life to its greatest extent possible without interfering with it for *its* personal and spiritual benefit.

While both purposes are mutually dependent and embody the Jain path in its totality, the first purpose reflects more clearly the ascetic model. The most perfected form of ahimsa is the mendicant model of immobility asceticism. The Jain ascetic precepts provide the striving monk or nun with the greatest and most demanding prescriptions of nonviolent living for one's own personal and spiritual benefit via the attainment of moksha.

I like to juxtapose the major characteristic and function of ahimsa with that of the Daoist principle of *wu-wei*; since *wu* can be translated as “not” or “non” and *wei* as “action,” “making,” “doing,” “striving,” or “straining,” *wu-wei* can be translated as “non-action,” “effortless action,” “non-interference,” or “non-grasping” (Watts 1989, 19).

From the lay perspective, unwholesome actions involve interfering (and therefore inflicting violence) with the natural flow of life. This results in the accrual of evil karma and fructifies as perpetual violence in bondage to *samsara*. On the other side, wholesome actions centered on the practice of ahimsa involves neither harming nor interfering with the natural flow of life. This results in the accrual good karma and fructifies as sustained peace in bondage to *samsara*. From the ascetic perspective, since all action and movement in life (wholesome or unwholesome) produce some degree of violence and all karma (good or evil) bind one's *jiva* in bondage to *samsara*, then a radical observance of ahimsa is required in order to shed all karma, cease the inflow of new karma, and attain *moksha* in order to elevate oneself to the highest realm of existence free from

samsara. Given this double purpose of ahimsa, we must likewise acknowledge that this practice of nonviolent living is not designed for just the sages and saints, but for the common laypeople as well.

Johnson sheds light on this double purpose of ahimsa by presenting the argument that it is possible to look at Jainism as having “two soteriological paths.” This notion of two paths to liberation indirectly addresses the problem of karma being able to properly engage with ahimsa in Jain doctrine and ethics. As Padmanabh Jaini has pointed out, karma and ahimsa as Jainism describes it may not have the same source and these two ideas can be mutually contradictory. In other words, karma and ahimsa may not necessarily come from the same place since they can be seen at odds with one another.

...we find certain Jaina stories claiming that groups of souls sometimes leave *nigoda* existence and proceed directly to the human destiny, from which, with no further rebirths, they attain to *siddha*-hood. It should be asked therefore, how it is that these very notions, which Jainas are at such pains to deny, are according to our analysis readily inferable from their oldest and most basic doctrinal materials. Is it possible that, for the Jainas, the doctrine of karma represents a relatively late accretion, a set of ideas imposed upon what was already a theoretical framework describing the operation of the universe?
(1980, 227-228)

This provides some space for Johnson’s argument to be considered. While both ascetics and laypeople adhere to the same general view of the universe, their parallel ethical codes differ only in compliance to their particular existing status. That is, when ahimsa is put to practice, ascetics engage in “passive ahimsa,” which represents an ethical model of non-interference and detachment. On the other hand, laypeople engage in “active ahimsa,” which represents an ethical model of compassionate worldly action and attachment. Thus, one inhibits the inflow of further karma, while the other creates beneficial karma (Johnson 2006, 4-7). In this light, Johnson portrays for us a “Jaina community as creating

and existing in a moral or ethical ‘climate’ [with] a generalized non-violent attitude toward the world... such a model assumes that it is possible to make soteriological progress in ways other than those which reproduce ascetic practices” (ibid., 15). It is for this reason that the lay model of ahimsa, in light of its existing tensions when trying to function beside karma theory, and while not perceived as the perfected embodiment of ahimsa via immobility asceticism, is still equally valuable and has its necessary role to play in the world. Both ascetics and Jains are capable of making soteriological progress even though their ethical demands differ based on particular existing status. One strives to eliminate karma, the other aims to accrue beneficial karma; both are necessary, both are valid.

The Ascetic Mahavratas and the Lay Anuvratas

The five *mahavratas* (Great Vows) are the sum-total of embodied ahimsa and the path to ultimate liberation in Jainism. It is a process of self-discipline which gradually purifies one’s internal and external behaviors. However, Dundas states that in the earliest strata of the canon, “there is only very sporadic reference to the Great Vows and no attempt can be found to adumbrate a formal code of ethics and monastic practice, beyond the stipulation that the passions must be conquered through withdrawal from the world of the senses and that any sort of violence or possession is bad” (2002, 43-4). Nonetheless, these vows are unanimously accepted by both Digambaras and Shvetambaras as “lying at the heart of Mahavira’s ethical teachings” making their role necessary in understanding a proper Jain ascetic ethics and practice. The Great Vows are found in Book II of the *Acaranga Sutra* and the five supporting practices for stabilizing each of the Great Vows are found in chapter seven of the *Tattvartha Sutra* (Dundas 2002, 158-59).

The first of the Great Vows is *ahimsa* (non-violence). It can be more accurately translated as ‘non-harm’. This vow is the foundation upon which all the other vows rest. The remaining four vows are merely extensions and reflections of the first. It is the complete rejection of any act of harm or killing, of any and all life-forms, to the best of one’s capacity either mentally, verbally, or physically. Secondly, it includes the repentance and confession of any violence committed throughout an ascetic’s lifetime. Finally, the observance of this vow demands the ascetic to actively discourage and prevent another from committing violence mentally, verbally or physically (Dundas 2002, 158-59). This vow guides every movement of an ascetic’s life; how they walk, how they sit, how they eat, and how they place their bowls down. The second vow is *satya* (truth). With this vow, the ascetic must refrain from any and all forms of lying or mental and verbal distortion of truth. Telling the truth creates peace of mind and heart. When one lives a life of perpetual mental and verbal distortion and hiding from the truth, it manifests as fear, anxiety, anger and denial of reality in one’s mind and speech. For this reason, lying gives birth to negative karmic accrual. The third vow is *asteya* (non-stealing). This vow is pretty straightforward. One should restrain from taking what is not given. Aside from stealing possessions, the texts do not extend this vow beyond the notion of staying at one place for an extended period of time or the unauthorized consumption of received alms. However, It should also be understood that killing a living being should be represented as stealing the life of another, as one would be taking what is not given through the means of violence. The fourth vow is *brahmacharya* (celibacy). This vow requires the ascetic to give up all mental, verbal, physical (sexual) or other prohibited pleasurable activities. In addition, one should refrain from consuming any

food or liquids that can be considered drugs, which will stimulate sexual impulse. The fifth and final vow is *aparigraha* (non-possession). It can more accurately be translated as ‘non-grasping’. Dundas explains that this vow “entails the renunciation of any attachment which the realizations take as relating to the objects of the senses and which later tradition was to regard as referring to possessions in general” (2002, 159).

Jain laypeople are encouraged to take up the twelve *anuvratas* (small vows) which serve as partial abstinence and imitation of the Great Vows observed by ascetics. They are broken down into the partial observance of the ‘Great Vows’ (*mahavrata*) the three ‘Subsidiary Vows’ (*gunavrata*) and the four ‘Vows of Instruction’ (*shikshavrata*). As Dundas (2002, 189) points out,

with regard to the first, while the ascetic is required to eschew any act of violence whatsoever, the layman must instead try to the best of his ability to avoid any pointless destruction of life-forms. The most appropriate manner to achieve this is by the regulation of possible ways of gaining a livelihood. The monastic theoreticians thus prohibit a variety of occupations, all of which in some way involve the destruction of life and the causing of distress to humans and animals, such as gaining a livelihood through destroying plants, digging, milling, excessive use of fire or water, and breeding livestock or selling their products (1992, 163). [This is how ahimsa functions among laypeople. Furthermore the *gunavratas* pertain to] the restriction of excessive travel and random and untrammelled movement in order to minimize the destruction of life-forms, the avoidance of excessive enjoyment of, for example, food or clothes, and the general abandonment of deleterious forms of activity such as futile speculation, moping or idle and self-indulgent practices.

Thus far, we have laid the groundwork for a future dialogue between Jain karma and ahimsa theory with the theory of slow violence under capitalism in the Introduction.

Through a general understanding and breakdown on the origin and role of karma in Jain cosmology, soteriology, and ethics, and a breakdown on the various elements of ahimsa (lay and ascetic) and the differences between them. In the chapter that follows, we take deeper look now into how karma and ahimsa play out when discussing their role in relation to systems (social, and ecological).

CHAPTER 2

KARMA AND SYSTEMS

Philosophically and in practice, karma can be interpreted as having an ability to establish and reinforce social systems—and even by twenty-first-century standards, ecological systems. Of course, karma is not the only driving factor in determining these systems, as we must also consider the Jain elements of substance, time, space, nature, and effort. But by paying close attention to a few specific elements of karma such as three of the non-harming karmas (*nama*, *ayus*, and *gotra*) and the narrative literatures that discuss karmas, we can see how systems begin to take shape. In this chapter, we will be taking a look at two Jain narratives. The first is the *Story of King Yashodhara*, which expresses the process of karmic retribution and discusses the nature of violence and collective rebirth. It shows how souls have the potential to reincarnate together and participate in influencing each other’s worldly engagements (and therefore their karmic activities). Finally, it reveals the consequences of how communities behave “karmically” when the residing king of a city exemplifies for his people a social and moral ethic that is sinful by Jain standards and produces collective distress. The second is *Sambodhi*, a narrative dialogue written by Acarya Mahapragya, the successor to Acarya Tusli, founder of the Anuvrat Movement. The text discusses the relationship between karma and established social systems within society. He concludes that systems in place are not the result of karmas, and therefore to change the system is acceptable, perhaps even necessary if communities are to thrive socially and spiritually by Jain standards.

The Story of King Yashodhara

In the *Story of King Yashodhara*, chief queen Amrtamati murdered her husband, King Yashodhara, and her mother-in-law, Candramati, by putting poison into a sweet dish. The story explains that their deaths were the karmic consequences of having sacrificed a cock made of flour as advised by Candramati to her son for his claim that he had had a dream which called him to renounce the world and become a mendicant. This was a lie he had fabricated to leave the palace after witnessing in disgust his wife, Amrtamati, having an affair with a hunchback. King Yashodhara's son, Yashomati, took over the ruling affairs of the family after his father and grandmother's deaths. The story goes that over a span of seven different rebirths, Yashodhara and Candramati take the form of various animals which always seem to find their way back to the palace. In most instances, they are offered up as gifts to now King Yashomati by a layperson in his kingdom, only to be killed or sacrificed as meritorious offerings to his father under King Yashomati's orders. Of course, the irony lies in the ignorance of King Yashomati, who continues to kill and eat his deceased relatives, and as mentioned in some instances, sacrificing his deceased relatives which now take the form of animals—all in his father's name and for his karmic merit. Now taking the form of a billy-goat laying with a chunk of his flesh cut off to be served to chief queen Amrtamati for physical gratification and pleasure, with his remains ordered by King Yashomati to be sacrificed by the brahmins for the "benefit of [his] father's soul", king Yashodhara reflects and cries out, "...not even a bit of it [karmic merit via sacrifice] has come to me, although I am standing right next to him. Here I am (instead), my backside cut off, suffering from hunger and thirst, tortured from unbearable pain, and my whole body trembling with fear!" (Hardy 1990, 123).

In Yasodhara and Candramati's penultimate rebirth, they return as two chickens who remember their past lives after hearing a sermon from a sage speaking to a man by the name of Candrakarma, who was bringing them in a cage to King Yashomati as an offering. When Candrakarma was at a loss for words after having heard the wise message of the sage, he asked for guidance on what to do in this lifetime. The sage instructed him to abandon his *dharma* (regarding his caste), and take up the prescribed practices of Jain lay followers: "[the] five smaller vows, the secondary and practice vows, avoidance of honey and of the five types of figs, not eating at night, the fivefold veneration, true faith, and the obeisance to the teacher—in all these" (Hardy 1990, 126). When Candrakarma heard these instructions, he explained how he was reluctant to accept the vow of not harming any living being because the tradition of his family (caste) demanded that this aspect of his dharma was appropriate for him. The sage responded, "If you do not abandon the dharma customary to your caste, consisting in killing living beings, you will pile up very rapidly evil karma. (Look! This is what happened to) that pair of chickens who did not discard the dharma of their family tradition...Similarly you, my friend, will have to suffer a series of rebirths and deaths full of pain, if you adhere to the dharma of your caste" (1990, 126). He then explained the series of past deaths and rebirths that plagued Yasodhara and Candramati now in the form of chickens. Candrakarma became simultaneously struck with panic and revelation of the nature of karma and reality and renounced his family dharma, took refuge in the path of the Jinas, and accepted all of the vows. The two chickens were witnesses to the entire discourse given by the sage and they too took refuge in the path of the Jinas and accepted the smaller vows after remembering their past lives in grief. In that moment, King Yashomati was nearby, and

wanting to show his skill of archery to his wife Kusumavali, killed both chickens with one shot of his arrow.

One day, King Yashomati was in the forest looking for a good hunt when he saw an ascetic by the name of Sudatta who informed King Yashomati in great detail of his evil actions, explaining to him that his deceased relatives were the very creatures he had killed and sacrificed. Amrtamati was now existing in the sixth hell after her death as a leper for having killed his father and grandmother. After explaining Yashodhara and Candramati's previous lives, he shared how in their most recent rebirth, they were two chickens who remembered their past lives after hearing a sermon by the sage who spoke to Candrakarma. Upon such realization, they took the smaller vows and five obeisances, only to be killed by King Yashomati for the last time before being reborn as fraternal twins to King Yashomati and his wife Kusumavali. Their names were prince Abhayaruci and princess Abhayamati. After hearing this, King Yashomati lost all interest for worldly affairs and took the ascetic vows before the sage.

This Jain story is very important for several reasons. First of all, it expresses the implications of a life lived engaging in karmic activities, which burden one's soul to suffer painful and inferior rebirths. By not adopting the Great Vows (the five *mahavrata*s for the mendicants and 12 *anuvrata*s for the laity), which are all centered on the observance of ahimsa, one is at risk of enduring future rebirths involving further violence, pain, and misery within the cosmic confines of samsāra. Secondly, it reveals the fruitless realities of merit transfer in the form of sacrifice to influence the karmic position of other jivas; in this case, King Yashomati's sacrifices for his father and grandmother's spiritual benefit. Next, it brings to light the Jain intention behind dharma. Whereas

dharma is observed by the non-Jain or Vedic community as a principle to adopt for proper social order, the “dharma” observed by the Jain follower is centered on the importance of seeing one’s karmic position and striving for ultimate salvation (moksha). In addition, this story illustrates the outcomes of attachment to worldly affairs and practices which bind one continuously to samsaric existence. This can be seen in the story when the father of Yashodhara, King Kirtyogha, renounced and initiated into the Digambara order after having seen a single gray hair on his head in the mirror (Hardy 1990, 119). At the end of the story, King Yashomati initiated under the sage, Sudatta, after having heard of his evil actions and the trials his father Yashodhara and grandmother Candramati had to endure for performing a sacrifice; and finally, when Yashodhara and Candramati were reborn as King Yashomati’s fraternal twins Abhayaruci and Abhayamati, they too renounced and initiated.

Finally, the story reveals how kingships fall into turmoil when the king, who is the embodiment of law and order and exemplifies the ideal layman to the society he rules over, presents himself to his kingdom performing violent sacrificial practices. Thus, a king engaged in destructive karmic activities imperils his kingdom with disharmony. In this light, the story argues that societies that do not observe proper ethical behavior, that is, Jain ethical vows and practices, become internally degraded and suffer greatly as a collective, even after death. Furthermore, it expresses the degree of responsibility the king bears of the welfare and spiritual development of his kingdom. By being a proper leader of one’s kingdom, the king, his kingdom, and the land flourishes and prospers. The opposite is also true. This reasoning is consistent with Johnathan Walters’ *overflow karma* theory which is “the idea that a particularly karmically potent individual such as a

buddha or an emperor, can affect the karma of others around him, or that individuals can transfer merit or demerit to others” (Appleton 2014, 127). In the case of *The Story of Yashodhara*, the “king’s virtue—or lack thereof—overflows from the individual and affects his whole kingdom” (ibid., 130). While this may present a conflict for the Jain general consensus around the notion of personal karmic responsibility, particularly with regards to the issue of merit transfer, these stories can follow up on Walters’ idea of overflow karma. The *Story of Yashodhara* reveals the futile efforts of Yashomati to transfer good karmic merit to his deceased relatives. However, it also shows the power rulers and sages have over influencing the actions of others, and therefore the type of karmic they would accrue as a result of their influence. The Brahminical practice of sacrifice observed by King Yashomati and his kingdom maintains and fosters tolerance of his subjects’ continuing throughout the story to bring to him as gifts or offerings for sacrifice his deceased relatives in the form of various animals. Thus, the king, those he lords over, and the deceased continue to influence each other in their collective actions and accrue and reap similar evil karma together. This is a very important point. The opposite is also true as portrayed in the story. By just interacting or merely being in the presence of a sage, the subjects and rulers of the city of Ujjayini were transformed, their evil actions ceasing and their illusions dispelled. Furthermore, in light of this overflow karma theory, in ‘The Story of Yashodhara’ it is easy to notice that if groups are said to make karma together and thereby experience the karmic results of their actions together, individual jivas can also experience rebirth together whereby these individual jivas remain together over a span of several lifetimes to work out each other’s karma. Walters regards this as what he calls *co-transmigration of social units* whereby “groups such as

family, friends or larger communities are reborn together in similar social relationships in multiple lives” (ibid., 127-28).

Quite remarkably, the Jain theory of karma begins to look a lot more complex and interwoven than the traditional individualistic approach presented in the canonical and philosophical texts discussed above. Consider Appleton’s view on Walters’ *seven categories of sociokarma*, of which I have presented two (*overflow karma* and *co-transmigration of social units*). Regarding the aforementioned discussion of how karma plays out in systems and communities through the *Story of Yashodhara*, Appleton writes:

Walters’ analysis cannot be applied unchanged to the Jain context, in which even more emphasis is placed upon the individual than in Buddhist philosophy. The ideal practice of immobility asceticism, which is believed to halt the influx of new karma and burn off old existing karma, could be seen as an action with no social dimension at all. However, even practitioners of this form of asceticism are sustained by small gifts of food and water (which are themselves a source of huge merit for the donor), and rely upon the teachings of the Jain community. Their own karmic present and future may be a matter for the individual, but they still affect the karma of others, and their own karmic past may well have involved multi-life social bonds. In lay Jain practice even merit transfer appears to be practiced, despite the vociferous denial of its efficacy in the scriptures. It is therefore of great interest to see to what extent this idea is present in the narratives. In addition, many stories show groups of people being bound together in birth after birth, sometimes by a positive bond such as conjugal affection, but more often by considerably less positive histories (2014, 128).

We may add to this that, in addition to the scriptures, there is an equal denial of the efficacy of merit transfer in much Jain narrative literature, as we see in the *Story of Yashodhara*. Now, a few cautions: when we pay particular attention to the Jain doctrine and the Jain narratives intended to illustrate the doctrine, I find that there are philosophical tensions existing between them, which become both problematic and fascinating. Is it important to note that these Jain narrative literatures do not always explain events or Jain views in a consistent way, but it is trying to illustrate a point worth noting. Further, Harisena, the author of the version of the *Story of Yashodhara* I have

analyzed here, was a Digambara who placed no authority at all in texts like the *Acaranga Sutra*, which is accepted only by the Shvetambara traditions.

While the *Story of Yashodhara* seems clear, there are some blind spots in this narrative that in my view are absolutely imperative to investigate. For example, the story claims that the murder of King Yashodhara and his mother Candramati by Amrtamati are the “(karmic) consequences of performing [the] evil act (of sacrificing the cock made of flour)” (Hardy 1990, 120). This implies several critical points for me. It seems as if in fact the karmic consequences of King Yashodhara and Candramati *required* Amrtamati’s actions to take place in order to manifest those consequences, but this sounds very controversial for me. Why would it be someone’s karmic consequence to be *killed*? Would that require that it be someone’s *karmic duty* to enable the karmic consequence of their actions (being killed)? However, this would not be consistent with the story as Amrtamati ended up in the lowest hell a woman can go to for committing murder and adultery. It seems like it is not without consequence for herself that she killed them, so how could it be her karmic duty and still wind up in hell? Is being killed the result of interference (violence) with the karmic process of life imparted by another’s actions? How can this karmic consequence upon Yashodhara and Candramati be justifiable if Amrtamati did not have a right to take anyone’s life? Certainly, Jain doctrine presents the notion that the universe behaves as a machine for karma to play out justice for all living beings; this reflects the various levels of cosmic existence and living beings inhabiting such various levels (hellish beings, one-to-five sensed earthly beings, gods, liberated souls). However, when is the law of karma ever supposed to engage in cutting off the process of life before an individual *jiva*’s end in their present form? Is that not the result

of the violent free-will on behalf of individual *jivas* (in this case, the evil actions of Amrtamati) and not the system of karma itself? If in fact Yashodhara and Candramati's deaths were the result of the evil act of sacrifice, does the universal law of karma justify killing by requiring someone to end their lives in order for karmic "justice" to play itself out? Why then would Amrtamati be held accountable for such acts if she is merely an instrument to karmic justice? Ultimately, who's fault is it that they were killed? From this perspective, who is responsible for the deaths of Yashodhara and Candramati? Is it themselves, Amrtamati, or the law of karma?

Of course, Amrtamati ended up in the sixth hell after dying as a leper, but the story portrays her actions as if the karmic justice system in place required her to do it because it was Yashodhara and Candramati's fate to be *murdered* as were the karmic consequences for having performed a sacrifice which was merely symbolic because the object of sacrifice was flour in the shape of a cock—which begs the question, and one that cannot be answered but is still worth asking—is that really worth being murdered in karmic terms? This narrative is trying to convey the importance of intent over impact regarding violence, which in fact argues the consensus within Jainism on its firm stance on impact over intent. Was it Amrtamati's fate to murder them, in which case, she would not be at fault over what she cannot control under a karmic system that demanded their deaths as a karmic consequence to their actions? Without Amrtamati's actions, there would have been a disharmony in this version of a karmic justice system because no one would have been available to murder Yashodhara and Candramati. Therefore, it seems a conflict lies in a cosmic reality which must function in either one of two ways but not both: a karmic system of individual free-will, or fatalism. Can this be a blind-spot in Jain

karma theory? Since karma can be regarded many times as "perceived injustice" because there isn't really any clear explanation for why some events turn out the way they do, it's lack of proper explanation and ambiguity becomes seemingly and logically consistent with a concept of *fatalism* - or at least a fatalistic approach to *karmic retribution*.

Acarya Tulsi's Anuvrata Movement

In 1949, a greatly revered Jain saint by the name of Acarya Tulsi founded the Anuvrata Movement in Rajasthan, India. The movement was guided by the fundamental belief that in a corrupted society full of greed, over consumption, and abuse of people and planetary resources, humanity could be cured through a process of individual self-purification and self-control by adhering to the traditional vows and principles inherent in Jainism. Acarya Tulsi propagated that the development of personal character and self-discipline under the Anuvrata movement focuses more on an "action-oriented movement than on giving to the world of an imposing nomenclature to a philosophy of individual regeneration, [and] the conviction that small vows can affect big changes" (Gopalan 1973, 191). As with all denominations within Jainism, the vows of the Anuvrata Movement point to the primary and fundamental virtue of all Jain doctrine and practice of ahimsa. In my view, when both the monastic and lay communities are equally valued, considered, and included in the Jain discourse, the central principle of ahimsa serves a double purpose:

1. proper knowledge and action toward liberation; the ultimate aim of all *jivas*, but only available to those who have taken up the ascetic path.
2. knowledge of karma—of self and other—for the purpose of creating and facilitating a proper social and moral ethics for all laypeople who cannot (and must not) attain liberation *in this life*.

The second purpose points back to the notion of the inevitability of a proper Jain social order which demands the eternal existence of both ascetics and laypeople, since one cannot exist and thrive without the other. Gopalan states, “In brief, the doctrine signifies that if the *jivas* are in various stages of evolution toward perfection (getting freed from the *ajivas*) no one *jiva*—at whatever higher stage it may be—has any right to interfere with the spiritual prospects of any other *jiva*—at whatever lower stage of evolution it may be” (1973, 193). Thus, the observance of *ahimsa* is carried out by the layperson for the purpose of allowing oneself, and all other *jivas*, to work out their *karmas* in this lifetime without the possibility of interference with one’s lifecycle. Furthermore, the first of a set of nine-point program in the Anuvrata movement begins with the vow of never to contemplate committing suicide. This observance reinforces the importance of ensuring that one lives out their entire lifespan without committing suicide regardless of the hardships one must endure. By committing suicide, the individual *jiva* is not able to work out all of their karma, will undoubtedly accrue very heavy negative karma, and be reborn in the hellish realms of cosmic existence—backtracking all spiritual progress. Although social considerations were analyzed and expressed within the context of this movement which arose in 1949 during a time of extreme violence, greed, and civil and international unrest, these considerations did not replace the overall aim of spiritual evolution and progress toward liberation. The process of reorganizing and restructuring society and its values depend on individual practice of the principles of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* (grasping for truth), and not solely on the “reconstitution of social relations or introducing legislative changes in the institutions” (ibid., 194).

Acarya Mahapragya, a disciple and successor of Acarya Tulsi, composed a discourse titled *Sambodhi: Enlightened Knowledge, Faith, and Conduct*, wherein he uses the format of the Jain canonical texts to recreate a dialogue between Tirthankar Mahavira (Bhagavan) and Muni Meghkumar (Megha). The discourse elaborates on Mahavira's views of the conditions of politics and society. The following is a dialogue where Megha inquires from Mahavira on the nature of karma and its relationship to social systems:

Megha said: Lord! How did you propound the doctrine of *ahamindra* (a system where everyone is equal)? For if it is true, the doctrine of karma gets disrupted.
The Lord [Bhagavan] said, *Megha!* The master-servant relationship is based on the social system. All community relations are not the fruit of *karmas*.
A King is the head of a monarchy and the head of a republic is a President.
This practice has nothing to do with *karmas*; it is just a matter of system.
Son! If the existing system of slavery were a result of *karmas*, how could I oppose it?
Son! This practice of slavery is not the result of *karmas*; it is part of a system.
Change in the system has my approval (Mahapragya 2000, 33).

This brings a rather innovative and fascinating thought into the nature of karma and systems. If no systems are the result of karmas, then how do we discern which are a matter of systems and which the result of karmas - and who gets to discern one from the other? Given that a said system in place is not the result of karmas, Mahavira claims that change in the system has his approval. However, it is neither his nor the ascetic order's responsibilities to enact such social reform. To engage in worldly affairs pertaining to the changing of systems would violate the ascetic or Jina's role. Mahavira continues:

The doctrine of karma is not at fault if everyone is able to earn a living as a result of a proper system. People are unhappy under an unwholesome system and happy under a wholesome system. Happiness and sorrow resulting from a system should not be ascribed to karmas; likewise, happiness and sorrow which are the outcome of karmas should not be attributed to a system. Just as the principle, 'treat everyone else as yourself' is accepted by all, the principle that individual ability differs from man to man is also universally accepted. It depends on the relative proportion of the karmas covering to the soul. Control of anger, pride, deceit and greed result in a good system where there is no hindrance to anyone's freedom (Mahapragya 2000, 35).

This brings the responsibility for such reforms of social systems to the laypeople, under the doctrinal interpretations of the Jain ascetics who they depend on for social and

spiritual guidance. Through proper faith, knowledge, and conduct, the lay community can create and nurture wholesome systems which result in happiness and dismantle unwholesome systems which result in unhappiness through the prescribed observances of controlling anger, pride, deceit and greed. The result is a more livable, peaceful, and habitable society where communities no longer create or perpetuate further “hindrance (or violence) to anyone’s freedom.” By suggesting that karma is not responsible for established systems in place, it seems that Mahavira’s intent here is to shelter karma from the charge that it justifies such established systems like those presented in this research (slow violence, environmental racism, capitalism), and that we can and should change those systems if they are unwholesome for the betterment and wellbeing of all. Furthermore, this text suggests that it is possible to critique the current Jain theory of karma because, as evidenced by the slow violence of environmental racism under a capitalist society, these injunctions perpetuated by “the system” cannot fit into a just paradigm of karma without seeming to be astoundingly unjust, illogical, and an irrefutable method of victim blaming entire select groups of humans, species, and geographical regions.

CHAPTER 3

JAIN ETHICAL RESPONSES TO SLOW VIOLENCE UNDER CAPITALISM

Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic structure that functions on the principle of a “free market,” which depends on its ability to maximize profit. Reciprocally, capitalism thrives on a strong base of consumers who can get the most out of their purchase; the motto is “cheaper, bigger, better, faster.” In order to have a free market, agreements are made by the participants in it; among these are “property (what can be owned)” and “contract (what can be bought and sold, and on what terms)” (Reich 2015, 8). As history shows, agreements within a free market regarding the implications of capitalism have not always held highly ethical standards regarding ownership and contract. In the United States, capitalism historically permitted the ownership of African slaves. The theory of maximizing profit and minimizing cost was most clearly defined during the era of slavery where white landowners profited from slave labor by African men, women, and children purchased through the triangular trade. We have come a long way from slavery, but now capitalism has taken an evolutionary leap in its practices and outcomes. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, citing Nixon (2011), our industrial and technological advancements through capitalism in the 21st century has led to globalization which has involved global-environmental corporate domination by Western countries. Their notions of a “free market” capitalism have allowed corporate-colonialism to thrive at the expense of what he describes as “disposable lands and disposable people” in developing (and within developed) countries.

While countries like the United States certainly advanced and prospered via corporate globalization under capitalism through the free market, the profit, influence, and power was concentrated in specific regions—leaving others with little to gain from such economic practices and policies. The United States’ history of segregation enabled this strategic transfer of wealth and resources to remain concentrated in the hands of specific communities. The violence taking place from slavery to the segregation era was remarkably visible and action was taken to address it. However, we are just beginning to witness the long lasting effects of centuries of violence and oppression in a post-segregation society where capitalism is thriving exponentially and violence has taken new forms. Among these are the disproportionate policing, lethal force, and incarceration of black and brown citizens in low-income communities where many are forced to labor in for-profit prisons, and the disproportionate installation of dirty, non-renewable energy companies and chemical waste dump facilities in the backyards of low-income communities of color leading to many hazardous and deadly environmental issues.

In my view, capitalism is the antithesis of a sustainable and cooperative economic culture whereby all beings can benefit and flourish. It is the source of competition and exploitation. It thrives at the expense of others, where the other generally tends to be the powerless and most vulnerable in society. Jain ethics is about non-violence and a manifestation of that is the removal of attachments through non-possession (*aparigraha*) and non-stealing (*asteya*). One must possess (morely likely than not in an unsustainable manner) and steal (the lives of souls deemed disposable to use for plunder and manipulation) in a capitalist society. From a Jain doctrinal perspective (ascetic model), the practice and essence of ahimsa is not the least bit capitalist.

A home dweller is restrained about other living beings in a gross manner. One who is austere, observes religious vows and practices equanimity earns a place in heaven but he cannot attain liberation because he is not completely free from the bondage of violence and possessiveness. Accumulation of wealth and other objects causes sorrow both in this world and in the hereafter. Therefore, no learned man desirous of being liberated and acquiring self-knowledge will like to confine himself to the household (Mahapragya 2000, 84-85)

Bhagwan Mahavira explains in these two verses the impediments to engaging with and accumulating possessions in the world. In order to acquire in a material world, it must be taken claimed for oneself, which occurs at the expense of other living beings. Although liberation is the principal aim, there is a place for the layperson to reduce violence by practicing partial self-restraint through the partial observance of the religious vows. The ascetic path does not support a system founded upon capitalist principles, and a proper lay path does little to contribute to it. Maximizing profit, the acquisition of lands, resources, and other living beings for one's personal worldly wealth and benefit cannot thrive under a proper Jain ethical model centered on ahimsa and world-denying/world-renouncing practices.

Many Western scholars and learned Jain intellectuals suggest that Jain philosophy and ethics can draw parallels to the Western social and environmental ethical discourses. Jain karma and ahimsa as a doctrinal, functional, and ethical basis for living and viewing the world find much parallelism to the twenty-first-century model of the social and environmental movements facing today in society. As we have seen with the Kettleman City case study, solutions are found when vulnerable communities organize and demand justice, and strong alliances are built between affected communities and the unaffected privileged communities willing to hear, learn, participate, and advocate for change in the system. This is how the environmental justice movement came about. In my view, these principles and elements are at the core of developing a sound environmental ethic. I do

not see it as not conducive for Jain ethics to have a social or environmental stance if it cannot be inclusive of a principle of justice and does not factor in a theory of addressing (or at least acknowledging) slow violence that involves race, class, and region as part of the problems facing many living beings today. Cort concludes with regards to *mokshamarg* ideology (ascetic model) that “Jain soteriology, with its devaluation of the material world in pursuit of a pure spirituality is in many ways not conducive to the development of a [social or] environmental ethic” (Cort 2002, 84). In my view, karma in philosophy and practice can impede the development of a social and environmental ethic in Jainism given its soteriological implications. We begin our discussion in addressing these concerns with karma.

Karma and Slow Violence

There are several seemingly violent implications, which can be associated with the established Jain karma theory. First off, we begin with the idea of justifiable violence through the burning off of karma. In many instances throughout the texts and narrative literatures such as the classic story of Mahavira and the deer hunter, it is implied that when one experiences pain, it can be attributed to a moment in time when the individual *jiva* is experiencing the burning off of his or her karma in the form of physical pain. It also carries fatalistic implications, whereby the coming to fruition of past karmas which can manifest as physical pain are processes that one cannot avoid as they occur in their due time. Thus, if one experiences physical pain, as in the story of Mahavira and the deer hunter, where the narration explains that the physical pain Mahavira endured in the moment of being beaten by the deer hunter was the coming to fruition of his past karmas presently being burned off through the experience, does the all-governing principle of

karma suggest that no pending pain can be avoided? How do we discern which instances of violence and pain are justified (instance of karmic fruition) or not? If I verbally or physically hurt another, does that merely make me an instrument of karmic justice in order for the other to burn off their karma? This is not consistent theoretically with how I view the function of karma. I should in fact be held accountable for my violence and accrue negative karma.

As stated in the introduction, it is clear in this context (when observing individual violence) who the person is that is causing violence and reaping the (immediate) fruits thereof. However, as we can see through the slow violence of environmental racism under capitalism, there are systems in place that create violence collectively (over a large collective of *jivas*) and yet in this context, it is not entirely clear who the person is (or group of people are) causing the violence and reaping the fruits of the violence, when it appears to be perpetuated by “the system.” By recapitulating Mahavira’s response to the functional differences between karma and systems in *Sambodhi*, karma is not charged with being responsible for systemic violence, thereby refuting my argument given that there is another power dynamic taking place—one that karma is not responsible for. In this regard, a system such as the slow violence of environmental racism under capitalism is not a form of justifiable violence governed by karma. It is a system which can and, for the betterment of society (socially and spiritually), must be changed.

Next, I see karma as a process that can be theoretically consistent with slow violence’s principles of “delayed destruction” and “temporal distance.” Because slow violence occurs “slowly,” there is a temporal distance which is created (violence is dispersed across space and time) making it less visible and resulting in delayed

destruction. Karma shares these qualities in the manner in which they come to fruition over individual jivas. Because one cannot remember their infinite number of past lives, much less what occurred just a few years before, there is a quality of temporal distance and delayed destruction which cannot be observed or explained when the time has come to receive the fruit one's past karmas. In other words, because the fruit of one's past karmas are dispersed across space and time, one cannot calculate its arrival, and therefore when it comes it is perceived as either unjust or good fortune. This notion follows up with another aspect of slow violence—"displacement without movement."

Through the process of slow violence, communities become displaced without having the adequate resources to escape or resolve the violence inflicted onto them. By the same token, there are communities outside that benefit as a result of the slow violence taking place within those distressed communities. Karma to some degree implies a theoretically consistent view with this notion of "displacement without movement" in that the current existence and circumstance of a *jiva* is dependent upon one's past karmas. Therefore, just as someone cannot escape their karma, they cannot escape the conditions upon which they have inherited and are experiencing given that this current condition exemplifies their past actions and must be endured in order to burn off past accrued karmas. In other words, "I am here for a reason; it is my karma." This can also be said of those who inhabit communities that don't experience slow violence manifested as social and environmental injustices. This creates a mode of institutional inaction given that if karma becomes the final explanation for the way things are, then why attempt to change what cannot be changed and must take into effect? Given that "as we enter the final stages of each particular movement of the wheel of time, it is necessary and inevitable

that both humankind and the natural world socially and ecologically decay,” this also takes a fatalistic approach when discussing the time cycles in Jain cosmology which can be even more impactful than karma fatalism (Dundas 2002a, 97). For if we are too fatalistic about time (*kali yuga*), we will not feel as inclined or obliged to act against the systemic problems. This is what Acarya Mahapragya was pointing to when he offered a solution with the narrative dialogue depicted in *Sambodhi*.

By understanding the eternal process of time and space unfolding in Jain cosmology, it can be understood that the world is destined to degenerate in every way, only to be renewed once again when the next cycle comes. We are currently existing in the *kali-yuga* (final time cycle) so we should not be surprised with the present conditions of our world. This Jain cosmological theory can reinforce an ideology of fatalism and passivity; if this is the way things are and are destined to be, no efforts can reverse the perceived violence plaguing the world, and this is the necessary process we are witnessing and must allow to unfold. A Jain social and environmental ethic cannot be produced to address or solve the implications of slow violence in a twenty-first-century capitalist society if this Jain cosmological theory is not up for debate.

Slow violence then becomes a process for karma (and *kali-yug*) to work itself out in the universe, in which case karma would explain and justify environmental racism and the political and economic advances and benefits of privileged members of society. Once again, if the narrative conversation depicted between Bhagavan Mahavira and Megha in *Sambodhi* is put to work regarding these systemic issues, then it can be understood that the structures of society established by those with social and political influence over the vulnerable upon which slow violence is endured cannot charge karma with these issues.

Perhaps then karma works individual to individual and not system to system—although I would argue that when institutions which are governed by a multitude of people intentionally cause harm to an entire region of lands and people, karma must somehow play a role in ways that cannot be understood or calculated. The water crisis in Flint, Michigan is a perfect example on this matter. Intent is key in this regard, as a group of people can knowingly engage in racial and class oriented environmental violence (e.g. the 1984 Cerrell Report, which suggested to companies seeking proposed sites for garbage incinerators that “the communities [and localities] that would offer the least resistance to such incinerators were rural communities, poor communities, communities whose residents had low educational levels... [Cole and Foster 2001, 3]). Finally, while Jainism does not support *varnashrama-dharma*, karma can in this regard support racial and class-oriented violence. Aside from the already mentioned illustrations, another way this can be exemplified is through the karmic process of collective rebirth as depicted in the *Story of Yashodhara*. That is, if it is doctrinally consistent that individual jivas can be reborn together over several lifetimes due to similar activities, attachments, and relations, then the same can be said to justify communities which share similar qualities as being reborn time and time again into the conditions of their present lives. This logic carries with it an element of race and class arrangement in society.

Ahimsa and Slow Violence

In my view, ahimsa is (or has the capacity to be) a direct response to personal and structural violence. Capitalism (a system) is the foundation upon which the slow violence of environmental racism (another system/sub-system) depends and persists, causing social and environmental harm to a multiplicity of jivas taking the form of both human

and non-human entities. As evidenced in some texts, if karma is not responsible for such systems in place, these systems can and should be addressed and reconstructed for the betterment of all in order to provide a more wholesome society that engages with the environment in a responsible and sustainable manner. After all, given that the very presence of life itself suggests the outcome of further violence, then the key is to at least minimize violence to the greatest extent possible for the spiritual benefit of all. While Jain doctrine does not actively advocate for social and environmental justice per se, it speaks against carelessness which can harm living beings, small and large, and calls for self-discipline and restriction for the progress and advancement of other living beings currently sharing the same space. Social and environmental justice would be a natural and complementary effect to Jain ethics. The intent may be different (*moksha* for ascetics, *punya* for laity) but the impact remains the same (more social and ecological balance), *less violence*.

The notion of “my suffering is your suffering” and the seemingly social and philosophical responsibility to attend to the welfare of others aside from one’s own is emphasized time and time again in Jain ahimsa. The *Acaranga Sutra* (1.1.5.101-102) emphasizes the mutual support and interdependency of living beings: “You are the one whom you intend to kill, you are the one you intend to tyrannize, you are the one whom you intend to torment, you are the one you intend to punish and drive away. The enlightened one who lives up to his dictum neither kills nor causes others to kill... Bondage and emancipation are within yourself” (Tatia 2002, 7). This religious and ethical responsibility to protect and care for “the other” depends on a radical restructuring view of reality; that is, one must believe and experience wholeheartedly on the

interconnectedness between all life-forms and recognize that when one causes harm to another, they are indirectly and simultaneously causing harm to oneself—both physically and spiritually. While the aim here is liberation, these values inherent in Jain ahimsa contain a quality of conscientiousness toward the position and view of the “other” and implies an element that the welfare of the other is likewise dependent on the welfare of oneself. “I did it; I shall cause another to do it; I shall allow another to do it. In the world, these are the causes of sin” (Jacobi 2008, 32). Furthermore, the witnessing and tolerance of inflicted violence is equally prohibited which lies at the root of all destruction.

One of the fundamental differences between Jain and Buddhist views on violence are on the differences between intent and impact. From a Jain perspective, in any act of violence committed, knowingly or unknowingly, the actor is at fault for having committed such violence. Every individual, monk, nun, layman, laywoman, “is responsible for his (or her) ignorance, and therefore for any act that follows from this ignorance...Thus, according to Jainism the moral imperative to practice ahimsa includes the requirement to remove the ignorance that would prevent a person from seeing the violence embodied in his or her actions” (Koller 2002, 23). The slow violence of environmental racism under capitalism is perpetuated and maintained via ignorance. In my view, Jain prioritization of impact over intent holds all people accountable for the violence they inflict, regardless of their unwitting participation. In order to refrain from violent actions, we must first dispel our ignorance in order to be able to *see* the slow violence being inflicted which one is unknowingly participating in. This brings up another challenge when discussing the modern implications of slow violence under capitalism: the difference between unknowingly participating in slow violence. If a city

in the state of Pennsylvania depends entirely on coal for their energy, and the coal plant is stationed in a low income community which largely affects that very community, should outsiders who use their electricity every day, unknowingly contributing to violence, be held accountable? If the systems in place do not allow one to stop participating in slow violence because they are dependent upon those very systems, this becomes very problematic for both the affected insiders and contributing outsiders. It seems that in order to reduce violence and address this problem, the alternatives then become to consume less energy, the short-term solution, and demand renewable energy which does not harm environments and communities, the long-term solution. Until then, violence across regions that harm the air, soil, rivers, animals, and humans inhabiting those affected communities will continue to increase, humans participating in violence will continue to accrue negative karma, and society will continue to decline spiritually . From this perspective, it can be argued that slow violence resulting in environmental racism under capitalism is a physical manifestation of a society in spiritual decline. Mass consumerism and exploitation of resources at the expense of communities falling apart in poverty and ecological pollution.

John M. Koller (2002, 31) refers to *samsara* as a realm for the “recycling of jivas”; all souls witness the realities of “karmic bondage,” which both the infinite pleasant and unpleasant forms of life are taken up. As such, he argues that the “Jain view of life is essentially ecological because all forms of life are valuable; lower and higher forms constitute a single large community in which every life-form is entitled to respect and ethical treatment” (ibid.). This demands a taking up of Jain ethical vows and practice centered on ahimsa in order to reduce one’s contributing violence, advance spiritually,

and not impede the progress of other lifeforms. The young prince Mrgaputra reflects on his past lives describing the infinite rebirths of pain and suffering and expressing his ability to no longer live in ignorance by sharing the following examples of his remembered previous rebirths:

As a fish I have, against my will, been caught with hooks and in bow-nets; I have therein been scraped, slit, and killed, an infinite number of times. As a bird I have been caught by hawks, trapped in nets, and bound with bird-lime, and I have been killed, an infinite number of times. As a tree I have been felled, slit, sawn into planks, and stripped off the bark by carpenters with axes, hatchets, an infinite number of times. As iron I have been malleated, cut, torn, and filed by blacksmiths, an infinite number of times. I have been made to drink hissing molten copper, iron, tin, and lead under horrid shrieks, an infinite number of times. You like meat minced or roasted; I have been made to eat, ever so many times, poisoned meat, and red-hot to boot (Jacobi 2008, 319).

I concur with Koller's interpretation of this text. He concludes: "Mrgaputra's speech is a powerful example of the awareness and compassion aroused by the ability to see and feel things from the perspective of the other, whether the other is person, fish, or plant. Is it precisely this ability to assume the standpoint of the other that arouses the energy to not harm the other, but to act so as to contribute to its wellbeing, that is at the heart of ahimsa" (2002, 32). Through this, the other is no longer perceived as dead matter to be manipulated and consumed for one's pleasure and benefit. The world of form becomes alive and valuable to the one who can see and who lives in such a way that perfectly embodies ahimsa. Capitalism is the antithesis of this view of life; the dark side of its politics and economics results in slow violence and environmental racism. There is a way to live in which one must always be on guard and remain conscientious of the position of other living beings. Violence committed, willingly or out of ignorance, affects both the violator and the victim; both become cut off from the ability to progress and prosper socially, environmentally, and spiritually. In this regard, Jain philosophy does have a social and environmental impact if enacted, regardless of its "world denying" soteriology.

Ahimsa then becomes a response to the various manifestations of careless and structural violence sanctioned under capitalism.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are all about narratives. These narratives that we impose on select groups in society ultimately influence the way we treat, relate to, and engage with such groups socially, politically, and economically. A clear example of this is discriminatory housing practices, which results in a form of economic segregation. Concomitantly, this results in poor distribution of capital and access to resources on specific communities with less funding and poorer infrastructure, making more people subject to environmental pollution and puts the most vulnerable in grave danger from natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, etc. Microaggressions also affect the way we perceive select groups in society which result in discriminatory practices toward them. All of these elements are the result of the capitalist model, which is racist and elitist.

Microaggressions therefore, play a major role in who gets to participate, engage, and thrive in our political process and economic arena. Microaggressions are literally the process by which select groups are pushed to the margins of society and away from the center of power and privilege. Ultimately “as long as microaggressions remain hidden, invisible, unspoken, and excused as innocent slights with minimal harm, we will continue to insult, demean, alienate, and oppress marginalized groups” (Sue 2010, 19). Until microaggressions comes to the light of our awareness as a society, the capitalist model will continue to reflect narratives, which influence our policies and reinforce the status of select groups. Taking all of this into consideration, we must consider microaggressions as a complementary facet to slow violence under capitalism.

Now let us investigate the various categories of microaggressions. The following table (Table 1) outlines a taxonomy of microaggressions, breaking down the practice of microaggressions into three parts: the *theme*, the *microaggression*, and the underlying *message*.

Table I: Taxonomy of Microaggressions

THEMES	MICROAGGRESSION	UNDERLYING MESSAGE
<p>Alien in One’s Own Land – When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born.</p>	<p>“Where are you from?” “What are you?” “You speak English very well.”</p>	<p>You are not American. You are a foreigner. You do not belong here.</p>
<p>Ascription of Intelligence – Assigning intelligence to a person of color or a woman based on their race/gender.</p>	<p>“You are a credit to your race/gender” “You don’t talk like a typical Black person.”</p>	<p>People of color/women are generally not as intelligent or verbally proficient as Whites/males.</p>
<p>Color Blindness – Statements that indicate that a person does not want to acknowledge race.</p>	<p>“When I look at you, I don’t see color.”</p>	<p>Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences.</p>

	“I only see one race, the human race.”	
<p>Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status – A person of color presumed to be dangerous based on race</p>	<p>A store employee following a customer of color around the store.</p> <p>A person turning in a different direction when there is a Black/Latino passerby</p>	<p>You are going to steal/you are poor/you do not belong.</p> <p>You are dangerous.</p> <p>You are a criminal.</p>
<p>Assumption of Abnormality – Occurs when it is implied that there is something wrong with being LGBTQ</p>	<p>Two men holding hands in public are stared at by strangers.</p> <p>A transgender woman is walking dressed as a woman.</p> <p>Using the word “gay” as an insult.</p>	<p>Your displays of affection are weird and offensive.</p> <p>You shouldn’t be dressed that way.</p> <p>You’re not a woman.</p> <p>It’s not normal.</p> <p>People who are weird, stupid, or different are “gay”.</p>

(Based on Sue 2010, 32-34)

Bhagvan Mahavira's message in *Sambodhi* on the difference between karma and systems serves as a direct response and solution to the problem of microaggressions. Microaggressions have nothing to do with one's karma (their physical qualities and abilities may have some to do with karma, but not the stories about them), but rather are a collective of imposed narratives based on inaccurate perceptions and assessments of certain classes of people by a dominating culture and ideology. They are "systematic." When this happens, certain groups of human beings lose their value and worth in the eyes of the dominating others which affect the way they are treated them in every facet of life. The Jain doctrine of proper view (*samyak darshan*) eliminates the veil of wrong perceptions we have toward certain living beings and advocates a lifestyle and view of impartial respect and equanimity toward all living beings, human and non-human. By bringing microaggressions to the light of our awareness, we can strive to dismantle our partiality toward others which largely affect how they are able to engage and move through the world.

Let us analyze and breakdown a few enumerated in Table I. First, the underlying message behind the theme *assumption of criminal status* puts many people in grave danger, particularly Black and Latino men. We have seen the slow violent effects of the over-criminalization and deaths of countless unarmed civilians just from the very notion of assuming one is dangerous solely based on skin color. These are just a few examples of how microaggressions monitor and regulate the abilities and movements of marginalized members of society. When we consider the slow violent effects of environmental racism under capitalism, we can see clear correlations between this violent system and its perpetuation through the narratives of microaggressions. Next, the

underlying message behind the theme *alien in one's own land* assumes that anyone who does not look like the dominating majority culture does not belong here and are susceptible to constantly having their identity policed, which puts them in danger to those who do not tolerate or respect the presence of perceived “outsiders.” Furthermore, the underlying message behind the theme *color blindness* is one of denying a person of color's racial/ethnic experiences. When one is unable to acknowledge and celebrate difference by pretending it is not there because difference makes one uncomfortable, they are unable to see or acknowledge any painful or difficult experiences the other has had and therefore cannot reach out and help in times of need. Finally, the discomfort of difference can be seen in identity policing through the microaggression *alien in one's own land*, where after confronted by the person who has received the microaggression, the “microaggressor” defends their partiality with *color blindness*—which of course is a false claim for if one truly could not see color or difference, they would not be asking where one is from to begin with. Peruvian Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez explains, “This is how they are seen or, more precisely, not seen, because they are in fact invisible insofar as they are excluded in today's world” (Gutiérrez and Müller 2015, 44).

Jain Ethics and Microaggressions: The *Pratikraman Sutra*

This is what living in “the margins of society” represents. By being *alien in one's own land* and simultaneously have to deal with the defense mechanisms of *color blindness*, you are visible only in your “difference” and “alien-ness” but remain invisible in your experience and oppression. As described in Chapter 2, the doctrinal and ethical model for the lay community is one of partial observance of the ascetic mahavratas in gradual progress toward the shedding away of old karmas and reducing in influx of new karmas

for one's personal and spiritual benefit. These benefits of course expand to one's community, since through the observance of the smaller vows (*anuvratas*), the surrounding living beings benefit greatly from one's careful observance of the various elements of ahimsa in everyday life. In addition to this, lay life is also "structured around the practice of the six obligatory actions (*avashyak*), [which] play an important role in the ritual life of many Jains" (Cort 2001, 122). These practices are outlined in the *Pratikraman Sutra*. I wish to pay particular attention to the first and fourth obligatory actions—*samayika* and *pratikraman*. Both of these obligatory actions create a space for reflecting on the degree of one's actions and the intentions behind them which serves to foster a deeper sense groundedness in being in order to assess one's perception on the matter at hand.

Samayika is the "state of equanimity for a certain duration, (a practice by which one remains in) the state of equanimity without attachment and hatred, and to treat all living beings equal to one's self...Equanimity is an act of remaining calm and tranquil. It implies neutrality of mind and temper (and) ultimately removes all karma(s)" (Shah 2014, 11). The fourth obligatory action, *pratikraman*, is "the rite by which the individual ritually negates the karmic impact of actions and thoughts" (Cort 2001, 122). The *pratikraman* is an observance of self-reflection; "*prati*" meaning "back" and "*kraman*" meaning "to go." This translates as the practice of *going back*, "to reflect and review, to confess and atone for one's own faults of mind, body, and speech in one's daily activities, and forgiving and extending friendship to all" (Shah 2014, 14). It is the Jain recitation ritual of repentance and expiation (*prayashcitta*). *Pratikraman* is comprised of five observances: "performed in the evening, to atone for the day's transgressions; performed

first thing in the morning, to atone for the night's transgressions; performed every fortnight; performed every four months; and performed annually, the *samvatsari pratikraman* performed on the last day of *Paryusan*" (Cort 2001, 124). The *Universal Forgiveness Prayer* and the *Reflection on Universal Friendship Prayer* embodies the core of *pratikraman* and Jain practice:

I forgive all living beings
May all living beings grant me forgiveness.
My friendship is with all living beings
I have no enmity with anyone

May the entire universe be blessed;
May all beings engage in each other's wellbeing.
May all weakness, sickness and faults diminish;
May everyone everywhere be healthy, peaceful and happy in all respects
(Shah 2014, 23-24).

Through entering a state equanimity for all living beings (*samakiya*) and self-reflection and prayer (*pratikraman*), the Jain mendicant and layperson remain cognizant of their everyday thoughts, words, and deeds. Through the practice of these two obligatory actions, Jain adherents vow to take responsibility for their actions in order to diminish karmic inflow, shed off past karmas, and reduce the everyday violence that comes with living. These Jain ethical practices can do a great deal of good in addressing microaggressions that manifest in everyday life as a result of the slow violence of environmental racism and other harmful oppressive systems working and thriving via capitalism in the West.

As with the observance of *pratikraman*, confronting microaggressions requires an individualistic approach where one must gradually nurture a cognizant awareness of underlying feelings, thoughts, and perceptions under certain situations and in their everyday interactions with different groups of marginalized peoples. There is certainly

the ability to teach others about microaggressions, but because these imposed narratives are deeply rooted in our individual and collective psyche, it is sometimes undetectable unless individual contemplation is first administered. Then and only then can we see how these microaggressive narratives affect others and maintain oppressive systems in order to address the larger physical manifestations that may come from them such as environmental racism under capitalism. Through *samayika* and *pratikraman*, one can practice the state of reflection and awareness necessary for being able to recognize one's internalized oppressive conditioning, which often result in microaggressive behavior.

CONCLUSION

What does the future of Jainism look like and how are Jain ethics translating to contemporary issues in society today? By undergoing a critical analysis of the Jain texts and from leading thinkers in Jain scholarship today, this research attempted to bring Jain ethics to the forefront of the presented modern implications of slow violence taking place in the twenty-first century. The slow violence of environmental racism under capitalism is a very serious affliction putting the future of countless communities and ecological spaces at risk of further violence and irreversible hazards. It was my hope that Jain philosophy could have a say in these issues, and I firmly believe it could make a wonderful contribution to these issues put forth. One example of this was the Anuvrata Movement which entered this research and conversation of karma and ahimsa in Jainism because of its new and innovative establishment of the *samana* and *samani* order who have taken partial monastic vows (more restricted than laity) and can therefore still engage in the world, travel abroad to make Jainism known to the wider public, and be a presence of Jain wisdom and spiritual leadership for the diaspora lay communities living in the West. Their efforts to reach out to the wider public by extending and sharing the *anuvratas* given by Bhagvan Mahavira to the non-Jain community is a new effort in Jain history.

Central Questions

Is ahimsa intrinsically anti-capitalist? This research concludes that ahimsa is in fact an intrinsically anti-capitalist ethic. The essence of ahimsa is displayed in its entirety via the ascetic model. Because there is a mutual relationship of support and interdependence between the ascetic and lay community, the ascetics depend on a laity which will not take

up the *mahavratas* completely in order to perform the necessary roles with minimal violence to serve and care for the ascetics. Reciprocally, the lay community depends on the ascetics to take up the mahavratas and serve as an example of proper Jain ethical living, and provide them with the proper knowledge of their tradition's doctrine for their spiritual benefit. As stated previously in Chapter 3, there is a place for the layperson to reduce violence by practicing partial self-restraint through the observance of the religious vows (*anuvratas*), but the ascetic path does not support a system founded upon capitalist principles, and a proper lay path does little to contribute to it. Maximizing profit, the acquisition of lands, resources, and other living beings for one's personal worldly wealth and benefit cannot thrive under a proper Jain ethical model centered on ahimsa and world-denying/world-renouncing practices.

Do ahimsa and karma in Jain doctrine support racialized structural violence and inequality? This research concludes that ahimsa can be an indirect response to the problem of racialized structural violence and inequality (slow violence of environmental racism under capitalism) but a response nonetheless. While the intent of Jain ahimsa is doctrinally based on soteriology, the lay community's restricted partial taking up of the vows centered on ahimsa allow them to engage in the world and utilize their karma for addressing issues affecting other lifeforms, communities, and environments. The lay community has the luxury of performing a form of "engaged ahimsa" if you will, as opposed to the ascetic model of ahimsa centered on disengagement via immobility asceticism. Ascetic ahimsa aims toward individual liberation (*moksha-marg*), whereas lay ahimsa aims toward spiritual progress while also having the potential to engage in collective support and cooperation (wellbeing). Capitalism certainly supports racialized

structural violence and inequality; Jainism has adapted itself to the economic practices without adequately addressing capitalism's drawbacks of slow violence.

Without addressing issues of economic justice, there can be no lasting and significant contribution to the environment's wellbeing. During the twentieth century most Jains have wholeheartedly embraced the values of global industrial and postindustrial capitalism, and have thereby contributed significantly to environmental and social degradation. At the same time, one does find among both Indian and diaspora Jains alternative voices calling for attention to the needs of the poor and dispossessed. Can Jain activists amplify these latter voices and mobilize Jains on behalf of economic and environmental justice? (Cort 2002, 80)

This research provides a platform for Jain thinkers and followers to assess their ethics in the face of slow violence under capitalism, and consider what their tradition represents and has the capacity to contribute to the modern world. Through this investigation, I firmly believe that Jains can mobilize on behalf of economic and environmental justice. This, however, does not come without a great challenge to investigate *our actions*, for if we consider the parallels I have identified between the role and function of karma and the manifestations of slow violence, delayed destruction, temporal distance, displacement without movement, one can see how easily karma can fit into this theory and can present itself as a theoretical instrument for justifying slow violence.

Can we have a capitalism that is non-violent through the Jain application of ahimsa? For ascetics, Jain ethics are fundamentally opposed to capitalist principles; the coexistence of a Jain ascetic practice with capitalism is impossible. However, this is not the case with the lay community. In my view, this is not only possible, but is already in progress.

Jains have long avoided using animal products in their many businesses. Lists of 'green-friendly' materials could be developed by Jains to be used in manufacturing processes. The Jain programs of environmental education could be expanded to prepare future leaders to be more familiar with environmental issues. Jains could actively support air pollution reduction initiatives by making certain that their own automobiles in India [and in the West] conform to legal standards (Chapple 2002a, 137).

Jain ethics are capable of participating in capitalism in a way that promotes efficiency and sustainability through the gradual minimization of violent economic practices. Investing in renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and electric, while demanding certain materials like metals which through extraction for use can harm smaller living beings, is an overall investment. Such initiatives will gradually promote the divestment of hazardous and deadly non-renewable energy practices like fossil-fuels, hydraulic fracturing, and coal which destroy and deplete our air, water and soil (and therefore ourselves and all other living beings who depend on these life-sustaining elements). Karmic activities, both wholesome and unwholesome, will continue, but the scales will gradually turn in the other direction as our life practices begin to reflect safer, sustainable, cooperative, and more peaceful settings.

Does Jainism inherently promote sound ecological practices, and can karma and ahimsa as Jain monastic and lay ethics of conduct be transferred into a global ethics? I hesitate to call Jainism inherently ecological, but its doctrine does prove that a byproduct of properly observing Jain ethical principles results in social and ecological consideration and balance. In order to have any global ethics centered on ecological consideration, the ideological principles that hold capitalism together need to be brought to the light. Ahimsa can produce a social and environmental ethic, while not intending to, and dismantle the various elements inherent in capitalism which produce and maintain slow violence. Conversely, ahimsa can also be critiqued for his highly individualized method of practice which does nothing to change systems and yet is one of the most important facets required for addressing slow violence. As Nixon states,

...although advocating for personal environmental responsibility is essential, to shrink solutions to the level of the private and the small is evasive, even if it does constructively enhance one's sense of agency. Planetary problems - and transnational, national, and regional ones - cannot simply be resolved by the aggregated actions of responsible individuals. Institutional actions (and institutional inaction) have profound impact on environmental outcomes, most blatantly in relation to climate change, which no collectivized ethical behavior can combat without backing from well-implemented transnational [and national] accords (2011, 39).

One of the challenges faced when translating ahimsa into a global environmental ethic is the problem of moving from individual-based rules of conduct to social ethics of community. Ahimsa can accurately be seen as too individualistic in practice to address issues involving violence over a collective of *jivas*. Nonetheless, its ability to advocate for self-restraint and carefulness in thought, word, and deed does create a more habitable space without meaning to. After all, society is a collection of “you’s” and “me’s”. We are bound to one another in our collective of person-to-person relationships. Ahimsa may seem too individualistic in theory, but in practice, one cannot but make an impact on the lives of others. As portrayed in the story of Yashodhara, liberation may be on our own terms, but we are never alone in existence. Our ethical values and practices have the potential to influence, inspire, and change people.

In closing, we reflect on Bhagvan Mahavira's words: “You are what you intend to hit, injure, insult, torment, persecute, torture, enslave or kill” (Singhvi 2002, 219). I would add that the opposite is also true and equally valid: You are that which you intend to protect, care for, praise, support, and liberate. When viewing oneself in every thought, word, and deed through the eyes of the other, the choice becomes clear that the fate of the world belongs both to ourselves and to each other. Karma then behaves like a mirror where every action taken in this realm of existence reflects back to each individual *jiva* in this life and future rebirths. Every victory over nature and one another can be seen as an

act of self-inflicted violence, a manifestation of *collective suicide* - a principle sin in Jainism. The opposite is also true. Jainism is clear that liberation is the aim and end of all *jivas*; but we can certainly care for and support one another along the way. Karma and ahimsa in Jain philosophy provide a method of understanding and addressing violence for the betterment of worldly conditions and spiritual progress of oneself and all.

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