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AUDREY TRUSCHKE

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# *Dangerous Debates: Jain responses to theological challenges at the Mughal court\**

AUDREY TRUSCHKE

*Department of Religious Studies, Stanford University, United States of America*  
*Email: [audrey.truschke@gmail.com](mailto:audrey.truschke@gmail.com)*

## **Abstract**

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Jain leaders faced a series of religious questions at the royal Mughal court. At the request of their imperial Muslim hosts, Jain representatives discussed aspects of both Islam and Jainism on separate occasions, including the veracity of Islam, whether Jains are monotheists, and the validity of Jain asceticism. The Mughals sometimes initiated these conversations of their own accord and at other times acted on the prompting of Brahmins, who had political and religious interests at stake in encouraging imperial clashes with Jain leaders. Jain authors recorded these exchanges in numerous Sanskrit texts, which generally remain unknown to Mughal historians and Sanskrit scholars alike. I examine the Jain accounts of these cross-cultural debates and expound their political, religious, and intellectual implications. These engagements showcase how the Mughals negotiated religious differences with diverse communities in their kingdom. Furthermore, the Sanskrit narratives of these dialogues outline complex theological visions of how Jain beliefs and practices could thrive within a potentially hazardous Islamicate imperial order. More broadly Jain and Mughal discussions provide rich insight into key developments in religious precepts and local identities in early modern India.

## **Introduction**

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Mughal elite engaged Jain spiritual leaders in a series of theological debates. Members of the two groups discussed aspects of both Islam and Jainism at different points, including the veracity of Islam, whether Jains are monotheists, and the validity of Jain asceticism. Persianate court

\* I thank John Cort and Hamsa Stainton for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. I also benefited from presenting this work at the University of Cambridge and at the American Academy of Religion Conference in autumn 2012. I avoid diacritics in the body of the article but retain them for technical terms and references.

histories mention nothing about these conversations, but Jain authors narrate the exchanges in detail in numerous Sanskrit texts. Mughal historians are generally unaware of these Sanskrit historical records, and Indologists more broadly have typically failed to recognize the far-reaching implications of Jain-Mughal interactions for the political, religious, and intellectual histories of early modern India.<sup>1</sup> These cross-cultural debates showcase how the Mughals negotiated religious differences with diverse communities in their empire. Furthermore, the Sanskrit narratives of these dialogues outline complex theological visions of how Jain beliefs and practices could thrive within a potentially hazardous Islamicate imperial order. Jain and Mughal debates provide rich insight into the complex dynamics of religious precepts and local identities in Mughal political contexts.

These theological disputes all unfolded within the royal Mughal court, which was frequented by Jain monks from western India in substantial numbers from the 1580s to the 1610s. Members of the Tapa Gaccha, a Shvetambara sect, enjoyed particularly extensive imperial connections and became integrated into the fabric of Mughal court life.<sup>2</sup> They served as tutors to the royal princes, companions to

<sup>1</sup> Several secondary sources summarize and investigate the various ways in which Jains and Mughals interacted, almost all authored by scholars of Jainism. See, for example, Mohanlal Dalichand Desai, 'Introduction', *Bhānuvandragāṇicārīta* (Ahmedabad-Calcutta: Sanchalaka-Singhi Jain Granthamala, 1941), pp. 1–75; Paul Dundas, 'Jain Perceptions of Islam in the Early Modern Period', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1999), pp. 35–46; Surendra Gopal, 'The Jain Community and Akbar' in Iqtidar Alam Khan (ed.), *Akbar and His Age* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), pp. 160–66; Shalin Jain, "'Interaction of the Lords": The Jain Community and the Mughal Royalty under Akbar', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 40, Nos. 3–4 (2012), pp. 33–57; R. Krishnamurthi, 'Jains at the Court of Akbar', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 23 (1944), pp. 137–43; Pushpa Prasad, 'Akbar and the Jains' in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Akbar and His India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 99–108.

<sup>2</sup> Other Jain communities also formed relations with the Mughals, although these ties were generally more limited than the extensive connections enjoyed by the Tapa Gaccha. Most notably, both ascetic and lay affiliates of the Kharatara Gaccha, another Shvetambara group, frequented the Mughal court. On the interactions of Akbar with the Kharatara monks Jinacandra and Jinasimha, see Lawrence A. Babb, *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 124–26; and Desai, 'Introduction', pp. 10–12. Minister Karmacandra, a prominent lay Kharatara, also served Akbar, and his imperial experiences are narrated in a Sanskrit work titled *Mantrikarmacandravamaśāvalīprabandha*. Jain merchants, such as Shantidas of Ahmedabad, forged commercial ties with the Mughals and financed state activities well into Shah Jahan's reign. Makrand Mehta, *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Historical Perspective with Special Reference to Shroffs of Gujarat: 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Delhi: Academic Foundation, 1991), pp. 91–109; Shalin Jain, 'Piety, Laity and Royalty: Jains

the king, and informants for Persian accounts of Sanskrit knowledge systems. Tapa Gaccha affiliates relished the opportunities these positions afforded them to access, and possibly influence, the ruler. They successfully solicited the Mughal crown for many concessions to their regional and religious interests, including tax cuts, bans on animal slaughter, and control of pilgrimage sites.<sup>3</sup> But at times such intimate cross-cultural ties also exposed Jains to politically fraught confrontations, especially when their religious sensibilities clashed with those of the imperial Muslim elite.<sup>4</sup>

Jains wrote about their interactions with the Mughals, including theological discussions, in numerous Sanskrit works that were composed between 1589 and 1653.<sup>5</sup> The majority of these texts were authored by Tapa Gaccha affiliates (the remainder were by

under the Mughals in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century', *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2013), pp. 77–89. M. S. Commissariat reproduces some of Shah Jahan's orders to Shantidas in 'Imperial Mughal Farmans in Gujarat', *Journal of the University of Bombay*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1940), pp. 1–56. Last, Digambara Jains were certainly present in many Mughal centres, such as Agra, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the extent of their imperial connections remains unclear. Further research is needed in this area.

<sup>3</sup>Jain sources describe these political concessions at length. Mughal materials, particularly extant imperial orders (*farmāns*), also confirm many of these events. See the *farmāns* collected and translated in Commissariat, 'Imperial Mughal Farmans in Gujarat', pp. 26–56; Desai, 'Introduction', Appendix 2, pp. 77–91; Puran Chand Nahar and Krishnachandra Ghosh, *An Epitome of Jainism, Being a Critical Study of Its Metaphysics, Ethics, and History and Culture in Relation to Modern Thought* (Calcutta: H. Daby, 1917), Appendix B; Muniraj Vidyavijayji, *A Monk and a Monarch*, Dolarrai R. Mankad (trans.) (Ujjain: Deepchandji Banthia, 1944), pp. 97–122. Ellison B. Findly lists Jahangir's *farmāns* relating to Jains in 'Jahāngīr's Vow of Non-Violence', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 107, No. 2 (1987), p. 253.

<sup>4</sup>Although it may seem slightly uneven to characterize these two communities according to religious (Jain) versus political (Mughal) categories, this accurately reflects the terms of their cross-cultural debates. Muslim religious leaders in Mughal India appear not to have been involved in the discussions, which were adjudicated by members of the imperial inner circle.

<sup>5</sup>I have identified six major Jain Sanskrit texts to date that address the Mughals in depth. I list them here in chronological order: *Jagadgurukāvya* of Padmasāgara' in Hargovinddas and Becardas, (eds), *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya* (Benares: Harakhchand Bhurabhai, 1911), dated 1589; Acharya Muni Jinavijaya (ed.), *Mantrikarmacandravaṃśāvalīprabandha* of Jayasoma with the commentary of Guṇavinaya (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1980), dated 1594; Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Sivadatta and Kashinath Pandurang Parab (eds), *Hīrasaubhāgya* of Devavimalagaṇi with his own gloss (Bombay: Tukaram Javaji, 1900), circa early seventeenth century; Mohanlal Dalichand Desai (ed.), *Bhānucandragāṇicarita* of Siddhicandra (Ahmedabad-Calcutta: Sanchalaka Singhi Jain Granthamala, 1941), circa early seventeenth century; *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya* of Hemavijaya with the commentary of Guṇavijaya (Mumbai: Shri Jinashasan Aradhana Trust, 1988), circa 1632; Bhikshu Jinavijaya

Kharatara Gaccha members), and all were directed at local, often strictly sectarian audiences.<sup>6</sup> While the debates themselves almost certainly took place in either a form of Old Hindi or Persian, these accounts are in Sanskrit. Moreover, Jains continued to produce these narratives decades after courtly relations with their religious leaders had ceased in the 1610s, and Sanskrit inscriptions and later treatises also refer to Jain-Mughal ties, in a more limited fashion.<sup>7</sup> Several Jain-authored Gujarati works also discuss events at the Mughal court and have yet to be researched in any detail.<sup>8</sup> This sustained attention suggests that stories of cross-cultural connections became an integrated part of the Tapa Gaccha's self-conceptualization and were important to repeatedly recount for the faithful (even in the absence of ongoing relations between Jain monks and the imperial elite). These Sanskrit narratives served multiple community interests for a group whose recent past was thoroughly intertwined with powerful Islamic rulers. Each author explores different ways of reformulating the Tapa Gaccha's literary and religious traditions to be salient within a Mughal-defined world.

Among the numerous challenges that Jain leaders faced from the Mughals, three encounters stand out as major moments of navigating theological diversity in an imperial context. First, in the 1580s Akbar's chief vizier, Abu'l Fazl, allegedly questioned Hiravijaya, the leader of the Tapa Gaccha, about the legitimacy of Islam. The Jain account of this event offers one of the few expositions of basic Islamic beliefs in Sanskrit and promotes Hiravijaya and the Tapa Gaccha tradition

(ed.), *Vijayadevamāhātmya* of Vallabha Pāṭhaka (Ahmedabad: K. P. Modi, 1928), dated 1653.

<sup>6</sup> Kharataras wrote the *Mantrikarmacandravamśāvalīprabandha* and the *Vijayadevamāhātmya* (even though the latter details the life of a Tapa Gaccha figure), and Tapa Gaccha authors produced the remaining four texts. Paul Dundas dispels the idea that the *Hīrasaubhāgya* (and, by extension, any Jain hagiography) was intended for consumption at the Mughal court. Paul Dundas, *History, Scripture and Controversy in a Medieval Jain Sect* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 60–61.

<sup>7</sup> On inscriptions, see the Tapa Gaccha Adishvara inscription printed in *Epigraphia Indica* (Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1891/92), Vol. 2, #12, pp. 50–59. Also see the Kharatara epigraphs dated to 1619 at Shatrunjaya: *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 2, #15, #17–20, and #23–24, pp. 60–64 and 67. For later texts, see Pandit Becharadas J. Doshi (ed.), *Devānandamahākāvya* of Meghavijaya (Ahmedabad-Calcutta: Sanchalaka Singhi Jain Granthamala, 1937), dated 1699; and A. P. Shah (ed.), *Digvijayamahākāvya* of Meghavijaya (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1945), circa 1710, pp. 30–31.

<sup>8</sup> Gujarati works of potential interest include: Ṛṣabhadās's *Hīravijayasūrirāsa*, Dayākuśala's *Lābhodayarāsa*, and Darśanavijaya's *Vijayatīlakasūrirāsa* (1622/23). Vidyavijayji draws on the *Hīravijayasūrirāsa* in his *A Monk and a Monarch*.

as uniquely able to answer the threat of Mughal-supported Islam. Second, in 1592 Akbar was convinced by Brahmans to accuse the Tapa Gaccha of atheism, which prompted a vigorous rebuttal from Vijayasena, a community leader and later Hiravijaya's successor. Two Sanskrit authors describe this episode in notably dissimilar versions that invoke variant perspectives within Jain theology, including different identifications of the Jain God. Moreover, they each situate Vijayasena's defence in particular historical contexts that highlight the cultural and intellectual values of narrating these debates for a Jain readership. Last, in the early seventeenth century a Jain monk known as Siddhicandra incurred Jahangir's wrath when he refused the king's order to take a wife. Siddhicandra personally attests to the ensuing argument, which raised significant doubts about whether ascetic vows are consonant with Jain philosophical principles. Together, these three instances speak to crucial questions regarding religious differences and identities, Mughal imperial dynamics, and Indian intellectual culture in early modernity.

Jain and Mughal debates provide detailed, grounded instances of how early moderns perceived religious affiliation in an Indo-Islamic context. In the last few decades, scholars have overwhelmingly focused on syncretic or hybrid interactions in pre-colonial India.<sup>9</sup> Many have questioned the assumptions inherent in the concept of syncretism and proposed translation or, in the case of Akbar's court, the still poorly understood Islamicate notion of 'peace for all' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*) as fruitful alternatives.<sup>10</sup> While this scholarship has deepened our understanding of how religious lines were often fluid, not all early moderns aimed to transcend their theological specificities, even when they recognized some shared ground.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, the Mughals and their Jain respondents attempted to work out the contrasts and similarities

<sup>9</sup> Alka Patel and Karen Leonard provide an overview of this trend and disputes concerning the most apt vocabulary in their introduction to Alka Patel and Karen Leonard (eds), *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 5–7.

<sup>10</sup> See Tony Stewart's important article, 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory', *History of Religions*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2001), pp. 260–87. For insightful work on *ṣulḥ-i kull*, see Rajeev Kinra, 'Handling Diversity with Absolute Civility: The Global Historical Legacy of Mughal *Ṣulḥ-i Kull*', *The Medieval History Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2013), pp. 251–95; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, 'Dimensions of *Ṣulḥ-i Kul* (Universal Peace) in Akbar's Reign and the *Ṣūfi* Theory of Perfect Man' in Khan (ed.), *Akbar and His Age*, pp. 3–22.

<sup>11</sup> Muzaffar Alam has criticized the dichotomy of peaceful or antagonistic as politically motivated on both accounts. Muzaffar Alam, 'Competition and

between their religious systems and the consequences of upholding various doctrinal convictions within an environment defined by royal authority.

In addition to elucidating how members of different communities related to one another within the Mughal Empire, these debates also furnish insight into the contours of religious affiliation in early modern India more generally. Scholars have largely abandoned the argument that Sanskrit thinkers lacked a concept of ‘religion’ simply because of the absence of a corresponding Sanskrit term. But the changing nature of religious identities in pre-colonial India still remains undertheorized. Jains who wrote about the Mughal court outline a complex vision of a specific and yet negotiable set of beliefs, practices, and political and social identities. This case-study also contributes a much-needed foundation to arguments that posit a break in how religious identities were formulated in South Asia before and after colonialism.

Moreover, Mughal interreligious discussions with Jains yield crucial clues regarding imperial dynamics. Most historians have ignored altogether the significant and varied roles of Jains and other non-Muslim Indian religious groups at the Mughal court, largely because Sanskrit and vernacular (rather than Persian) materials are the major sources for this social history. Moreover, when scholars describe religious debates in Akbar’s court, they often speak narrowly of the ‘*ibādathkhānah*, a house of religious discussions that lasted only a few years, and envision a free-flowing exchange of ideas that bears little resemblance to the politically fraught realities of the Akbari dispensation.<sup>12</sup> Mughal disputes with Jain leaders allow a more thorough investigation into how theological questions intersected, sometimes perilously, with political concerns. Here we move beyond an idealized view of Akbar-led religious inquiries that operated outside any imperial consequences and instead begin to parse the nuanced workings of Mughal authority in interactions with leaders of different communities. Jahangir also initiated religious disagreements with Jain

Co-existence: Indo-Islamic Interaction in Medieval North India’, *Itinerario*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1989), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> On the ‘*ibādathkhānah*’s limited life, at least as a house of religious debate, see Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, ‘Religious Disputations and Imperial Ideology: The Purpose and Location of Akbar’s *Ibadatkhana*’, *Studies in History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2008), pp. 202–3. The best account of this institution remains Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar’s Reign: With Special Reference to Abu’l Fazl (1556–1605)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975), pp. 104–40.

leaders. Jahangir's interest in cross-cultural conversations has come into greater prominence recently with the publication of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (Jahangir's Assemblies) and several astute analyses of this work.<sup>13</sup> Jain texts add further depth to our understanding of Jahangir's reign and Mughal modes of power that extended across the rules of multiple emperors.

Last, this set of exchanges captures a crucial moment in the intellectual history of early modern India. Over the past few decades, many scholars have filled in gaps in our knowledge of Indian critical thought 'on the eve of colonialism'. The story of Jains at the Mughal court builds upon the work of Sanskritists who have analysed previously neglected materials from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> But, unlike most earlier studies, here I focus on Jain authors rather than Brahmans. Jains have often been unjustly disregarded in accounts of India's intellectual past, and nowhere is this oversight more detrimental than for the early modern period. Jains wrote vociferously about their encounters with the Mughals, whereas Brahmans maintained a nearly complete narrative silence in Sanskrit on their imperial activities. Elsewhere I have investigated the possible meanings and implications of this omission of Brahmanical textual memory.<sup>15</sup> Here it suffices to emphasize that Jains provide a unique perspective on what it meant to stretch the boundaries of Sanskrit literature to incorporate historical encounters with the Mughals and Islamic thought. In these Sanskrit works, Jains comment on radical social and political changes associated with the Mughal political order.

Before analysing particular discussions and texts, a few comments are warranted on the historical validity of Jain Sanskrit sources. These materials are far more than mere eyewitness reports, and Jain authors considered aesthetic taste and theological appropriateness alongside the prerogative to truthfully represent the past. Individual writers offer little overt commentary regarding their literary priorities, but

<sup>13</sup> Particularly see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims in the court of Jahangir (1608–11)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2009), pp. 457–511; and Corinne Lefèvre, 'The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (1608–11): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 55, Nos. 2–3 (2012), pp. 255–86.

<sup>14</sup> Most notably, see the articles associated with the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems Project, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks/>, [accessed 31 October 2014].

<sup>15</sup> Audrey Truschke, 'Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court' (Columbia University PhD Thesis, 2012), pp. 108–80.



two points are worth mentioning. First, all three meetings considered below are confirmed by numerous historical sources, and the basic outline of the latter two discussions is also true beyond a reasonable doubt.<sup>16</sup> Second, these narratives are enriched rather than flawed by being a ‘view from somewhere’ that incorporates religious and aesthetic sensibilities.<sup>17</sup> Instead of restricting themselves to dry facts, Jain writers proffer a non-imperial perspective on court dynamics and Mughal hegemony. These viewpoints can begin to balance modern interpretations of the Mughal imperium that are often overly and unapologetically reliant on Persian-language chronicles.<sup>18</sup> But, more importantly, Jain sources invite reflection on not only the minutiae of history but also literary practices, community memory, and religious identities in pre-colonial India.

### Confronting Islam in Sanskrit

In 1582, Hiravijaya travelled to the Mughal court to meet with Emperor Akbar and remained in residence at the imperial capital in Fatehpur Sikri until 1585. Many Jain writers divulge various details of this extended visit.<sup>19</sup> But Devavimāla alone tells the story that

<sup>16</sup> On the validity of Islam, other Jain authors mention that, during his initial sojourn at court, Hiravijaya met with Abu'l Fazl (for example, *Bhānucandragāṇicārīta*, v. 1.111), although Devavimāla's version of their conversation is probably largely imagined. On Vijayasena's defence of Jain monotheism: in addition to the versions given by Hemavijaya and Siddhicandra, Vallabha Pathaka narrates this exchange in Chapter 6 of his *Vijayadevamāhātmya*, as does an inscription at Shatrunjaya (both are cited below). On Siddhicandra's adherence to asceticism, vernacular texts confirm the argument and exile (Desai, ‘Introduction’, p. 57, note 88), as do Kharatarā inscriptions and texts about interceding in the aftermath of this event. Mohammad Akram Lari Azad, *Religion and Politics in India During the Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Criterion Publications, 1990), p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> Corinne Lefèvre and Ines G. Županov, ‘Introduction: Cultural Dialogue in South Asia and Beyond: Narratives, Images and Community (Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 55, Nos. 2–3 (2012), p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> Orsini outlines some of the possibilities for considering early modern north India as a multilingual milieu. Francesca Orsini, ‘How to do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (2012), pp. 225–46.

<sup>19</sup> This initial visit is recorded in numerous Sanskrit texts, for example: *Jagadgurukāvya*, vv. 122–89; *Hirasaubhāgya*, Chapters 13–14; *Bhānucandragāṇicārīta*, vv. 1.78–128. The Adishvara inscription also relays this meeting, although in less detail: *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 2, pp. 52–53, vv. 14–24. Vidyavijayji draws on vernacular narratives of this first encounter in his *A Monk and a Monarch*.

Abu'l Fazl instigated a debate with the Tapa Gaccha leader about the merits of Islam versus Jainism. Their resulting conversation showcases a striking and unprecedented description of Muslim beliefs in the Sanskrit literary world. After hearing about Islam, Hiravijaya provided a forceful theological response and even purportedly swayed Abu'l Fazl towards Jain convictions. Devavimala uses this episode to bolster the larger project of his work to deify Hiravijaya, who is presented as exceptionally capable of upholding the Tapa Gaccha tradition within the Mughal Empire.

Devavimala idolizes Hiravijaya throughout his biography, titled *Hīrasaubhāgya* (Good Fortune of Hiravijaya). He composed the lengthy 17-chapter text, along with an autocommentary, shortly after Hiravijaya Suri's ritual death by starvation in 1596.<sup>20</sup> Paul Dundas has written at length about how Devavimala venerates Hiravijaya by likening the Tapa Gaccha leader to important Jain and Hindu figures and also lauding him as embodying the ideals of classical Indian kingship.<sup>21</sup> These combined methods produce the image of a Jain spiritual sovereign whose authority is formidably articulated in numerous Indic idioms. Alongside these more tradition-bound claims, Devavimala also devotes a few chapters to Hiravijaya's interactions with the Mughals and here investigates how to express the Tapa Gaccha's weight in the Indo-Islamic world.

Devavimala begins by giving Hiravijaya a strong opponent to defeat, namely Abu'l Fazl, who is depicted as a learned theologian. From the beginning, Devavimala frames the vizier as a religious scholar, describing Abu'l Fazl as 'seeing the far edge of the ocean of Islamic learning'.<sup>22</sup> In his commentary, Devavimala further specifies that Abu'l Fazl knows multiple Islamic scriptures including the Qur'an and Qur'anic exegesis.<sup>23</sup> After a brief interlude during which Akbar found himself distracted and asked Abu'l Fazl to meet with their guest, Devavimala again characterizes the vizier as 'learned in the secrets of

<sup>20</sup> The *Hīrasaubhāgya* is undated. For estimates, see Satya Vrat, *Glimpses of Jaina Sanskrit Mahākāvya* (Jaipur: Raj Publishing House, 2003), p. 92; and Dundas, *History, Scripture and Controversy*, p. 59. References to the Mughals span *sargas* 10–17, and *sargas* 13–14 contain the central story of Hiravijaya's first sojourn at Akbar's court.

<sup>22</sup> Dundas, *History, Scripture and Controversy*, pp. 58–72.

<sup>23</sup> *turuṣkaśāstrāmbudhipāradyśvā* (*Hīrasaubhāgya* v. 13.120).

<sup>23</sup> *saphārākūrānapramukhāṇi tānyevāmbudhir bahutvāt samudras...* (*Hīrasaubhāgya*, commentary on v. 13.120). The meaning of *saphārā* remains unclear (*taṣṣīr*, meaning Qur'anic exegesis?), but Devavimala clearly intends to refer to a set of Islamic religious texts here.

all *śāstras*' and glosses *śāstras* as 'Islamic scriptures beginning with the Qur'an'.<sup>24</sup>

Hiravijaya exceeded the vizier's accreditations from the start, however, which set the stage for a decisive Tapa Gaccha victory. The discussion began when Abu'l Fazl recognized the Tapa Gaccha leader as a wise discriminator 'regarding both Islamic and Jain creeds' and so approached the sage respectfully, 'like a student'.<sup>25</sup> Then, having gathered a crowd of people to act as an audience for the exchange, Abu'l Fazl asked Hiravijaya's opinion of Muslim convictions. At this point Devavimala breaks from traditional Sanskrit wisdom and includes Abu'l Fazl's exposition of Islam along with Hiravijaya's response. This passage is worth quoting at length for its astounding admission of Islam into Sanskrit discourse as a cogent system of belief. According to Devavimala, Abu'l Fazl said:

O Suri, this was laid out by the ancient prophets in our scriptures—all Muslims (*yavana*) who are deposited on earth as guests of the god of death will rise at the end of the earth and come before the court of the Supreme Lord called *khudā*, like they come to the court of an earthly king. He will cast good and bad qualities onto his own pure mind as if onto a mirror and bring about rightful judgement there, having refuted the false construction of mine versus another's. Having reflected, he will bestow the appropriate result of [the Muslims'] virtues and vices, like the fertile soil generates plentiful grain from different seeds. Some will be brought to heaven by him, just as boats are led to the edge of the ocean by a favourable wind. Then they will live pleurably, nearly overwhelmed by floods of suitable, amazing enjoyments. Others will be sent to hell by him due to sin. Like birds being crushed by hawks and pots being fired by potters, they will suffer great agonies at the mercies of hell's guards. O Suri, what is the validity of this Qur'anic speech (*kurānavākyaṃ*)? It is true like the speech of great-souled people, or is it false like a flower in the sky?<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *niḥśeṣaśāstropaniṣadyadhītī* (*Hīrasaubhāgya*, v. 13.130), glossed in the commentary as *niḥśeṣāṇāṃ sarveṣāṃ śāstrāṇāṃ kurānādiyavanāgamānāṃ upaniṣadi rahasye adhītam adhyayanam aśyāstīti*.

<sup>25</sup> *svīyatadīyaśāstre*; glossed in the commentary as *yavanajātisaṃbandhi* and *sūriśāsanasaṃbandhi*, respectively (*Hīrasaubhāgya*, v. 13.135).

<sup>26</sup> *Hīrasaubhāgya*, vv. 13.137–43; all translations are my own unless otherwise noted. See the translation of the same passage in Paul Dundas, 'Jain Perceptions of Islam', p. 38. This passage is also found in Devavimala's *Hīrasundaramahākāvya*, a shortened and probably earlier version of the *Hīrasaubhāgya*. Muni Ratnakirtivijaya (ed.), *Śrīhīrasundaramahākāvya* of Devavimala (Khambhat: Shri Jaina Granthapublishana Samiti, 1996, 2 volumes), vv. 13.136–42. On this text, see Dundas, *History, Scripture and Controversy*, p. 59.

Devavimāla's open exposition of Muslim beliefs contrasts sharply with the strong preference for eliding Islam in Sanskrit texts. Philosophers overwhelmingly refused to incorporate Islam into Sanskrit discourse as a tradition that could be considered alongside Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical thought. Sanskrit narratives frequently feature Muslim figures but refer to them using ethnic or social (rather than religious) categories.<sup>27</sup> Against this custom of unyielding rejection, Devavimāla gives Islam a substantial platform as a theological system within a Sanskrit poem. He further refers to a body of Islamic texts, above all the Qur'an, and employs several Perso-Islamic terms that are transliterated into Sanskrit and defined in the commentary.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Devavimāla presents Islam as a recognizable religious tradition with its own vocabulary and a solid textual basis.

In his commentary, Devavimāla softens the brazen innovation of this passage by linking Islamic ideas with traditional Sanskrit thought. For example, he explains why Allah will refute 'the false construction of mine versus another's' by citing a famous Sanskrit sentiment that the entire world is a single family: 'only narrow-minded people make the distinction of mine versus another's. For the right-minded, the whole world is a family.'<sup>29</sup> Variants of this verse appear in many texts, and Devavimāla quotes a version found in the *Hitopadeśa* (Friendly Advice), a ubiquitous book of instructive fables.<sup>30</sup> Devavimāla also connects the description of hell's vicious guards with a Prakrit verse from Dharmadāsa's *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* (Ornament of the Clever-mouthed), a popular work of riddles dating to the mid eleventh century or earlier.<sup>31</sup> Through such references, he attempts to render Islam explicable within the intellectual universe of Sanskrit, and suggests some measure of equivalence between Muslim and traditional Indian

<sup>27</sup> Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims (Eighth to Fourteenth Century)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998), pp. 28–43.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, *paigambar* (*paighāmbar*) for prophet, *doyaki* (*dūzakh*) for hell, and *bhīsti* (*bīhīsti*) for heaven.

<sup>29</sup> *ayaṃ nijah paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām / udāracaritānām tu vasudhāiva kuṭumbakam* (*Hīrasaubhāgya*, commentary on v. 13.139).

<sup>30</sup> Hatcher discusses the provenance of this verse and its modern resonances. Brian A. Hatcher, "The Cosmos is One Family" (*vasudhāiva kuṭumbakam*): Problematic Mantra of Hindu Humanism', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1994), pp. 149–62.

<sup>31</sup> *Hīrasaubhāgya*, commentary on v. 13.142. V. Raghavan establishes the date for the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* based on its citations in Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*. V. Raghavan, 'The Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana of Dharmadāsa' in H. L. Hariyappa and M. M. Patkar (eds), *Professor P. K. Gode Commemoration Volume* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1960).

ideas. Despite his attempts to cushion the newness of this dialogue, however, Devavimāla's ingenuity in detailing Islamic beliefs at all is arresting. Furthermore, Hiravijaya's retort indicates a wide gulf of understanding between Islamic and Jain world-views.

According to Devavimāla, Hiravijaya deposed Abu'l Fazl's Islamic convictions by methodically questioning the logic of a creator God, heaven, hell, and judgement day. In lieu of Allah, Hiravijaya argued for the supremacy of the Jain doctrine of action (*karma*) as governing all things:

'He—who is free of dirt like a shell, devoid of defects like the sun, made of flames like fire, and without a body like the god of love—is the Supreme Lord. In what form does he attend court like a living being that adopts many appearances in his wanderings through existence? There he sets a person on the path to heaven or hell for what reason? A previous action, once ripened, has the power to grant both joys and sorrows. Thus, let action (*karma*) alone be recognized as the creator of the world, since otherwise [God] has no purpose.' When the lord of ascetics [Hiravijaya] fell silent after speaking, Shaykh [Abu'l Fazl] replied: 'That book [commentary: Qur'an] is recognized as false just as inconsistency is recognized in the speech of a garrulous, vile person.' The Lord [Hiravijaya] spoke again: 'If the creator first makes this world and then later destroys it as if he were fire, he would have unparalleled distress. There is no creator or destroyer of the world whose variety is brought into being by its own karma. Therefore, the existence of a creator, like the birth of a son to a barren woman, appears false to me.'<sup>32</sup>

Throughout his reply, Hiravijaya refuted Abu'l Fazl point by point, but he relied squarely on established Jain thinking. Jains had long denied any God or gods the role of being creators and instead contended that individuals have control over their own fate within the world. They frequently promoted this view against Brahmanical schools of thought that identified a particular God as the maker of reality.<sup>33</sup> Even when Abu'l Fazl interrupted to proclaim that this argument falsified the Qur'an, Hiravijaya did not adapt his views for an Islamic audience. Instead he continued to articulate Jain thinking on action (*karma*) as it had been elaborated for centuries. As we will see, later writers, such as Hemavijaya, sometimes present Tapa Gaccha representatives as

<sup>32</sup> *Hīrasaubhāgya*, vv. 13.145–50 (also see *Hīrasundaramahākāvya*, vv. 13.144–49).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002, second edition), p. 90. Also see Guṇaratna's elaborate arguments in Luigi Suali (ed.), *Śaddarśanasamuccaya* of Haribhadra with *Tarkarahasyaṭīpikā* Commentary of Guṇaratna (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1905), pp. 112–36, vv. 45–46. For a summary of Jain arguments against the concept of a creator god, see Nagendra Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Jainism*, Vol. 4 (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2001), pp. 52–107.

answering religious questions from the Mughals in creative ways that allowed for correspondences with Islamic sensibilities. But Devavimāla outlines a view more exclusively grounded in Jain theological discourse and even cites religious treatises, such as the *Kalpasūtra*, in his commentary.<sup>34</sup> In closing, Devavimāla declares that through his words Hiravijaya placed dharma, whose basis is compassion (*dayā*), within the heart of Abu'l Fazl.<sup>35</sup>

Whether this exchange actually happened remains dubious, and Abu'l Fazl's alleged conversion to Jainism is certainly a rhetorical flourish rather than a historical claim. But this narrative nonetheless presents three major insights concerning the implications of religious diversity at the Mughal court. First, in this anecdote, Devavimāla establishes Jainism and Islam as comparable, although highly unequal, theological systems. As I mention above, Devavimāla departs drastically from his predecessors and contemporaries in allowing Islam to penetrate the boundaries of Sanskrit literature at all, much less as an alternative to Jain ways of understanding the world. Furthermore, he deploys Abu'l Fazl, a prominent political figure and a leading intellectual of his day, as the mouthpiece for Muslim beliefs. He even permits Islam a fairly full hearing, equivalent in length to Hiravijaya's winning rebuttal. Here Devavimāla invokes theology as a primary mode of expressing cultural difference and characterizes Jain and Mughal relations in terms of their incompatible religious doctrines.

Second, Devavimāla uses this theological clash between Hiravijaya and Abu'l Fazl to advance a forceful argument that the Tapa Gaccha is a vibrant, competitive tradition within the Mughal imperium, a de facto Islamic space. In this sense, the Jain victory appears all the more potent for the authority and substance allocated to Islam and its prominent spokesman. Crucially, Devavimāla argues that Hiravijaya could counter Islam because of the Tapa Gaccha's claims to theological certainty. He also promotes the strength of Jainism vis-à-vis the Mughals in other ways throughout his text. For example, immediately following this episode, Devavimāla narrates how Hiravijaya taught a rather receptive Akbar about Jain dharma. Devavimāla goes into more detail regarding Jain beliefs in this exchange and also compares

<sup>34</sup> *Hīrasaubhāgya*, commentary on v. 13.145.

<sup>35</sup> *Hīrasaubhāgya*, v. 13.151 and commentary. For a full translation of the end of this passage, see Dundas, 'Jain Perceptions of Islam', p. 39.

this meeting to royal connections forged by earlier Jain leaders.<sup>36</sup> Other writers in both the Tapa Gaccha and the rival Kharatara Gaccha frequently offer similar stories about Jain teachers who allegedly ‘enlightened’ Akbar. This sort of interaction would have seemed familiar to early modern Jain readers as a laudable case where a pious monk leads a king to proper religious practice. But Hiravijaya’s discussion with Abu’l Fazl highlights more pointedly how Jain perspectives were dynamic within the changing religious milieu of Mughal India and could even dominate politically supported Islam.

Last, Devavimala’s description of Muslim beliefs constitutes an important break with the Sanskrit trend of denying Islam the status of a religious or philosophical system. Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Brahmanical philosophers overwhelmingly did not recognize Islam.<sup>37</sup> By the mid eighteenth century exceptions began to surface, but they are rather limited. For instance, one author briefly denounced Islam in a Sanskrit treatise, but he switched to Rajasthani for this section of his work.<sup>38</sup> Andrew Nicholson has suggested that some early modern criticisms directed against Buddhists and Jains are vague enough to have been interpreted by astute readers as applicable to Muslims as well.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, Devavimala seems to stand apart in providing a Sanskrit exposition of Islamic theology within a specific historical context. This bold innovation showcases the elasticity of the early modern Sanskrit tradition and the contested boundaries of its intellectual domain.

### Divergent proofs for Jain monotheism at Akbar’s court

Jain intellectuals record multiple occasions when Akbar called upon Hiravijaya and his successor, Vijayasena, to explain the nature of ‘God’ within Tapa Gaccha theology. These discussions were sometimes

<sup>36</sup> Phyllis Granoff, ‘Authority and Innovation: A Study of the Use of Similes in the Biography of Hiravijaya to Provide Sanction for the Monk at Court’, *Jinamanjari*, Vol. 1 (1990), pp. 53–55. John E. Cort, ‘Who is a King? Jain Narratives of Kingship in Medieval Western India’ in John E. Cort (ed.), *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 105–6.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Madhusūdana’s *Prasthānabheda*. Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> Dundas, ‘Jain Perceptions of Islam’, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 196.

benign but became confrontational when the Mughals doubted whether Jains were monotheists. Akbar and Jahangir tolerated different religious sensibilities at the royal court but perceived atheism as beyond the pale of acceptability.<sup>40</sup> In order to remain welcome members of the emperor's inner circle, Jain leaders necessarily proclaimed themselves to be monotheists before the Mughal assembly. Moreover, Jains developed highly divergent records of such discussions in Sanskrit for circulation within their communities. These debates and their narrativizations reveal how Jains navigated the treacherous boundaries of religious distinctions. These exchanges also highlight how Jains reformulated certain aspects of their own tradition in order to operate within a Mughal-defined world.

One exemplary case is the accusation of atheism lobbied against the Tapa Gaccha at the imperial court in the early 1590s. Vijayasena, who was next in line for leadership of the group, responded to Mughal horror at the prospect that Jains deny the existence of God. The two earliest chroniclers of this exchange, Hemavijaya and Siddhicandra, invoke variant perspectives within Jain philosophy to refute the charge of atheism, including different identifications of the Jain God. Moreover, they each situate Vijayasena's defence in particular historical contexts that highlight, respectively, the political and intellectual stakes of the debate. Taken together, these two writers show erudition and flexibility to be great strengths of the Jain tradition that allowed its followers to flourish in Mughal environs and perhaps even enabled them to literize their experiences.

Hemavijaya and Siddhicandra both wrote in the 1620s–1630s and include Vijayasena's testimony to Jain monotheism in larger hagiographies.<sup>41</sup> They begin this episode with the same frame story where Vijayasena impressed the Mughal assembly with his intellectual skills. The Jains and Akbar mutually rejoiced in their increasingly close relations, much to the chagrin of certain Brahmans and Rajputs at court who became jealous.<sup>42</sup> At this point Siddhicandra and

<sup>40</sup> See Mughal criticisms of atheism in H. Blochmann (ed.), *Ā'in-i Akbarī* of Abū al-Fazl ibn Mubārak (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1867–77, 2 volumes), Vol. 2, pp. 113–14.

<sup>41</sup> Siddhicandra's *Bhānucandraganīcarita* is undated but ends in the mid 1610s. Hemavijaya wrote 16 chapters of his 21-chapter work in the early seventeenth century, and Guṇavijaya completed the remaining five chapters in addition to a full commentary in 1632 (introduction to *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, pp. 2–3).

<sup>42</sup> Rajputs were often present at the Mughal court, and Persianate court histories confirm the frequent attendance of Brahmans as well. W. N. Lees and A. Ali (eds),



Hemavijaya diverge in their accounts and offer differing attestations of both the Mughal charge and Vijayasena's answer. Hemavijaya emphasizes the dispute's immediate political consequences, whereas Siddhicandra underscores its significance in traditional Indian intellectual discourse.

According to Hemavijaya, the central issue at stake was whether Akbar was convinced that the Jains believed in a monotheistic God. Trouble began when, upon seeing the Tapa Gaccha rise in Akbar's esteem, a nameless Brahman articulated a rather detailed case against the sect that resonated with basic Islamic suppositions. He exclaimed:

Those idiot Jains do not believe that there is a pure one, without a physical form, changeless, sinless, emancipated from rebirth, free of emotional agitations, passionless, independent, the slayer of all sins, and the maker of all happiness, namely God (*paramēśvara*). The path of those fools who do not believe God is the source of the world is always in vain like a fixed point without coordinates. Therefore, O Sun of the Courts of Shahs, the sight of those people is not good for kings like you, any more than the sight of menstruating women.<sup>43</sup>

As intended, the Brahman's words infuriated Akbar who put a more basic query to Vijayasena: "These great-souled cheats of all mankind with hoards of worldly practices certainly do not believe in God (*paramēśvara*)"—O Guru, Let your words banish this doubt from my mind just as a cloth removes oil from water.<sup>44</sup> In his reformulation of the Brahman's criticism, Akbar omitted many specific charges, most conspicuously the issue of a creator God, and asked more generally about Jain opinions regarding a supreme deity. This shift allowed Vijayasena to champion Jains as monotheists without disingenuously assenting to a creator.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, this reduced charge removed the encounter from the history of debates with Brahman opponents in favour of exploring a possible dissonance between Islamic and Jain world-views.

*Muntakhab al-Tavārikh* of 'Abd al-Qādir Badā'ūnī (Calcutta: College Press, 1865), Vol. 2, pp. 256–57.

<sup>43</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, vv. 12.142–45; *darśana*, here translated as 'sight', is likely a *śleṣa* (double entendre) also meaning Jain philosophy.

<sup>44</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, vv. 12.148–49.

<sup>45</sup> For example, see Haribhadra's arguments against a creator God in several Brahmanical schools of thought in his *Śāstravārtāsamuccaya*. Frank Van Den Bossche, 'God, the Soul, and the Creatix: Haribhadra Sūri on Nyāya and Sāṃkhya', *International Journal of Jaina Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (2010), pp. 1–49.

With the stage set for possible heresy, which could result in the disastrous expulsion of the Jains from court, Vijayasena defended his imperial alliance. Hemavijaya records the response in 61 verses as the Jain leader weaved eloquent descriptions of God with more pointed statements about Jain precepts. In the middle of his speech, Vijayasena offered his most direct answer to the king's challenge:

The Shaivas worship him as 'Shiva' and the Vedantins as 'Brahma', The Buddhists who are sharp in logic worship him as 'Buddha' and the Mimamsakas as 'Karma'. Those who ascribes to the Jain scriptures worship him as 'Arhat', and the Naiyayikas as 'Creator'. May that Hari, the Lord of the Three Worlds, give you whatever you desire.<sup>46</sup>

Thus the Jain God is Arhat, also known as Jina, and is comparable to a range of deities in other Indian systems. Jain thinkers had often held that a similar expression of the ultimate commensurability between gods was found in texts such as the *Bhaktāmarastotra*, which they incidentally claim to have recited before Akbar and Jahangir.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Jain philosophical compendiums had long followed a similar approach, identifying a specific deity (*deva* or *devatā*) for each tradition.<sup>48</sup> Hemavijaya clearly found the Jain penchant for compiling and comparing theistic ideas useful in articulating Vijayasena's response. However, these compendiums often defined theist (*āstika*) as an ethical rather than a doctrinal category that might be more aptly described as 'non-materialist'.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, Hemavijaya depicts

<sup>46</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, v. 12.178.

<sup>47</sup> On the interpretation of the *Bhaktāmarastotra*, see John. E. Cort, 'Jain Questions and Answers: Who Is God and How is He Worshiped?' in Donald S. Lopez (ed.), *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 599–600. On the recitation of the *Bhaktāmarastotra* at the imperial court, see *Bhānucandragāṇīcarita*, v. 2.156. This episode takes place during a ceremony to reverse a curse on Akbar's infant granddaughter (Truschke, 'Cosmopolitan Encounters', pp. 148–49).

<sup>48</sup> See *Ṣaddarśanasamuccaya* of Haribhadra, vv. 45–46 (the Jain *devatā* is *jīnendra*), and 'Ṣaddarśananirṇaya of Merutuṅga' in Nagin J. Shah (ed.), *Jainadārśanikapraṅganaṅgraha* (Ahmedabad: LD Institute of Indology, 1973), p. 7 (the Jain *deva* is *jina*). On Haribhadra's use of the term *devatā* here, see Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, pp. 157–58. On Haribhadra's work more generally, see Olle Qvarnström, 'Haribhadra and the Beginnings of Doxography' in N. K. Wagle and Olle Qvarnström (eds), *Approaches to Jaina Studies: Philosophy, Logic, Rituals and Symbols* (Toronto: Center for South Asian Studies, 1999), pp. 169–210.

<sup>49</sup> Nicholson notes that Mañibhadra, a commentator on Haribhadra's *Ṣaddarśanasamuccaya*, defines *āstika* as those who affirm 'the existence of another world (*paraloka*), transmigration (*gati*), virtue (*puṇya*), and vice (*pāpa*)' (Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 155). On *nāstika-āstika* as an ethical distinction, see Nicholson, *Unifying*

Vijayasena as making a far stronger claim than many of his intellectual predecessors whom the Jains qualified as monotheists according to Islamic standards.

Hemavijaya also judged the argument of comparability inadequate on its own merits and relays that Vijayasena punctuated his statement with a wish for Akbar's well-being that invokes a name of Vishnu (Hari). Vishnu was an appropriate God to call upon for royal blessings and would have been more familiar than other Indian gods to the Mughal elite.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, in having Vijayasena directly address the emperor, Hemavijaya reminds his readers of the Mughal king's centrality in this affair and indicates that Akbar alone will determine the Jains' fate.<sup>51</sup>

In Hemavijaya's telling, Vijayasena devoted the other 60 verses of his reply to elaborating the intricate Jain imagery surrounding Arhat, a two-fold deity. Vijayasena spent the first half of his speech defining a formless, eternal God 'whose essence is knowledge and whose nature is inconceivable'.<sup>52</sup> His descriptions often refuted the specific Brahmanical objections that the Jains do not consent to a God who is pure, lacking a physical form, and so forth. He also drew upon a long Jain tradition of emphasizing God's inactivity in the world.<sup>53</sup> Vijayasena proclaimed in the closing line of his speech: 'We always say that in this aspect God has no beginning, no birth, is free of a soul that links him to this world, is made of knowledge, and is without equal.'<sup>54</sup> In this view, Arhat is suitably vague and lofty as to be palatable to Islamic sensibilities, which often emphasize the all-powerful and unqualified nature of God. In other circumstances, the Mughals also pressured Brahmans to admit a higher power devoid of

*Hinduism*, p. 175. For Haribhadra's description of the Lokāyatas, the one school he identifies as *nāstika* (atheist or materialist), see *Śaddarśanasamuccaya*, vv. 80–87.

<sup>50</sup> Akbar's court had ties with Vaishnava groups dating back to the 1560s and issued land grants to Chaitanya communities. Tarapada Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, 'Akbar and the Temples of Mathura and Its Environs', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 48 (1987), pp. 235–36.

<sup>51</sup> Compare to a similar approach used by the Kharatara writer Samayasundara in his *Artharatnāvalī* (The String of Jewels of Meaning) where he interprets a single sentence to have many meanings, the final of which praises Akbar. 'Artharatnāvalī (also called *Aṣṭalakṣārthī*) of Samayasundara' in Hiralal Rasikdas Kapadia (ed.), *Anekārtharatnāvalī* (Bombay: Jivanchand Sakerchand Javeri, 1933), pp. 65–66.

<sup>52</sup> *Vijayaprasāstimahākāvya*, v. 12.1.74a.

<sup>53</sup> Cort, 'Who is a King?', p. 102.

<sup>54</sup> *Vijayaprasāstimahākāvya*, v. 12.211.

form and attributes.<sup>55</sup> Yet such syncretic possibilities do not preclude the second half of Vijayasena's analysis, which is more specifically situated within Jain thought.

Over 31 verses, Vijayasena portrayed Arhat as one of the Jain ford-makers (*tīrthāṅkara*) who descended to earth to spread the Jain teaching. Vijayasena focused on Arhat's first sermon as an enlightened individual, which took place in a divine assembly hall (*samavasaraṇa*) and is much celebrated in Jain literature and art.<sup>56</sup> His imagery follows traditional Jain ideals to the letter as gods, men, and animals peacefully gathered to hear the Jina's teachings.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Gunavijaya added a commentary to the *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya* that brings out further nuances of this scene, such as identifying the 11 marks that show Arhat had overcome causality.<sup>58</sup> It is quite plausible that Vijayasena articulated this detailed description before the Mughal court. Abu'l Fazl crafted an extensive section on Jainism in his *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (Akbar's Institutes), part of a major court history, and therein repeats some of these characteristics, such as Arhat's fragrant breath, white flesh and blood, and lack of sweat.<sup>59</sup> But the details of Arhat on earth would hardly have helped Vijayasena's case that the Jain God is comparable to Allah. Here Hemavijaya's retelling seems designed to assure a Jain audience that admitting some parallels with Islam did not infringe on their distinct theological precepts. In this way, Hemavijaya demonstrates the fitness of the Tapa Gaccha for the current political climate by balancing its flexibility of religious formulations with specific convictions.

At the end of Vijayasena's elaborate defence, Hemavijaya returns to the political peril of this debate and narrates the return of the Tapa Gaccha to a place of pride in Akbar's estimation. First, he proclaims that the emperor's doubts were fully allayed.<sup>60</sup> As for the Brahmins,

<sup>55</sup> Muhammad Hashim (ed.), *Jahāngīrnāmah* (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, vv. 12.180–210. Folkert traces the earliest portrayal of the *samavasaraṇa* to the *Aupapātika*. Kendall W. Folkert, *Scripture and Community: Collected Essays on the Jains*, John E. Cort (ed.) (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 150–51.

<sup>57</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, vv. 12.186–87. Compare to the imagery in the *Āvaśyakaniryukti* (cited in Dundas, *The Jains*, p. 35).

<sup>58</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, commentary on vv. 12.185–86. Also see *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, v. 12.190.

<sup>59</sup> Compare *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, vv. 12.182–83, and Blochmann (ed.), *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, Vol. 2, p. 108. Abu'l Fazl also notes Arhat's first aspect as 'the supreme lord without qualities' (*nirguṇa parameśvara*) (Blochmann (ed.), *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, Vol. 2, p. 99).

<sup>60</sup> *Vijayaprasastimahākāvya*, v. 12.212.

‘when the Brahmans were defeated by the Suri, they became so emasculated it is amazing the town people did not lust after them as if they were women’.<sup>61</sup> The Jains, on the other hand, were highly praised by the Mughal king, and their fame grew immeasurably as Vijayasena exited the court in triumph to return to a renunciant way of life. Hemavijaya marvels at how Vijayasena shone like the sun and commends his wisdom in this exchange, which resulted in increased political clout for the Tapa Gaccha.<sup>62</sup> For Hemavijaya, Mughal power as embodied in the emperor defined both the accusation of atheism and the benefits of overcoming this suspicion. Jain leaders were able to respond to Islamic concerns without compromising their theology precisely because their tradition understood God as possessing multiple aspects.

Siddhicandra relates a rather different version of these events that is far more grounded in traditional Indian philosophical disputes. He changes the audience for the exchange, the course of Vijayasena’s argument, and the Jain God. Even more than Hemavijaya, Siddhicandra reformulates this episode for a Jain readership that is edified by reviewing complex doctrinal points. For Siddhicandra, Vijayasena’s defence of Jain monotheism was an opportunity to engage in longstanding disagreements with Brahmanical schools of thought, and the Mughal court was primarily a stage for the exchange.

Siddhicandra opens with an objection that is a mix of Brahmanical and Mughal concerns. He places the initial accusation in the voice of Ramdas Kachhwaha, a Rajput in the service of the Mughals, who said to Akbar: ‘These [Jains] are outside of the Vedas, do not worship God (*paramātmā*), and never do obeisance before the king.’<sup>63</sup> Here Ramdas surrounded the central charge of atheism with two other affronts that indicate the dual contexts of this debate. The last offence (refusal to bow) is not necessarily theological, but it pointedly underscores that Jains risked losing Akbar’s approval if they did not meet imperial expectations. Ramdas frequently advanced Vaishnava interests at the

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, v. 12.216.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, v. 12.220.

<sup>63</sup> *Bhānucandragāṇicārīta*, v. 4.20; the full debate is vv. 4.19–47. Ramdas Kachhwaha is here called Ramadasa Maharaja. For more details on his relationship to the Mughal court, see Desai, ‘Introduction’, p. 39, note 54; and Maulavi Abdur Rahim and Maulavi Mirza Ashraf (eds), *Ma’āsir al-Umarā* of Shāhnavāz Khān (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1888–91, 3 volumes), Vol. 2, pp. 155–57. Ramdas appears again in the *Bhānucandragāṇicārīta* as serving Jahangir (*Bhānucandragāṇicārīta*, v. 4.218).

royal court and so it seems reasonable that he sought to displace the Jains from Mughal favour.<sup>64</sup> But the mention of the Vedas is more enigmatic.

Siddhicandra likely uses the phrase ‘outside of the Vedas’ (*vedabāhya*) here in a deliberately ambivalent sense. In the context of the Mughal court, he probably intended ‘Veda’ in a broad sense of acceptable scriptures so that ‘outside of the Veda’ meant something like ‘separate from people of the book’.<sup>65</sup> Similar uses of ‘Veda’ are known from contemporary vernacular works.<sup>66</sup> Akbar included Hindus within the protected category of monotheistic ‘people of the book’ (*ahl-i kitāb*) and would have been concerned about whether Jains also qualified. But Jain readers would have recognized the category of *vedabāhya* from philosophical and legal discourses, where it indicated groups that rejected the Vedas and was frequently applied to Jains, Buddhists, Pashupatas, et cetera.<sup>67</sup> In the early modern period, this phrase was still in active use in disputes between religious communities.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in employing this expression, Siddhicandra signals the importance of the impending exchange within Indian philosophical contests. Writing about this episode several decades later in 1652/3, Vallabha Pathaka similarly presents the issue in terms of Jain-Brahmanical differences and portrays Akbar asking Vijayasena, ‘Why do you not believe in Rama and mother Ganga?’<sup>69</sup> Siddhicandra places the conversation in

<sup>64</sup> Ramdas Kachhwaha was involved with procuring tax-free lands for various Vaishnava temples. Kumkum Chatterjee, ‘Cultural Flows and Cosmopolitanism in Mughal India: The Bishnupur Kingdom’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2009), p. 155. Mukherjee and Habib note that Ramdas Kachhwaha is mentioned in several *farmāns* (Mukherjee and Habib, ‘Akbar and the Temples of Mathura’, pp. 240–41).

<sup>65</sup> I am grateful to Daniele Cuneo for this suggestion. Note that Siddhicandra avoids Perso-Arabic vocabulary throughout his *Bhānucandraṅgarīta*. Thus, it is unsurprising that he declined to employ a less ambiguous phrase here, such as *ahl-i kitāb*.

<sup>66</sup> For example, for such uses in a Tamil text, see Vasudha Narayanan, ‘Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil Cirappuranam’ in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 80–81.

<sup>67</sup> I am grateful to Don Davis for this point.

<sup>68</sup> For example, see the use of *vedabāhya* by Madhusūdana in the late sixteenth century. Jürgen Hanneder, ‘A Conservative Approach to Sanskrit Śāstras: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s “Prasthānabheda”’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (1999), pp. 576 and 579. Also see the use of *vedabāhya* by Dhunḍirāja in the early eighteenth century. Madhav Deshpande, *Sanskrit and Prakrit: Sociolinguistic Issues* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), pp. 48–49.

<sup>69</sup> *Vijayadevamāhātmya*, v. 6.28a.

a more learned context than Vallabha Pathaka, however, which he also indicates through the set of people involved in the discussion.

According to Siddhicandra, Akbar put the Rajput's accusation to Vijayasena, who denied everything. Then Bhattacarya, a Brahmanical (likely Shaivite) leader, contended, 'It may be assented by them verbally, but nothing of the kind is found in their scriptures (*śāstra*).'<sup>70</sup> At this point, Akbar asked his vizier, Abu'l Fazl, to settle the disagreement and retreated from the scene. Siddhicandra repeatedly presents Abu'l Fazl as a paragon of Sanskrit learning in his *Bhānucandraṅṅicarita*. When he first introduces the vizier in the text, Siddhicandra marvels:

The wisdom [of Shaykh Abu'l Fazl] extended to all the *śāstras*, including Jainism, Mimamsa, Buddhism, Sankhya, Vaisheshika, Carvaka, Jaiminiya, literature (*kāvya*), yoga, Vedanta, lexicography, music, drama, aesthetic tropes, mythology (*purāṇa*), metrical works, the science of omens, astrology, mathematics, physiognomy, political science, erotics, veterinary sciences, and guardianship. In terms of writing (*vāṅmaya*), there is nothing that he has not seen or heard.<sup>71</sup>

Elsewhere Siddhicandra notes that his teacher, Bhanucandra, tutored Abu'l Fazl in Sanskrit philosophy using the compendium *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* (Collection of the Six Schools).<sup>72</sup> In the current situation, Abu'l Fazl exercised his erudition in the entirety of Sanskrit learning to facilitate a consolidated tour of old Jain-Brahman debates that had been worked out over many centuries.

Siddhicandra's cryptic narrative of the exchange between Bhattacarya and Vijayasena is difficult to follow and assumes familiarity with frequently rehearsed arguments. But the core question revolved around whether there is a creator God, an issue that was dropped at the beginning of the discussion in Hemavijaya's version. Vijayasena used many practiced Jain arguments, and several of his contentions also correspond closely with those proffered by Kumarila in his *Ślokavārttika*.<sup>73</sup> At the end of their verbal spar,

<sup>70</sup> *Bhānucandraṅṅicarita*, v. 4.23b.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 1.68–71.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 2.58–60. It is unclear whether Siddhicandra intends to refer to Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* or Rājaśekhara's later work of the same name. In any case, the two share certain portions of text (Folkert, *Scripture and Community*, pp. 359–60).

<sup>73</sup> For example, compare the argument that a creator must have a body. *Bhānucandraṅṅicarita*, v. 4.32, and Swami Dvarikadasa Sastri (ed.), *Ślokavārttika* of Kumārīlabhaṭṭa with the *Nyāyaratnākara* commentary of Pārthasārathi Miśra

Vijayasena summarized the Tapa Gaccha position that any creator would be reliant on others and thus by definition not God: 'if one who was dependent on action (karma) created, then he would not be independent and [instead] would be just like us. And given that all sorts of things are born from action (karma), then what need do we have of Vishnu?'<sup>74</sup> Thus, karma is God for the Jains in the sense of accounting for the cycle of cause and effect in the world, and all individuals qualify for the lesser status of creators because they initiate actions.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Vijayasena contended in closing that it is ridiculous to require belief in a creator God in order to be considered theists:

Given this line of reasoning, because of not assenting to the state of being a creator in respect to man but in respect to natural matter that is insentient, how are the Sankhyas believers in God? And saying that 'this world arose unprecedented, born from a sacrifice recorded in the Vedas', how are the Vaisheshikas believers in God? And believing that 'this world is an illusion, without God as a creator', how are the Vedantins believers in God?<sup>76</sup>

Thus, if Bhattacharya would deny that karma qualifies the Jains as theists, then he must also invalidate a variety of other Indian schools of thought. Siddhicandra celebrates that Vijayasena rendered the Brahmans speechless with this 'powerful ocean of reasoning'.<sup>77</sup> Such logic would not appear to be particularly convincing to someone who ascribed to an Islamic-based conception of Almighty Allah. But here we are far from an Islamic Mughal court and deeply engulfed in the world of Sanskrit philosophy. Crucially, Siddhicandra ends the episode with Abu'l Fazl proclaiming that the Jains 'spoke in accordance with their own teachings'.<sup>78</sup> Here Siddhicandra seems to forget about discrediting the accusation of atheism. Instead he names consistency within Jainism's own philosophical system as the standard of victory

(Varanasi: Tara Publications, 1978), p. 462, vv. 47–48. Also compare the contention that God could not create for the sake of amusement (*krīḍā*) (*Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, v. 4.43, and *Ślokaṅvārttika*, p. 463, v. 56).

<sup>74</sup> *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, v. 4.35. Malliṣeṇa makes a similar argument in his *Syādvādamāñjarī*, a twelfth-century commentary on Hemacandra's *Anyayogavyavacchedikā*. A. B. Dhruva (ed.), *Syādvādamāñjarī* of Śrīmalliṣeṇasūri with the *Anyayogavyavacchedadvātrimṣika* of Hemacandra (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), p. 22.

<sup>75</sup> Also see *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, v. 4.37 ('all beings are creators', *sarvabhāveṣu kartrtvam*).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 4.39–41.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 4.42.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 4.43.



and proclaims the strength of the Tapa Gaccha's theological tradition to a sectarian readership.

Thus, Siddhicandra and Hemavijaya agree on the basic argument that the Tapa Gaccha espouses a monotheistic system but individually emphasize distinct nuances within Jain thought. Taken together, one is struck by the ability of these writers to articulate divergent but yet consonant ideas. Hemavijaya promotes two compatible views of God as a transcendent deity beyond attributes and an enlightened teacher incarnate on earth; Arhat is to be revered in both aspects and occupies a central place in Jain thought akin to Allah's position in Islam. Siddhicandra evades finding a Jain God that is to be worshipped and rather identifies the cycle of cause and effect that governs the world as providing the same explanatory power within Jainism in accounting for reality as God does in other religious traditions. All of these explanations are consistent with Jain philosophy and demonstrate how Tapa Gaccha thinkers could advantageously present select aspects of their theology.

The lesson for Jain readers of the works of Siddhicandra and Hemavijaya seems to be that while political alliances may give rise to religious challenges, the Jain system is well equipped to transform such threats into opportunities for even greater gain precisely because of its multiplicity of perspectives. Given that sustained relations between Tapa Gaccha monks and the Mughals ended in the 1610s, Jain ascetics had few further needs to invoke such flexibility in an imperial context. Nonetheless, Jains faced suspicions of atheism at several later points, for example from Hindu leaders and Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century when Jain thinkers outlined still additional views of their deity.<sup>79</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sophisticated ability to articulate congruent perspectives may partly explain why Jains wrote extensively and diversely about their experiences at the Mughal court while Brahmans frequently remained mute.

Last, particularly when consider in tandem, Hemavijaya and Siddhicandra demonstrate that Tapa Gaccha authors perceived immense value in narrating these altercations for a local audience.

<sup>79</sup> For instance, Atmaram describes God as all enlightened beings that merge together to form a single entity. He originally promoted these arguments against Dayananda Sarasvati, and they later appeared in anti-Christian literature. John E. Cort, 'Indology as Authoritative Knowledge: Jain Debates about Icons and History in Colonial India', in Brian Hatcher and Michael Dodson (eds), *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2012).

Others, such as Vallabha Pathaka, also discuss this exchange, as I mention above. Additionally, a long inscription carved in 1595 at Shatrunjaya, a pilgrimage destination in Gujarat, broadcasted Vijayasena's heroism in this episode:

[Vijayasena] openly established in the assembly of Shah Akbar that unparalleled Arhat was to be understood as God (*paramēśvaratva*) using such lofty words that the bhattas, lords of the Brahmans, whose babbling was sheer madness, became blinded by powerful proofs like thieves confronted by a great light.<sup>80</sup>

Through such continual recountings, this debate and other Jain-Mughal encounters became a constituent part of the Tapa Gaccha's self-identity that it was beneficial to remember even in the absence of ongoing imperial relations. Nonetheless, not all Mughal challenges to Jain theology ended so well, and Tapa Gaccha leaders ultimately fell from royal favour because of a religious conflict.

### Defending Jain asceticism from imperial interference

While Tapa Gaccha monks eagerly engaged with the Mughals in many respects, they were also sensitive to the risk that political ties could undermine religious obligations. Moreover, intellectuals feared that lay followers and critics from other Jain sects might infer laxity, whether or not it actually came to pass. Many authors deploy stock tropes to counter these worries, such as that ascetic leaders refused monetary rewards from the Mughal kings to maintain their detachment from the world or declined to sit on luxurious carpets to avoid hurting small insects underneath.<sup>81</sup> Often these moments served as public glorifyings (*prabhāvanā*) where overcoming secular temptations actually enhanced the prestige of the Tapa Gaccha tradition and justified the involvement of monks in political affairs.<sup>82</sup> One thinker, Siddhicandra, offers a particularly complex story in this vein about how he resolutely remained committed to asceticism despite immense pressure from Jahangir and his wife, Nur Jahan.

<sup>80</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 2, p. 54, v. 29, reading the suggested alternative of *pratyakṣa* (note 10). Hemavijaya authored this inscription.

<sup>81</sup> For example, *Jagadgurukāvya*, vv. 175–76 (on rejecting money); *Hīrasaubhāgya*, vv. 14.6–7; and *Jagadgurukāvya*, vv. 169–70 (on the perils of carpets).

<sup>82</sup> John E. Cort, 'Genres of Jain History', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1995), pp. 487–88.

Siddhicandra has featured in this discussion already as an author, but a few biographical details are helpful here. Siddhicandra was a Tapa Gaccha monk who spent significant time at Akbar's court. He was also the only Jain figure of his time known to be fluent in Persian and, by his own admission, read Persian texts to the Mughal king and princes.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps because of these markedly strong imperial links, Siddhicandra exhibited more anxiety about accepting Mughal patronage than his peers. In narrating disagreements over ascetic practice, Siddhicandra develops a robust Jain authority in contradistinction to the worldly Mughals and proclaims the Tapa Gaccha strong by virtue of its contrast rather than likeness to the ruling elite. He also voices some strong objections to monks being located in royal environs and offers an unsettling account of the hazards of such ties. Of the three debates discussed here, Siddhicandra's rejection of Jahangir's demands tenders the most ambivalent moral about whether the possible dangers of Jain relations with the Mughals outweighed the benefits.

The story commences with Emperor Jahangir observing that in both age and nature Siddhicandra was ill suited for an ascetic way of life:

You possess marks that show you capable of being an earthly king.  
O friend, you are resplendent with the radiating beauty of youth.  
Given that your age is suited for pursuing fiery young women,  
why do you abandon the pleasure of sensual desires and give yourself to  
austerities?<sup>84</sup>

In response, Siddhicandra chided Jahangir for poking fun at his dedication. He further retorted that the transience of the world makes people of all ages well advised to consider asceticism. In rather poor form, Jahangir, 'his eyes rolling about from the influence of drink', asked the monk directly how he could prevent himself from thinking about sex.<sup>85</sup> Siddhicandra then discoursed eloquently about the benefits of being detached from worldly things. Jahangir quieted

<sup>83</sup> *Bhānucandragāṇicarita*, vv. 4.90 and 4.104. Siddhicandra also refers to his Persian skills in his commentary on the *Kādambarī*. Kashinath Pandurang Parab (ed.), *Kādambarī of Bāṇabhaṭṭa and His Son (Bhuṣaṇabhaṭṭa) with the Commentaries of Bhānuchandra and His Disciple Siddhichandra* (Bombay: Pandurang Jawaji, 1940), p. 483, v. 5 of *ṭīkā*. Siddhicandra's teacher, Bhanucandra, lauds his pupil as famous for knowing all virtuous Persian books in his commentary on the *Vasantarājaśākuna*. *Vasantarājaśākuna* of Vasantarāja with *ṭīkā* of Bhanucandra (Mumbai: Khemraj Sri Krishnadasa Sreshthina, 1987), p. 1, v. 9 of *ṭīkā*.

<sup>84</sup> *Bhānucandragāṇicarita*, vv. 4.238–39.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 4.247–48.

down in amazement at this strong reasoning, perhaps mixed with an alcohol-induced stupor, until Nur Jahan (here called Nur Mahal) walked into the assembly hall.<sup>86</sup>

At this point, Siddhicandra's narrative slips into the realm of fantasy, considering that *purdah* restrictions in the harem would have prevented Nur Jahan from appearing in court.<sup>87</sup> But the value of this particular encounter for Siddhicandra is far less its historical precision than its promise as a potent illustration of a Tapa Gaccha monk upholding his religious values while pursuing political influence.<sup>88</sup> Nur Jahan tried to undermine the monk's authority by positing: 'Wherever there is youth, speech that reflects soundness of mind is impossible.'<sup>89</sup> In response, Siddhicandra cited the example of the king of Balkh, who gave up everything in order to become a renunciant in his youth. Although the *Bhānucandraṅgarita* does not include the name of the ruler, this appears to be the saga of Ibrahim ibn Adham, a figure renowned in the Perso-Arabic tradition for his denial of all earthly possessions, including his crown.<sup>90</sup> Siddhicandra introduces this Islamicate reference with the lone Hindi verse in his text: '16,000 palaces, 18 lakh horses, and the city of Bilakkh (Balkh) were given up for the sake of his Lord.'<sup>91</sup> This brief foray into the Mughal cultural sphere, including the use of a language intelligible to the imperial elite, indicates the great political liability of this debate that called for the invocation of an idea designed to hit close to home for Jahangir and Nur Jahan.

Nonetheless, after invoking a Perso-Islamic precedent for young renunciants, Siddhicandra promptly steered the conversation back to his own tradition and frames both himself and his royal interlocutors as speaking in Indian terms. Nur Jahan proposed that it would be best to renounce as an old man, after having one's fill of sensual pleasures.<sup>92</sup> Siddhicandra responded that the degradation of the

<sup>86</sup> Nur Jahan was known as Nur Mahal between 1611 and 1616.

<sup>87</sup> Ellison B. Findly, *Nur Jahan, Empress of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 89–90.

<sup>88</sup> Although, as I discuss above, inscriptions and vernacular works confirm that this event occurred, even if some of its details are exaggerated in the *Bhānucandraṅgarita*.

<sup>89</sup> *Bhānucandraṅgarita*, v. 4.269.

<sup>90</sup> Rumi famously relays this tale in his *Maṣnavī*. Oddly, Niccolao Manucci, a traveller to India during the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, seems to have picked up a quite different version of this tale. William Irvine (trans.), *Storia do Mogor or Mogul India, 1653–1708*, Vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1907–1908, 4 volumes), pp. 469–70.

<sup>91</sup> *Bhānucandraṅgarita*, v. 4.271.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 4.275–79.

current age, the Kali Yuga, has had exactly the opposite effect, and people wantonly pursue pleasures virtually until the grave.<sup>93</sup> Next Jahangir, transformed from a drunkard into a skilful philosopher without explanation, articulated a series of compelling objections to the participation of Jain ascetics in government business. Some of his arguments carry rhetorical force, for example when he exclaimed: ‘Young man! Why do you want to bring sorrows such as plucking out hair by the root on your body, which is as delicate as the stem of a shirisha flower.’<sup>94</sup>

Jahangir’s most convincing argument, however, relied solidly upon Jain philosophy. The Mughal emperor argued that the Jain doctrine of manysidedness (*syādvāda*) made Siddhicandra’s obstinacy untenable and that the monk should adopt a more relativist approach as trumpeted by his own tradition. Jahangir, described here as ‘grasping Jain doctrine’, said:<sup>95</sup>

Only the minds of men adjudicate between virtue and vice. Without the mind, there is no shirking of duty. Even if there is some fault here, it is to be repelled with good intentions, just as leanness caused by fasting is to be curbed by eating wholesome food. There are rules and exceptions in the dharma of ascetics and both are to be remembered by all. Therefore it is foolish for everybody to grasp a single viewpoint. The truth of multiple viewpoints (*syādvāda*) is to be understood in all things by those who speak of manysidedness (*syādvāda*). For them, endorsing a single view would be called falsity. O wise one, having abandoned your obstinacy and consenting to my speech, enjoy pleasures as you wish. What wise man would error in his own advice?<sup>96</sup>

Siddhicandra replied that exceptions to religious practice are for the weak and avoiding temptation altogether is the best method of resistance. But his only counter to Jahangir’s use of *syādvāda* is to glibly quip that the doctrine itself admits that it cannot be taken as absolutely true and so dogmatism is sometimes justified.<sup>97</sup> This rhetorical sleight of hand signals the feebleness of Siddhicandra’s position here, particularly in contrast to Jahangir’s rather deft deployment of Jain thinking. At this point in the exchange, rational

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, vv. 4.280–83.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, v. 4.289.

<sup>95</sup> ... *arhanmatajñena śāhinā* (Ibid, v. 4.306).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, vv. 4.301–5. In v. 4.304a, read *syādvāda eva sarvatra*.

<sup>97</sup> See *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, vv. 4.307–13 for Siddhicandra’s response (v. 4.311 on *syādvāda* in particular). No doubt Jahangir’s interpretation could be said to be misconstruing *syādvāda*, but Siddhicandra did not make this case.

discussion ceased, and it is not clear who won intellectually. Especially in the latter portion of the discussion, Siddhicandra portrays Jahangir as more in tune with Jain doctrine than himself and allows the Mughal ruler to make several persuasive points against asceticism in one's youth.

But Siddhicandra does not allow his readers to dwell on the arguments and next narrates how Jahangir's anger flared as the king shouted:

Do you dare to show me contempt? Do you not know my power?  
When angered, I am the God of Death (*kyānta*) before your eyes,  
but when happy I am a wishing-tree of paradise.  
Now you will reap what you have sown with your poisonous obstinacy.<sup>98</sup>

Siddhicandra still stood firm, at which point Jahangir once more ordered him to take a wife along with other earthly rewards, including elephants, horses, and a position in the imperial administration.<sup>99</sup> He refused, and Jahangir ordered an elephant brought to crush the disobedient monk. When Siddhicandra rejected Jahangir's command to marry one last time, the elephant and the crowd roared, but the monk remained undisturbed. Impressed, Jahangir's anger dissipated slightly. He directed that the elephant be pulled back and imposed exile on Siddhicandra instead of execution.<sup>100</sup> In addition, Jahangir issued a *farmān* proclaiming: 'Other renunciants that wander my kingdom are to dwell in the forest since [the forest] alone is an appropriate residence for ascetics who are free of desires.'<sup>101</sup>

The moral of this story thus far is murky at best. Siddhicandra stayed true to his vows despite enormous pressure from the throne and severe consequences for himself and all other renunciants. Certain aspects of the tale communicate the strength of Jain convictions to a sectarian audience, such as when Siddhicandra proclaims to Jahangir, 'I will not violate the dharma I have chosen, even a hair!'<sup>102</sup> But whether Siddhicandra justified his presence at court is a far more open-ended question. Tapa Gaccha followers were acutely aware

<sup>98</sup> *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, vv. 4.316–17a.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 4.326.

<sup>100</sup> Here I summarize *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, vv. 4.317b–33. Note that there are precedents for the Mughals turning to violent spectacles as a means of resolving religious conflict, such as the *sannyasi* (ascetic) battle overseen by Akbar and the proposed trial by fire for the Jesuits.

<sup>101</sup> *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, v. 4.334.

<sup>102</sup> *Bhānucandraṅgarīcarita*, v. 4.313b.

of both the benefits and challenges their spiritual leaders faced in forging connections with the Mughal elite, but the former were what vindicated the latter. Given that Siddhicandra's steadfastness resulted in the eviction of Jain monks from court, he hardly demonstrated the value of the entire exercise.

However, Siddhicandra offers one more story to conclude his *Bhānucandraṅṅicarita* that at least partially redeems politically affiliated monks. In brief, one day Jahangir noticed that Bhanucandra, the sole Jain ascetic allowed to remain at court, looked forlorn. Jahangir inquired, and Bhanucandra confessed that he missed his star pupil, at which point the emperor repented of his earlier harshness and called for Siddhicandra's return to court in a jubilant procession. Having reinstated the monk, Jahangir decreed that all ascetics could again go where they pleased, and with this the text closes.<sup>103</sup> Given this finale, it seems that the hazards of life at court are worth the trouble of monks, who will be vindicated, perhaps after significant hardship. Siddhicandra even puts a positive gloss on the saga by noting that Jahangir's anger and order of exile afforded him the opportunity to work off some bad karma and thus enabled his spiritual growth.<sup>104</sup> But even at this happy ending, the well-worded objections of Nur Jahan and Jahangir continue to percolate in readers' minds. In particular, the king's *farmān* articulates an influential, time-honoured position among Jain thinkers: namely, monks belong in the forest rather than at court.

Jain intellectuals such as Siddhicandra vividly perceived the threats they faced by entering into a sphere where Mughal authority reigned supreme. Moreover, in enshrining their anxieties in writing they ensured that such concerns would be known to future generations. Siddhicandra's decision to narrate this particular cross-cultural encounter might be explained as having an educational value for Jain readers who might also form imperial links, but this is unlikely given that Jahangir again exiled Jain ascetics in 1618.<sup>105</sup> Although he quickly rescinded this second ban too, Mughal relations with Tapa Gaccha monks never recovered, and Jahangir referred to Bhanucandra in the

<sup>103</sup> Here Siddhicandra likely refers to the imperial order that Jahangir issued in 1616 that promised Jains freedom to travel and worship (the *farmān* is reproduced in Commissariat, 'Imperial Mughal Farmans in Gujarat', p. 15; also see his translation and discussion on pp. 26–27).

<sup>104</sup> *Bhānucandraṅṅicarita*, vv. 4.352–53.

<sup>105</sup> *Jahāṅgīrnāmāh*, p. 250.

1620s as someone ‘whom I used to know’.<sup>106</sup> More likely, Siddhicandra wrote about this interaction because he found it valuable for the Tapa Gaccha community more generally. Perhaps in the 1620s, after more than 30 years of sustained imperial relations, the sect’s identity was too intertwined with the Mughals to be imagined separately, at least by a young monk brought up in the royal court. Additionally, as the strongest and one of the more thoughtful interlocutors available to Gujarati Jains in early modern India, the Mughals provided a useful foil for the Tapa Gaccha to work through the arguments for and against their own religious practices.

### Conclusion: formulating religious difference

Jain ascetic leaders participated in numerous theological disputes with members of the Mughal elite, which Sanskrit literati subsequently memorialized in a variety of written texts. The three debates I have described here each involved a different set of discussants who addressed rather disparate questions. Upon his initial sojourn at the royal court, Hiravijaya discussed the truth of Islam and the authority of the Qur’an with Abu’l Fazl, Akbar’s vizier. A decade later, Vijayasena engaged with either Abu’l Fazl or Akbar to answer Brahman- or Rajput-inspired doubts about whether Jains qualified as monotheists. Last, Siddhicandra induced the first expulsion of Jain monks from the Mughal court when he rebuffed Jahangir’s directive to enjoy earthly pleasures. All three episodes are interesting in their details, and they also suggest larger insights into questions of religion, politics, and community identity in early modern India.

First, these episodes demonstrate the depth and complexity of religious identity in the Mughal dispensation. Scholars frequently lament the shift on the subcontinent from traditional modes of pluralistic faith towards more contemporary religious ideologies.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Arif Nawshahi and Mu’in Nizami (eds), *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī of ‘Abd al-Sattār ibn Qāsīm Lāhawrī* (Tehran: Markaz-i Pizhuhishi Miras-i Maktub, 2006), p. 111. On this second ban being short-lived, see Azad, *Religion and Politics in India*, pp. 119–21; and Findly, *Nur Jahan*, pp. 197–99. Whether these bans also affected Kharatara ascetics remains unclear, but we have little evidence for imperial interactions with any Jain religious leaders after 1620. Nonetheless, the Mughals continued to have relations with lay Jains, most notably merchants (Jain, ‘Piety, Laity and Royalty’, pp. 67–89).

<sup>107</sup> For example, see Ashis Nandy’s discussion of religion as a ‘way of life’ versus as an ideology: Ashis Nandy, ‘The Politics of Secularism and Recovery of Religious



Speaking of developments in Indian modernity, for instance, Sudipta Kaviraj has drawn a distinction between thick and thin religion where ‘thick religion’ is a layered belief system that is generally tolerant of other views, practiced locally, and typically separate from politics. In contrast, ‘thin religion’ is an intolerant brand of broad identity that is often focused on a political end.<sup>108</sup> But this sort of distinction does not accurately capture how Jains experienced religion in Mughal India as a deeply political phenomenon that recognized limits of tolerance while also propagating specific ideas.<sup>109</sup> Crucially, the mutual saturation of politics and theology did not flatten religion for the Jain community. Rather it enabled Jains to pursue groundbreaking paths, such as writing about the taboo topic of Islamic beliefs in Sanskrit, reframing debates about Jain theology, and disobeying royal Mughal commands.

In terms of relations between religious communities, Jain and Mughal debates offer a way to move beyond syncretism and instead glimpse some of the processes that led to a partially shared culture. Jains and the Mughals both recognized real similarities between their two religious traditions (not to mention Brahmanical views), and they also admitted unbridgeable disparities. They did not seek to resolve all their conflicts, nor did they proclaim differences between their traditions irrelevant. Their discussions lack any hint of the satire that undergirded some early modern religious exchanges written in vernacular languages.<sup>110</sup> Rather, Jain and Mughal leaders tried to identify a theologically sound bedrock of common ideas that would allow them to continue their close relations. At the time same, both maintained distinct markers of their traditions. In this sense, articulating the convergences and contradictions between Jainism and Islam was important for both the Mughal and Jain figures involved

Tolerance’ in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 322–23.

<sup>108</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on Secularisation Theory’ in Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds), *Religion and the Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 336–55.

<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless, we should not fail to recognize what Anand Taneja has called the ‘hospitality’ often displayed by early modern Indians who welcomed religious debates. Anand Vivek Taneja, ‘Saintly Visions: Other Histories and History’s Others in the Medieval Ruins of Delhi’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2012), p. 582.

<sup>110</sup> For example, Eleanor Zelliot, ‘Medieval Encounter Between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath’s Drama-Poem Hindu-Turk Samvad’ in Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711–1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 64–82.

in these debates. Nonetheless, the two groups engaged in these discussions for rather different reasons, which give insight into their respective political and religious agendas.

For the Mughals, negotiating religious ideas was an important part of exercising imperial authority. Here we ought to distinguish between Hiravijaya's discrediting of Islam, which seems largely imagined, and the latter two encounters, which are attested in multiple historical sources in both Sanskrit and Gujarati. Nonetheless, Mughal court chronicles mention none of the debates. Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnāmah* lists three Tapa Gaccha figures (Hiravijaya, Vijayasena, and Bhanucandra) among the learned men of the age but offers no explanation for this classification or even identification of these individuals.<sup>111</sup> For the Mughals, it was not appropriate to integrate narratives of interactions with Jain ascetics into a Persianate court history. But in terms of expressing state authority on the ground, the Mughal kings, particularly Akbar, wished to engage with other religions. Akbar is reported to have pursued connections with followers of other traditions too, for example requesting Jesuit missionaries to visit Fatehpur Sikri and ordering the construction of a hall of religious debate (*'ibādathkhānah*). Jahangir also initiated conversations across theological divides, and, for both rulers, many of these disputes involved heavy political consequences. For example, the *'ibādathkhānah* was instituted largely to undermine the authority of the *'ulama'* (Islamic religious scholars).<sup>112</sup> In their interactions with Jains, the Mughals sought to work out how their religious ideas coupled with political power might create space for and relate to this tradition.

Jain thinkers viewed Mughal challenges as valuable for articulating and even reformulating their own sense of a religious community. An Islamic Other was a real, useful interlocutor for Gujarati Jains who found themselves in an increasingly multicultural world. Particularly in narrating Mughal encounters well into the seventeenth century, even after they had lost the bulk of their imperial connections, Jain authors suggest that discussions of theological distinctions had become crucial, even foundational to Tapa Gaccha identity. Accordingly, the value of remembering disputes with the Mughals persisted even

<sup>111</sup> Blochmann (ed.), *Āṣṇ-i Akbarī*, Vol.1, pp. 233–35 (see variant reading in note 9 on p. 233).

<sup>112</sup> For an overview of tensions between Akbar and the *'ulama'*, see Rizvi, 'Dimensions of *Ṣulh-i Kul'*; and John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 36–41.

without ongoing relations, especially so long as the Mughals were the dominant political force in northern India.

Last, this set of encounters offers several models for how Sanskrit writers integrated Islamic views into their intellectual and religious universes. Jain thinkers recognized that Islam could be threatening, particularly when joined with Mughal hegemony. Perhaps Brahmins also identified dangers in incorporating Mughal-backed Islam into Sanskrit, although their views are difficult to infer due to a lack of Sanskrit narratives about their time at the royal court. But, for the Jains, writing in Sanskrit about their imperial experiences was not forbidden. On the contrary, such cross-cultural narratives opened up dynamic possibilities for repositioning their theological and literary traditions within a changing world.