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# **Rāj Bhakta Mārg**

**The Path of Devotion to Srimad Rajcandra.**

**A Jain Community in the Twenty First Century.**

**By**

**Emma Salter**

**A thesis submitted in candidature  
for the degree of doctor of philosophy.**

**University of Wales, Cardiff.**

**September 2002.**

## Summary

This thesis is a diachronic study of a branch of modern Jainism that was established at the beginning of the twentieth century. It makes extensive use of ethnographic data collected during field-research in Gujarat, Mumbai (India) and London (UK).

Members of this branch of Jainism follow a Jain layman from Gujarat called Srimad Rajcandra (1867 to 1901 CE). Srimad was profoundly dissatisfied with contemporary Jainism. He believed that its soteriological message had been subverted by empty rituals and groundless theorizing, and that spiritual ignorance had resulted in sectarian division, something to which he vehemently opposed. Today there are numerous ashrams and temples dedicated to Srimad. Most are in Gujarat, from where the majority of his followers originate, but some are also found in other regions of India. Srimad's following extends beyond India into diaspora Jain communities in North America and Europe, including Britain.

This thesis argues that Srimad's devotees are unified by an inclusive history and ideology that is centred in the life and teachings of Srimad Rajcandra, and so can be viewed collectively as a distinct movement within modern Jainism. Two tangible factors that distinguish Srimad's followers from other Jains are their acceptance of his writings (in Gujarati) as scripture and their veneration of his image in the form of photographs and statues. Such an argument is necessary because the structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement is fragmentary. It is a composite of various disparate, autonomous lay communities and individuals. Each community has its own local history and independent tradition, which influence its specific beliefs and practices.

This thesis discusses the internal causes for the movement's organizational structure. These include Srimad's lay status and anti-sectarian values, his interpretation of self realisation as a religious experience, and his teaching about guru *bhakti* as a means of attaining liberation.

## Acknowledgements

It would have been impossible to complete this thesis without the range of support I received in Britain and India.

I would like to acknowledge the University of Wales, Cardiff and the Department of Theological and Religious Studies at Cardiff for awarding me a grant to fund this research. A further acknowledgement is due to the Department of Theological and Religious Studies at Cardiff for contributing towards fieldtrip expenses and for extending my funding into my final year. I would like to thank academic and administrative staff in the department for all their encouragement and support throughout the duration of my studies.

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To all of Srimad Rajcandra's devotees and other Jains whom I met I owe a huge thank you. This thesis was made possible only by their good grace. It is enriched by their intelligence and eagerness to discuss their religious beliefs with me. Throughout the course of this research I received a level of generosity and hospitality that cannot be rivalled and many friendships have been made along the way. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the following people: trustees and devotees at the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram', Agas; Param Pujya Sri Atmanandji and his disciples; Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai Kothari and his disciples; Param Pujya Sri Dr. Rakeshbhai Jhaveri and his disciples; Mr. Jaysingbhai Narayandas and Mr. Dirubhai Daftari.

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## Note to Readers

Throughout this thesis book titles are italicised, for example *The Jains*. Gujarati words are also italicised, for example *bhakti*, and diacritics have been added. Where a Gujarati word appears in direct quotes the style adopted by the original author is maintained. The English meaning is given the first time the word is used and there is a selective glossary at the end of the thesis. Words that are commonly used in English, such as ‘guru’ and ‘karma’, have been anglicised. Proper names are neither italicised nor given diacritics. They are written in their full honorific form at their first mention, thereafter they are usually reduced to a respectful shortened form. For example, Sri Maharaj Lalluji Svami is shortened to Lalluji. The reasons for this are explained in the section on methodology in the Introduction. I have opted for the plural forms of pronouns to indicate non-specific gender, rather than the more cumbersome her/his format. Place names are written in their modern form without diacritics. For consistency, Mumbai, rather than Bombay, is written. Unless otherwise specified the dates given throughout the thesis are CE. Fifty six is subtracted from Gujarati *vikram samvat* (VS) dates to convert them to CE dates.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of this conversion see Williams 1984, p9 footnote.

# Contents

Summary		
Acknowledgements		
Note to Readers		
		Page.
Chapter One:	<u>Introduction</u>	1 - 56.
Chapter Two:	<u>Devoted Communities</u> How Srimad Rajcandra's followers are organised.	56 - 122.
Chapter Three:	<u>From Householder to Saint</u> A biographical outline of Srimad Rajcandra and his influence on the Srimad Rajcandra movement.	123 - 179.
Chapter Four:	<u>The Path of Self Realisation</u> The impact of Srimad's philosophy of self realisation and his religious instruction of guru <i>bhakti</i> on the Srimad Rajcandra movement.	180 - 235.
Chapter Five:	<u>Legacies of a Saint</u> Devotees' use of Srimad's writing and image and their influence on the Srimad Rajcandra movement.	236 - 279.
	<u>Conclusions</u>	278 - 308.
Appendices:	<u>One.</u> Aspirant's vows from Srimad Rajcandra Ashram, Agas. <u>Two.</u> <i>Srimad Rajcandra</i> reference 680. <u>Three.</u> 'What is the Seed of Omniscience?'	
Plates		
Glossary		
Bibliography		

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1. Objectives**

This thesis is about a contemporary Jain movement the members of which are devotees of a Jain layman from Gujarat called Srimad Rajcandra (1867 to 1901). It aims to contribute to a broader general understanding of Jainism through a focused study of this specific branch of Jains. The Srimad Rajcandra movement is relatively recent and so this thesis offers an important perspective on modern Jainism<sup>1</sup>.

Wilson has observed that the structure of any organisation is influenced by its origins, historical development and ideological outlook<sup>2</sup>. In response to that observation, this thesis makes a diachronic analysis of the evolution of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. It approaches this analysis by discussing the internal causes for the movement's inception and for its development as a lay organisation with a fragmentary and multifarious social structure. The thesis shows that Srimad's followers are united by an inclusive history and ideology, which justifies their being described collectively as a 'movement', and one that is distinct from other forms of Jainism. It also shows that the movement as a whole is composed of various autonomous communities, each

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<sup>1</sup> There is some tension surrounding the term 'Srimad Rajcandra movement'. This is discussed further in Chapter Two

<sup>2</sup> Wilson 1967, p8



with its own local history and each with its own specific beliefs and practices. The originality of this thesis is located in its subject matter. To the best of my knowledge this is the only study about the followers of Srimad Rajcandra. A substantial amount of data is presented here for the first time.

The motivation for presenting this thesis on Shrimad Rajcandra's followers is embedded in contemporary scholastic efforts to extend the boundaries of academic understanding about Jainism. In many ways the Srimad Rajcandra movement conforms to the received academic model of Jainism. For example, its members describe themselves as Jain, they venerate the Jinas, they are vegetarian and they maintain customary Jain religious festivals and practices. However, the movement also challenges the received academic model in some significant ways. For example, it is a lay organisation that largely rejects mendicant authority and members believe that by devotional veneration of a lay guru they may attain liberation within a relatively short period of time (perhaps within fifteen life-spans).

Past scholarship has been criticised for portraying a narrow and standardised view of Jainism and for dismissing variations that do not conform to the received academic model. For example, Cort comments that the "standard portrait [of Jainism is] misleading and inadequate to a full understanding of Jain religiosity"<sup>3</sup>. This is primarily because it dwells on well defined mendicant ideology whilst paying little attention to the less well defined ideology of the laity. Cort has identified these different, but unopposed realms of value as liberation and wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. More recent studies, Cort's included, have explored ethnographic as well as textual data to

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<sup>3</sup> Cort 1990, p47. He gives an outline of the standard portrait on pages 44 to 47. Also see Cort 1989, pages 18 to 24.

<sup>4</sup> Cort 1989 and 2001.

expose Jainism as having a far richer tapestry than was formerly assumed by western scholars<sup>5</sup>. For example, Banks records how some Jains believe in a “paramount deity” that supersedes the Tīrthaṅkars<sup>6</sup>; Babb describes the cult of the *Dadagurus*, in which the images of deceased ascetics are worshiped to gain boons<sup>7</sup>; Jaini discusses that from about the twelfth century the Tīrthaṅkars’ tutelary deities (*yakṣas*) sometimes received a greater degree of veneration than the Tīrthaṅkars themselves<sup>8</sup>; Cort tells the tale of “Bell-Ears” who is a popular protecting deity amongst Śvetāmbar Jains<sup>9</sup>; and Humphrey and Laidlaw describe a “possession cult” in a Jain temple outside Jaipur<sup>10</sup>. The underlying causes for these different beliefs and practices may be speculated upon, but what is clear is that to gain a comprehensive understanding of Jainism its many variations need to be considered alongside its universal themes.

Cort has suggested that the “standard portrait” of Jainism evolved as a result of the intensive studies undertaken by western scholars in the nineteenth century, particularly “philologically orientated” German scholars, and which culminated with the works of Hermann Jacobi and Georg Buhler<sup>11</sup>. The academic approach and interpretation of such scholars were, according to Cort, influenced by their cultural backgrounds, specifically their “Protestant theological valuation”<sup>12</sup>. He argues that Protestant emphasis on the authority of the Christian Bible over centuries of Catholic tradition influenced an academic trend of prioritising biblical study and of uncovering the ‘origins’ of things, in the belief that origins represent authenticity. In applying

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<sup>5</sup> Examples include, Babb 1996, Banks 1992, Carrithers and Humphrey 1991, Cort 1989 and 2001, Dundas 1992, Folkert 1993, Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, Kelting 2001, and Laidlaw 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Banks 1992, p205.

<sup>7</sup> Babb 1996, pages 102 to 136.

<sup>8</sup> Jaini 1991, p197.

<sup>9</sup> Cort 2000a, pages 417 to 433.

<sup>10</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, pages 230 to 232.

<sup>11</sup> Cort 1990, p44. Cort 1989, pages 24 to 31. Cort 1992, pages 171 to 187.

<sup>12</sup> Cort 1990, p51.

this method to the study of Jainism western Indologists looked for a canon, which, Cort writes, “they thought they had found in the 45 Agamas of the Śvetāmbar Murtipujakas”<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, Śvetāmbar Jainism came to represent a ‘proper’ model of Jainism because it was believed to have the oldest, hence most authentic, canonical texts<sup>14</sup>. As a result Digambar and other forms of Jainism that varied from the Śvetāmbar model were marginalised by western academia<sup>15</sup>. Cort goes on to suggest that this narrow academic perspective was compounded further because it concurred with the outlook of Śvetāmbar Jains themselves<sup>16</sup>. Scholarship ended-up presenting an ‘orthodox’ model that rendered those Jains who endorsed it as ‘orthodox’ by virtue of the fact that they conformed to the academic model.

Cort suggests that the legacy of nineteenth century scholarship led subsequent researchers, albeit unwittingly, towards a subjective analysis of Jainism. He describes two approaches to the study of religions, which he terms as “emic” and “etic”; “emic statements are culturally specific, whereas etic statements are comparative”<sup>17</sup>. Non-Jain western scholars of Jainism would be expected to take an etic – external – approach. Cort argues that, contrary to this expectation, due to a dependence on the model formulated in the nineteenth century a masked emic – internal - approach is often taken<sup>18</sup>. Scholarship takes an emic approach when it describes as ‘improper’ an aspect of Jainism that differs from the ‘proper’ received model based on textual accounts of Śvetāmbar Jainism. Such distinctions amount to value judgments which it is not the place of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid p52.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p52. Cort is citing Folkert ‘Jainism’ in John R. Hinells (ed.) *A Handbook of Living Religions* 1984, p262. Folkert suggests that the notion of a fixed canon in Jainism is misrepresentative and that scholastic errors were made in identifying canonical scripture (1993, pages 41 to 76). See Chapter Five for further discussion on this point. With reference to Hinduism, Oberoi discusses the inadequacies of text only based studies (1997, pages 4 to 9).

<sup>15</sup> Cort 1990, p58.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p53. Also see Folkert 1993, pages 44 to 52 (especially 46 to 47).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p55.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p56.

academia to make. Cort's observations warn current academics to be wary of using the received model of Jainism as a standard against which to compare new data. If the received model was constructed on the basis of subjective analysis, then to make a direct comparison between this and new data would result in an equally subjective analysis of the new data.

It is acceptable, even expected, that Jains will make emic, or culturally specific, statements about their own religious tradition. Different groups of Jains have different opinions about what constitutes 'proper' Jainism. For example, the Jains that Banks interviewed in Leicester held that the authority of initiated ascetics is paramount. This authority is rejected by both the Srimad Rajcandra movement and the Kanji Svami Panth. The Srimad Rajcandra movement is a lay organisation that disputes mendicant authority. For this reason it is sometimes considered heterodox by other Jains who question whether it is even a branch of Jainism at all. One of Srimad's devotees commented to me that 'mainstream' Jains regarded him as belonging to a 'fringe movement'<sup>19</sup>. Some of Srimad's followers have an equally disparaging view of what they describe as 'sectarian' Jainism. Whilst it is expected that Jains will have a subjective approach to Jainism, it is not appropriate for the academic to make judgments about what is 'proper' and 'improper' Jainism.

Despite the alleged limitations that Cort finds with nineteenth century western scholarship on Jainism, academics in the twenty first century are surely indebted to it for providing a springboard for further research. Academic disciplines, particularly anthropology, now recognise that researchers are potentially influenced by their cultural background and acknowledge the difficulty, if not impossibility, of producing an entirely objective study.

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<sup>19</sup> London, April 2001.

Carrithers writes that “we are likely to fail in understanding others by seeing them in our own image, not theirs”<sup>20</sup>. He also argues that cultures may be easily misrepresented when studied in a historic and cultural vacuum. An aspect of any culture, at any single moment in its history, is the consequence of its historical development, which in turn may have been shaped by countless influences. So, whereas contemporary Jainism can be discussed in the present tense, this should not lead to the assumption that the events described represent the entirety of Jainism throughout the length of its history, “as though”, Carrithers writes, “‘Jains do this’ meant ‘Jains have always done this’”<sup>21</sup>. However, as Cort has stressed, it is important that the cultural backdrop is that of the tradition being examined and not that of the researcher.

Cort’s arguements imply that an orthodox model and its heterodox alternatives have been imposed upon Jainism by scholarship where there was none. Rather than dwelling on generalisations that reinforce the received model, the study of Jainism is better advanced by specific studies of particular communities that reveal variations within the tradition. Focused research of this type has a dual result. Unveiling alternatives to the received model allows for a more accurate and complete understanding of Jainism, whilst at the same time improving the general model, as similarities, as well as differences, between various branches are observed.

Whilst acknowledging that there is no single, ‘proper’ form of Jainism, and that the term ‘orthodoxy’ needs qualification, Jains can be identified as Jains, by themselves and by others, through their general conformity to a broad set of beliefs and practices<sup>22</sup>. Laidlaw describes

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<sup>20</sup> Carrithers 1992, p9. Also see Melinda Bollar Wagner 1997, pages 87 to 88.

<sup>21</sup> Carrithers 1992, p8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p111

Jainism as “a socio-historical phenomenon”<sup>23</sup>, but other scholars have been more direct in their acceptance of Jainism as a definable religious tradition. For example, Babb writes,

“Despite major sectarian differences there is enough common ground among Jain groups that one may legitimately speak of “Jainism”, a Jain religious tradition in a general and inclusive sense”<sup>24</sup>.

Cort writes,

“At the broadest level the Jains situate themselves within their distinctive universal history. [...] This universal history is broadly the same for all Jains, although there are some sectarian disagreements”<sup>25</sup>.

Banks writes that all the various forms of Jainism “bear certain *marks*, certain distinguishing features, that legitimates a common identity”<sup>26</sup>. In his book Banks has included a schematic diagram that represents various branches of Jainism<sup>27</sup>. It is notable that Srimad Rajcandra’s following is omitted from this diagram even though Srimad predates Kanji Svami (1889 to 1980), whose following is included.

That Jainism has an identifying structure is self evident from the fact that contemporary scholars (myself included) often introduce their studies with a brief outline of it<sup>28</sup>. However, the amount of variation within the loose boundaries of this structure make organising data about what Jains do

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<sup>23</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p9

<sup>24</sup> Babb 1996, p5.

<sup>25</sup> Cort 1995a, p473.

<sup>26</sup> Banks 1992, p228

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p31.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Babb 1996, pages 5 to 8; Banks 1992, pages 15 to 35; Folkert 1993, pages 1 to 19.

and believe extremely challenging. For example, Laidlaw and Humphrey found it impossible to give a concise description of Jain *pūjā* rituals, even amongst a localised group, because of the variations in belief and interpretation they encountered<sup>29</sup>. Kelting comments how her understanding of Jainism was “confounded” by learning about the experiences of Jain laywomen<sup>30</sup>. Oberoi suggests that diversity within a single religious tradition is characteristic of religion in India, and a characteristic that academic study should reflect instead of attempting to herd data into an ill fitting taxonomy<sup>31</sup>. The work of contemporary scholars of Jainism is beginning to collectively reflect the broad range of diversity within the tradition.

The difficulties scholars face when attempting to organise and present data on Jainism are illustrated by Banks’s study of Jains in Gujarat and Leicester in the 1980s<sup>32</sup>. He categorises the forms of Jainism he encountered during his study into ‘orthodox’, ‘heterodox’ and ‘neo-orthodox’, but states that,

“Jainism too should not be taken as a single entity, nor can any form of ‘pure’ or ‘original’ Jainism be distilled from the mass of ethnographical and historical data I present in this book”<sup>33</sup>.

Banks discusses Jainism in terms of orthodoxy, which he describes as, “[that which] may be considered as traditional Jainism, rooted in sectarianism and ritual”<sup>34</sup>. He defines orthodoxy by comparing the forms of Jainism that he observed in India alongside, what he describes as, the

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<sup>29</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Kelting 2001, p6.

<sup>31</sup> Oberoi 1997, p12.

<sup>32</sup> Banks 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p6. It should be noted that Banks conducted the research for this book, based on his doctoral thesis, in the mid 1980s. At this time very little ethnographic based research on Jainism had been published.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p202.

heterodox and neo-orthodox Jainism that he witnessed amongst Jains trying to establish themselves as a religious group in Leicester<sup>35</sup>. From this respect it may seem that Banks is guilty of the emic approach discussed earlier in this chapter. However, in his study Banks uses the term 'orthodoxy' as a literary device when writing, in general terms, about what most Jains in India do most of the time, whilst neither prescribing this as 'proper' Jainism nor ignoring variations. Also, Banks took his cue for discussing 'orthodox' Jainism from the Jains that he met. He reports that in Leicester many Jains believed 'proper' - as they described it - Jainism could only be practised in India, largely because they considered it to be dependent upon supervision by initiated ascetics. (Ascetics may only travel by foot, hence cannot leave India). Therefore, according to these Jains orthodoxy was, "exemplified by ascetics who hold knowledge and hence power", and "flourishes best in parochial undisturbed situations"<sup>36</sup>. Rather than imposing an orthodox model upon Jainism, Banks's study reveals the understandably emic attitudes that Jains themselves hold towards orthodoxy. This analysis of the Srimad Rajcandra movement faced a similar problem of organising data. The more that was learned about Srimad's followers the more difficult it became to categorise them or to make bald statements about their beliefs and practices. The diversity found within this particular branch of Jainism is identified and discussed throughout this thesis.

This discussion has aimed to locate this thesis on the followers of Srimad Rajcandra within contemporary attitudes towards the academic study of Jainism. The point has been raised that only by acknowledging the range of diversity in Jainism and by investigating its various forms can a representative, academic model of this tradition begin to be constructed. However, it has

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid chapter 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p202.



also been recognised that to abandon the general structure of Jainism completely is just as unhelpful because to do so denies the existence of an overall sense of a Jain community. Banks observes that this is misrepresentative, “simply for the reason that a notion of community is perceived by the actors [Jains] themselves”<sup>37</sup>. It has been argued that it is not the role of the academic to distinguish ‘proper’ from ‘improper’ Jainism, although we may expect Jains to argue this point amongst themselves. The difficulties encountered in organising and presenting data which are caused by the variety of traditions in Jainism have also been acknowledged.

This thesis contributes to broadening the range of academic perspectives on Jainism by its analysis of one specific group of Jains. A considerable amount of descriptive ethnographic data is included in this thesis. This builds a portrait of these Jains, but the ‘validity’ of their beliefs and practices is not judged by comparing data with a single existing model that is presumed to be orthodox. As a method of organising the data presented into a coherent form, it is discussed and analysed according to its relationship with the organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Chapter Two describes how Srimad’s following is organised, Chapter Three discusses Srimad’s own influence on this structure, Chapter Four discusses the influence of his teachings on self realisation and guru *bhakti*, and Chapter Five discusses the influence of his writings and his image.

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<sup>37</sup> Banks 1991, p258.

## 2. Jainism in Outline.

A brief outline of the general aspects of Jain philosophy, practice and organisation is included here to familiarise the reader with them. Jaini's *The Jaina Path of Purification* and Dundas's *The Jains* are recommended for more a comprehensive introduction to Jainism.

Jainism derives its religious authority from the teachings of the Tīrthaṅkars, twenty-four of whom appear during every half of a cosmic cycle. The Tīrthaṅkars are also known as Jinas and these terms are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. The most recent Tīrthaṅkar, and the last in the present time cycle, was Vardhamana Mahavir who preached in Bihar, Orissa and Western Bengal<sup>38</sup>. There is no independent evidence to date Mahavir's life. Śvetāmbar tradition gives his dates as 599 to 527 BCE, Digambar tradition says he died in 510 BCE<sup>39</sup>. Textual evidence suggests he was historically contemporary with the Buddha, who historians now believe died in 404 BCE<sup>40</sup>. Jain history does not regard Mahavir as the founder of its religion, but, like the preceding Tīrthaṅkars, as one who rekindled the diminishing message of its religious truth. The twenty third Tīrthaṅkar, Parsvanath, has also been established as a historical figure. He is believed to have lived two hundred and fifty years before Mahavir and to have been the head of a "Nirgrantha Order", the origins of which may have predated him<sup>41</sup>.

Jain doctrine states that life is ubiquitous. Countless, minute monads are believed to permeate the cosmos alongside more substantial life forms including plants, animals, humans, celestial beings and hell beings. All life forms possess a soul, the fundamental quality of which is

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<sup>38</sup> Sangave 1997, p3.

<sup>39</sup> Dundas 1992, p21.

<sup>40</sup> Fynes pxxviii in Hemacandra 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Dundas 1992, p17. Sangave 1997, pages 1 and 2. 'Nirgrantha' means to 'untie knots' of bondage in *saṃsāra*.

consciousness. Souls, and the material cosmos they inhabit, are eternal and uncreated. Each soul has always existed and has throughout its existence experienced every conceivable embodiment millions of times over. The soteriological goal of Jainism is to release the embodied soul, the *jīva*, from *saṃsār*, which is the continuous, painful drudgery of death and rebirth. Once release has been achieved the soul experiences its pure nature of omniscience and absolute bliss. The omniscient soul suffers no further embodiments. At the end of its final incarnation it attains *mokṣa*, eternal liberation, and has no further dealings with temporal realms.

*Mokṣa* is the perfect ontological state. Souls which have attained this state are called *siddha*. Souls that are omniscient but still embodied are called *arhat* or *kevalin*, they will become *siddha* upon the death of their physical body. Tīrthaṅkars or Jinas are omniscient, but distinguished from *arhat* and *kevalin* because of their important role as religious teachers. Tīrthaṅkars did not have a religious teacher themselves<sup>42</sup>. Tīrthaṅkar means 'ford maker'. The title refers to the path of liberation their religious teachings describe and to the fourfold Jain community of nuns, monks, laywomen, and laymen that they have established<sup>43</sup>. Tīrthaṅkars are also known as Jinas, meaning conquerors (of *saṃsār*), from which the term Jainism is derived.

Karma is fine, physical matter that permeates the cosmos. It clings to the unliberated soul preventing it from attaining *mokṣa* and so causing the unhappy state of bondage in *saṃsār*<sup>44</sup>. It does this by defiling the soul's knowledge of its own nature. Karma is attracted to the soul by physical, mental or verbal action, but it is passion, the emotive motivation inherent in all action, that causes it to stick to the soul with a binding effect. Once stuck, karma produces an action

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<sup>42</sup> Dundas 1992, p33.

<sup>43</sup> Babb, 1996, p5. Cort 1995a, p474.

<sup>44</sup> For types of karma and their effects see Jaini 1998, pages 131 to 133.

related to that by which it was attracted, before naturally falling away from the soul. All karma has a binding effect, so it is anomalous to describe any karma as 'good'. However, some karma produces *pāp*, unpleasant results, and some produces *puṇya*, pleasing results. The most meritorious karma one can hope to attract is that which enables one to pursue life as a mendicant, the only incarnation from which one can attain the ultimate goal of *mokṣa*. It is the interaction between soul and karma that causes the soul to be trapped in the endless stream of action and reaction. *Mokṣa* is therefore attained by avoiding, decreasing, and eventually totally ridding the soul of karma. It is the purpose of religious practice to achieve this through various forms of worship, asceticism and meditation. These practices lead gradually and arduously to a state of physical and psychological non-attachment in which one is totally devoid of passion. This passionless state allows the soul to realise its own nature, eliminating the false belief, induced by karma, that it is part of, or attached to, the physical body or material world.

The Jaina's aim then, is to purge their soul of karma in order to attain liberation. Anything detrimental to this aim is *hiṃsā* (harmful). Any mental, physical or verbal action that causes pain to another soul causes *hiṃsā* to one's own soul. This is the soteriological reason why Jains practise *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). *Ahiṃsā* is Jainism's principal ethical stance. On a practical level it means not causing violence to any living being. This is particularly difficult considering that the cosmos is saturated with life forms. Many of Jainism's characteristic practices arise from attempts to reduce and avoid *hiṃsā*. For example, *ahiṃsā* forms the basis of the *aṇuvrats*, the vows taken by the laity, and of the *mahāvrats*, the vows taken by the ascetic community. Religious practice leading to *mokṣa* is therefore a combination of *ahiṃsā* and non-attachment. Harm to one's own soul is reduced by avoiding causing harm to others, and the binding

properties of karma are further eluded by detaching one's self from the effects of physical, verbal and mental action.

A soul that has attained *mokṣa* is pure, totally free from the contamination of karma. The gradual process of purification is charted by the *guṇasthāns*, which are the fourteen stages of purity through which the soul has to pass before attaining *mokṣa*. Each *guṇasthān* demarcates precisely the type and quantity of karma from which the soul has been freed, or that it has temporarily suppressed<sup>45</sup>. The fourth *guṇasthān* is of great significance. It is achieved when a soul experiences *samyag darśan* (true insight) by suppressing the insight deluding *darśan mohanīya* karmas. This experience is the first glimpse the soul has of its true nature and is the moment when the Jain first steps onto the *mokṣa mārg*, which is the path to liberation<sup>46</sup>. The aspirant that has reached the fifth *guṇasthān* takes the *aṇuvrats* (lay vows). The *mahāvrats*, (mendicant vows) are taken at the sixth *guṇasthān*. The ascetic techniques practised by the mendicant continue to purify the soul until all karma affecting the soul's perception is finally dispelled and it experiences omniscience (achieves the status of *arhat* or Jina). This is the thirteenth *guṇasthān*. The fourteenth *guṇasthān* occurs at the moment of death, when karma associated with embodiment is exhausted. This is followed by *mokṣa*. Liberation is not inevitable and the *guṇasthāns* may be descended as well as ascended. However, it is believed that with correct effort a soul can attain *mokṣa* within a minimum fifteen life spans of its first experience of *samyag darśan*. The process of liberation is also affected by cosmic factors. In

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<sup>45</sup> Dundas describes the *guṇasthāns* as “stages of quality” (1992, p130). Jaini describes them as “stages of purification” (1998, p141). For a list of the fourteen *guṇasthāns* and their relationship with karma see Jaini 1998, pages 272 to 273.

<sup>46</sup> Jaini 1998, pages 141 to 142.

the current era of this part of the universe it is not possible to ascend beyond the seventh *guṇasthān* and to attain even this level would be extraordinarily rare.

In the past Jainism has sometimes been described as an atheistic tradition because it does not accept a creator God<sup>47</sup>. This description is misrepresentative of the Jain interpretation of the cosmos, in which exist Gods and gods<sup>48</sup>. ‘Gods’ are liberated souls, ‘gods’ are the celestial beings that inhabit the seven heavens, have superhuman powers and enjoy luxurious lifestyles. The gods (celestial beings) represent ideal worshippers and bow before the Gods (liberated souls) who, because of their liberated state, are worthy of veneration<sup>49</sup>. The cosmos is believed to be uncreated and eternal, finite in size, but vast beyond human imaginings. It is composed of two substances: *jīva* (consciousness) and *ajīva* (not consciousness). The latter is described as matter, which includes time, space, motion and non-motion, as well as physical matter. *Jīva* is the soul. Whereas matter can join and separate to form substances of various modes and qualities, *jīva* is constant and cannot interact with matter. At the base of the cosmos are the seven realms of hell, above them is *madhya loka*, the ‘Middle World’, which is the domain of human habitation, and above this are the seven celestial realms<sup>50</sup>. At the very top of the cosmos is *īśatprāgbhārā* (the slightly curving place), also called *siddha loka*, where liberated souls reside in a state of *mokṣa*<sup>51</sup>. The soul needs a human incarnation to attain *mokṣa*, which necessitates birth in *madhya loka*. In this realm liberation is only possible in regions known as *karma bhūmi*, and even then only during specific eras. *Karma bhūmi* regions undergo perpetual cyclic phases,

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<sup>47</sup> Dundas 1996, pages 77 and 94.

<sup>48</sup> Cort 1989, pages 408 to 413.

<sup>49</sup> Babb 1996, p79. Babb 1998, p143.

<sup>50</sup> Dundas 1992, p78. Jaini 1998, pages 29 to 32.

<sup>51</sup> Dundas 1992, p79. Jaini 1998, p270.

six of *utsarpiṇī* (ascent) and six of *avasarpiṇī* (descent), as joy and despair slide in and out of balance. Our world is currently in the fifth phase of *avasarpiṇī*.

The attainment of *mokṣa* is limited to the third and fourth phases of each half cycle because it is only during these periods that Tīrthaṅkars can be born (twenty-four during each half cycle).

However, of the *karma bhūmi* regions one territory, *Mahāvideha*, remains in the third phase and enjoys the constant presence and preaching of a Tīrthaṅkar (currently Simandhar Svami), so from here *mokṣa* can be attained at any time<sup>52</sup>. The structure and mechanism of the cosmos explains why liberation is not possible in our current incarnation, but encourages religious effort by the opportunity of rebirth in *Mahāvideha*.

Jains are organised into ascetic communities of *sādhvīs*, female mendicants, and *sādhus* or *munis*, male mendicants; and lay communities of women and men<sup>53</sup>. This fourfold sangh was established and re-established by the Tīrthaṅkars through the efforts of their immediate disciples<sup>54</sup>. There is an established hierarchy within mendicant communities of *sādhū*, *upādhyāy* and *ācārya*. All three are initiated mendicants and should therefore have attained self realisation. *Sādhū* are at the lowest stage, they are still studying scripture and have no pupils of their own. *Upādhyāy* are at a higher stage, but are also still studying and have a small group of pupils. *Ācārya* are at the top of the hierarchy and have a large number of pupils. Śvetāmbar mendicants by far outnumber their Digambar counterparts<sup>55</sup>. Mendicants embody the doctrinal ideal of

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<sup>52</sup> Jaini 1998, pages 30 to 31.

<sup>53</sup> For a gender non-specific term Cort prefers 'mendicant', he avoids 'nun' and 'monk' because of their Christian connotation (1991a, p667, note 1). Dundas opts for 'ascetic' as a gender non-specific term, (1992, p131). Some of the ascetics in the Srimad Rajcandra tradition are lay people, so the term 'mendicant' is used throughout this thesis to avoid confusion. When the mendicant is female the term '*sādhvī*' is used and '*muni*' is used when the mendicant is male.

<sup>54</sup> Jaini 1998, p35. See also Babb who writes that one meaning of '*tirth*' is, "the community, established by the Tīrthaṅkar, of ascetics and laity who put his teachings into practice" (1996, p5).

<sup>55</sup> Cort 1989, p307.

Jainism. They renounce worldly life and all possessions to follow a peripatetic existence and undertake arduous ascetic practices. Their renounced state is an external sign of their internal purity (mendicants should have attained the sixth *guṇasthān*). It is this level of internal purity and the religious knowledge associated with it that gives them religious authority over the laity. Mendicants are supported materially by the laity through donations of food and the provision of *upāśrays* for which the lay person hopes to gain *puṇya*<sup>56</sup>.

The laity are householders. They receive religious instruction from listening to the mendicants' discourses, although a considerable amount of theological discourse and understanding is also generated from within the lay community<sup>57</sup>. Many, but not all, Jains worship in temples before consecrated images of the Tīrthaṅkars. Lay Jains perform a range of rites and rituals in veneration of the Tīrthaṅkars and sometimes of other ascetics too. As mentioned earlier in this Introduction, deities are also sometimes the object of worship. Ideally the lay person aspires to mendicancy, but in practice the percentage of lay Jains who become mendicants is small. In theory, to make the transition from householder to mendicant a lay person takes the *aṇuvrats*. These are a series of arduous ascetic vows that differ from mendicant vows only in the degree to which they are observed<sup>58</sup>. After sixty six months these finally lead to an initiation ceremony (*dīkṣā*) during which the *mahāvrat*s, the five great vows of mendicancy, are taken<sup>59</sup>. These are:

1. *Ahiṃsā*, non-violence
2. *Satya*, honesty
3. *Asteya*, taking nothing that has not been freely given

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<sup>56</sup> *Upāśrays* are halls, usually attached to temples, where mendicants stay for short periods and from where they deliver religious discourses.

<sup>57</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>58</sup> Cort 1989, p238.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid pages 146 to 148.



4. *Brahmacārya*, celibacy (or fidelity for the lay person)

5. *Aparigraha*, non-attachment (restriction of wealth for the lay person)<sup>60</sup>.

At this time novice mendicants renounce all association with their worldly life, including familial contact, and famously pluck the hair from their own head. However, Laidlaw comments that in practice it is rare for a mendicant to have taken lay vows prior to their initiation<sup>61</sup>. Once initiated, the ritualistic style of worship practised as a lay person ceases and is replaced by a scheme of internal and external ascetic practices designed specifically to dispel karma from the soul and which include ‘Six Obligatory Actions’. Dundas lists these as “equanimity (*samayika*)..., praise of the fordmakers [Jinas], homage to the teacher, repentance (*pratikramana*), laying down the body (*kayotsarga*) and abandonment (*pratyakṣhyana*)”<sup>62</sup>.

For eight months of the year mendicants are peripatetic. They travel in small groups of two or three, meet with their *ācārya* approximately once a year and settle in one place only during the monsoon season. In many practical senses mendicants form communities of individuals. With reference to Digambar mendicants in Southern India Carrithers writes that “it is difficult to conceive a more radical form of *individualism* either in ideas or practice”<sup>63</sup>. It is perhaps this accent on autonomy that has contributed to the rich crop of diversity found in Jainism.

Nevertheless, throughout the course of Jain history its fundamental tenets appear to have remained notably constant. Cort comments that “...Jain doctrine may demonstrate a stability that is remarkable, and possibly even unique among the world’s religious traditions.”<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid p239.

<sup>61</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 160 and 174. Also Cort 1989, p258.

<sup>62</sup> Dundas 1992, p146. For details of ascetic lifestyle and practice see Jaini 1998, chapter 8, and Dundas 1992, chapter 6.

<sup>63</sup> Carrithers 1989, p219.

<sup>64</sup> Cort 2000b, p166.

dynamic between the mendicant and lay communities is far more involved in practice than this outline suggests. Cort records that the Śvetāmbar mendicant, Ācārya Padmasagarsuri, took a lead role in the inauguration of a new temple in Ahmedabad in 1985. Cort found the content of the *ācārya*'s sermon surprising, not for its spiritual content, but for the use of worldly anecdotes and for the fundraising pitch he made at the end of his sermon<sup>65</sup>. Kelting explains that the presence of a male mendicant is necessary at grand ceremonies, such as the inauguration of a new temple or mendicant initiation, but that the majority of Jain rituals are presided over by religious specialists from the lay community<sup>66</sup>. Whilst conducting fieldwork for this thesis I was surprised to meet *sādhvīs* (but not *munis*) at two different ashrams dedicated to Srimad, at Sayla and Koba, both in Gujarat. These mendicants attended the gurus' *svādhyāy* (religious discourses) and in a few rare cases had actually become disciples of one guru, Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai at Sayla<sup>67</sup>. This is remarkable because the gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement are lay people.

This outline of Jainism is accurate from an academic perspective, but it gives a two-dimensional and rather theoretical portrait. As discussed in the first section of this Introduction, Jainism in practice encompasses a great many variations on the themes described here. This is most readily confirmed by observing the number of sects and sub-sects to have emerged during its historical development. The most debated and probably the earliest schism split Jainism into its two main branches, Digambar and Śvetāmbar, from which most forms of the religion stem. Jains do not agree about the historical origins of the split, in fact Dundas comments that accounts of it are

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<sup>65</sup> Cort 2001, pages 3 to 5.

<sup>66</sup> Kelting 2001, p141.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter Three.

born from “sectarian bitterness” and are of “little historical worth”<sup>68</sup>. According to one account, in approximately 300 BCE famine drove part of the mendicant community, led by Ācārya Bhadrabahu, south to Mysore in Karnataka where the mendicants resided for twelve years, during which time Bhadrabahu died<sup>69</sup>. When some of the mendicants returned north to Patna, they discovered that in their absence, under the direction of Ācārya Sthulabhadra, a canon of sacred texts had been collated and the *munis* had taken to wearing a single white cloth. The returning mendicants’ refusal to accept these changes resulted in the Śvetāmbar /Digambar split<sup>70</sup>. Another account suggests that the Digambar sect originated six hundred and nine years after Mahavir’s death when, in response to Mahavir’s sermon, ‘The Way of the Conquerors’, a Śvetāmbar apostate called Shivabhuti relinquished his clothes (a habit that had died out with Mahavir’s disciple Jambu) for which he was expelled from his *gacch* (mendicant order). According to Śvetāmbar beliefs Shivabhuti and his immediate followers went on to found the ‘heretical’ Digambar form of Jainism<sup>71</sup>. Dundas suggests it is more plausible to assume that a gradual differentiation in the beliefs and practices of Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jains was finalised at the Council of Valabhi at Saurashtra (either 453 or 466), during which the Śvetāmbar canon was fixed and at which no Digambar Jains were present<sup>72</sup>.

Digambar Jainism does not believe that Tīrthaṅkars engage in human activity, that women can attain enlightenment, or in the authenticity of the canon formulated by Śvetāmbar Jainism<sup>73</sup>.

Digambar *munis* are naked, they do not carry begging bowls and beg for food only once a day.

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<sup>68</sup> Dundas 1992, p42.

<sup>69</sup> Dundas translates ‘*durbhikṣā*’ (famine) as, ‘a time when it is difficult to gain alms’ (1992, p41).

<sup>70</sup> Jaini 1998, p5. Dundas 1992, p41.

<sup>71</sup> Dundas 1992, p41.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid pages 41 to 44. Also see Dundas 1985, pages 163 to 164. Folkert questions whether a fixed canon was established at the Council of Valabhi (1993, p46).

<sup>73</sup> Folkert does not accept that scriptural disagreement is a major issue between Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jainism. (1993, pages 50 to 51).

Śvetāmbar Jainism believes that Tīrthaṅkars are simultaneously omniscient and engage in human activity and that women can attain enlightenment. Śvetāmbar mendicants are clothed, carry begging bowls and beg for food two or three times daily<sup>74</sup>. Images of Tīrthaṅkars in Digambar temples are naked and unadorned, whereas Śvetāmbar images wear royal regalia and their facial features are coloured and bejewelled. Differences in the appearance of the images are matched by differences in the execution of *pūjā* (rituals of veneration). Śvetāmbar worshipers have physical contact with the images during *pūjā* whereas Digambar worshipers maintain a respectful distance and do not touch the images. Despite these noticeable differences the structure and religious meaning of the *pūjā* ritual appears to be essentially common to both sects. Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jains do not share sacred spaces and do not generally interact<sup>75</sup>. Babb comments that, as they belong to different castes, their social interaction is also limited<sup>76</sup>.

This discussion has shown that the Jain community is represented in its broadest sense by various different groups and sects. Some of those better known to academia are listed in the table below<sup>77</sup>. The results of continued academic interest in Jainism will no doubt expand the list in time, as the extent of its diversity is gradually revealed. This thesis aims to include the Srimad Rajcandra movement in the list below. All the groups listed have their roots in either Digambar or Śvetāmbar Jainism, but it is difficult to append Srimad Rajcandra's followers to either of these branches.

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<sup>74</sup> Jaini 1998, pages 39 to 40.

<sup>75</sup> Collaboration is found outside of India. For example, the Jain temple at Leicester, UK, has areas suitable for Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jains to worship.

<sup>76</sup> Babb 1996, p4.

<sup>77</sup> Information in the table is taken from Banks 1992, p31; Cort 1989, pages 93 to 97; Dundas 1992, pages 119 to 124 and 211 to 232; Kelting 2001, pages 9 to 11; and Sangave 1997, pages 6 to 11. Babb (1996, p17) and Laidlaw (1995, p53) have observed that most Śvetāmbar Jains from Gujarat are associated with the Tapa Gacch and most Śvetāmbar Jains from Jaipur in Rajasthan are associated with the Khartar Gacch.

Srimad's father was Vaiṣṇava and his mother was a Sthānakvāsī Jain. Srimad himself advocated image worship (a transition made early in his adult life) and his followers will worship in Digambar or Śvetāmbar temples, depending on their personal preference. For example, the ashram at Koba has a Digambar temple, the ashram at Sayla has a Śvetāmbar temple, and the ashram at Agas has both types. The reasons for this, which should become clear throughout the course of the thesis, originate with Srimad's aversion to sectarianism and with the formative influences on each individual community of Srimad's followers.

ŚVETĀMBAR			DIGAMBAR	
Name	Founder		Name	Founder
Khartar Gacch	Vardhamana (d.1031)		Bisapanth	
Tapā Gacch	Jagaccandra Suri (1200s)		Taranapanth (aniconic)	Tarana Svami (1448 to 1515)
Lonka Gacch	Lonka Shah (1600s)		Kanji Svami Panth	Kanji Svami (1889 to 1980)
Terāpanthī (aniconic)	Acarya Bhikshu (1726 to 1803)			
Sthānakvāsīs (aniconic)	Lavaji and Dharmasimha (1800s)			

### 3. The Srimad Rajcandra Movement in Outline.

This summary introduces the organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement and some of the beliefs and practices held by its membership. A slight emphasis on doctrinal over practical Jainism may be detected in the discussion given above. There are two reasons for this. First, there is a greater conformity in doctrinal Jainism, so it is easier to summarise. Second, Srimad Rajcandra stressed the importance of soteriology and this emphasis may have coloured my own interpretation of Jainism. According to Srimad, religious knowledge was not just a matter of scriptural learning or of taking vows, but was gained through self realisation, which he interpreted as the experience of one's soul. In his opinion many mendicants were being initiated without first having had the crucial experience of self realisation (mentioned above as marking the fourth *guṇasthān*), so although mendicants by outward appearance, they lacked the required level of internal purity and experiential religious knowledge to teach with authority. This had led Jainism towards its unhappy state of sectarian division. Srimad prioritised soteriology whilst at the same time turning away from exclusive mendicant authority.

Srimad Rajcandra (1867 to 1901) was born in Vavania, a small village of Saurashtra (also called Kathiavad) in Gujarat. He never travelled outside of India. Most of his life was spent in Gujarat and Mumbai, from where he managed a successful gem business. From childhood he was passionate about religion and he settled on Jainism when he was about sixteen. He was a prolific writer and many of his letters, poems, philosophical discourses and other writings, written predominantly in Gujarati, attest his claim that he attained a high level of internal purity. According to his biographers his public discourses attracted crowds of listeners. From this general following emerged a select group of devoted disciples with whom he corresponded at

length. Their influence directed the historical development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. He was a householder, but desired to take *dīkṣā*. This desire was denied him by his death, aged only thirty-four. A century later, Srimad's followers form a significant movement within modern Jainism, a fact that testifies to his importance as a key religious figure in this tradition. Through the vision of his followers, Srimad has made the transition from a revered lay teacher to a venerated saint, whom many regard as divine<sup>78</sup>.

Virtually all Srimad's devotees have ethnic connections with Gujarat. The majority are centred in Gujarat and Mumbai where the number of ashrams and temples dedicated to him is growing. In January 2002 over two thousand followers attended celebrations, spanning three days, to mark the opening of a third temple in Rajkot. Dedicated communities are also scattered throughout India and abroad - in East Africa, North America and Europe including Belgium and UK. Srimad's followers are likely to be found wherever there are pockets of Gujarati-speaking Jains. It has not been possible to identify a precise number of followers. Questions on this point provoked some lively debate, and figures quoted range between one hundred thousand and four hundred thousand<sup>79</sup>. Dedicated ashrams report a steady rise in membership, which indicates that Srimad's following is increasing. Yet despite the expanding community of Srimad's followers and the many temples and memorials dedicated to him, he remains relatively unknown to Jains outside his immediate following. As this Introduction will go on to show, he is also often misunderstood by academics who have stumbled across him.

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<sup>78</sup> Srimad's 'divine status' is linked to his high level of internal purity. Some followers, but not all, believe that he is currently incarnated as a celestial being, but that type of 'divinity' is not relevant here.

<sup>79</sup> There is no way to verify this figure. Dundas comments that it is a remarkably high estimate and that it includes almost one sixth of the Jain population in India. (Private communication, 2003).

'*Rāj Bhaktā Mārg*' was suggested as an inclusive term to accurately describe the entire community of Srimad's followers<sup>80</sup>. '*Bhaktā*' means 'devotee', '*Rāj*' is a short form of Srimad's name, Rajcandra, and *mārg* means path. Hence the term describes all those people who are on the path of devotion to Srimad Rajcandra and appeals as an appropriate title for this thesis. The problem of finding a fitting title was encumbered by the particular way in which the community of Srimad's followers is socially organised. His followers either gather into independent communities, or are individuals who direct their own religious practice. The movement's social organisation is fractional; it has no central administration and is better described as a collection of autonomous communities and individuals than as a single community. Communities are often located physically at a particular ashram and are in some cases centred spiritually around a living guru. Although Srimad's followers share enough in common to be discussed collectively, there is also much diversity amongst them. The Srimad Rajcandra movement is therefore a paradigm of the overall diversity found in Jainism as discussed in this Introduction.

One reason for the fractional organisation of Srimad's following stems from his religious teachings. Srimad taught that self realisation can only be attained by *sat guru bhakti*, total submission to, and veneration of, an authentic religious teacher. Different applications of this religious instruction have caused a major split in his following. One section worships Srimad alone as their guru, whereas another section worships a living guru alongside Srimad. Those who only venerate Srimad are said to follow a *parokṣ* guru, '*parokṣ*' meaning 'indirect', in this context, 'not living'. Those who are the disciples of a living guru are said to follow a *pratyakṣ* guru, '*pratyakṣ*' meaning 'perceptible', in this context, 'present and living'. It should be

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<sup>80</sup> Param Pujaya Sri Atmanandji, personal interview January 2002. Harshad Sanghrajka, August 2002.



understood that this dichotomy does not affect the individual follower's attitude towards the Tīrthaṅkars, who continue to receive appropriate veneration and ritual attention.

*Pratyakṣ* gurus are believed by their disciples to be self realised (but not all self realised people are necessarily gurus) and therefore meet the criterion stressed by Srimad that religious knowledge is gained by experience of the soul. There are currently three gurus of this type in the Srimad Rajcandra movement - Param Pujaya Sri Atmanandji, Param Pujaya Sri Nalinbhai Kothari, and Param Pujaya Sri Rakeshbhai Jhaveri - each of whom is the spiritual head of their own community of disciples. Each, along with his disciples, is also a devotee of Srimad. Externally, relations between these three communities appear good. Disciples usually regard the 'other' gurus with respect and in many cases are keen to hear or read their religious discourses. However, a disciple should commit to only one living guru, towards whom they are inevitably partisan. The disciples of these three gurus form three distinct communities of followers within the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Therefore the second reason for diversity is closely linked to the first. Srimad's teaching on guru *bhakti* has afforded the emergence of autonomous guru-centred communities.

Each community of followers that constitutes the Srimad Rajcandra movement, regardless of whether it is centred around a living guru or not, has its own particular history and distinctive religious practices. These factors, along with the major dichotomy of whether to follow a *pratyakṣ* or *parokṣ* guru, have resulted in the considerable variations observed amongst this group of Jains. This is compounded by the fact that there is no overall, spiritual or administrative body governing the movement. Nevertheless, Srimad's followers may be described collectively in terms of a movement because they show considerable conformity in

their beliefs and practices. This consolidates them and distinguishes them from other groups of Jains. For example, all followers refer to the same canon of scripture, which is the collected anthology of Srimad's writings. They all worship before the same image of Srimad, either in the form of a photograph or a statue, and they practise congregational *bhakti* by singing devotional *bhajans* (hymns), many of which were written by Srimad. The Srimad Rajcandra movement is also distinctive because it is a lay movement in which mendicant authority has been replaced with the religious authority of lay gurus.

Srimad's interpretation of Jainism focused on soteriology, which he believed to be the only genuine motive for religious practice. Fundamental to his interpretation is self realisation. His emphasis on this as a state of internal purity has led some scholars to assume that he was referring to omniscience. For example, Laidlaw writes that,

“[Srimad's] reformulation of omniscience and liberation as states of consciousness, and even more his claim actually to have attained these states, were radical and unorthodox”<sup>81</sup>.

Srimad did not profess himself liberated, but he did claim to have achieved a high stage of self realisation. The terms ‘liberation’ and ‘self realisation’ are distinct. Liberation refers to omniscience, followed by *mokṣa*, which, as previously described, is irreversible and occurs following the soul's release from all the binding effects of karma. Self realisation is the experience of the soul<sup>82</sup>. This is different to liberation because the soul is still bound, but it

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<sup>81</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p235.

<sup>82</sup> A number of different terms can be translated as ‘self realisation’, for example, *ātma gnān* (knowledge of self), *saṃyag darśan* (true vision), for clarity this thesis generally conforms to ‘self realisation’ because this is the term Srimad's followers used most frequently when discussing their religious beliefs in English.

indicates that the process of purification is underway. The first experience of self realisation is a monumental leap forward in the aspirant's religious progress because it is the first step on the path to liberation.

Self realisation is the initial goal towards which the majority of Srimad's devotees are striving. Followers agree that its achievement requires immense religious effort, but whereas for some it is a slender, theoretical possibility, for others it is a realisable goal. For example, devotees at the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas hold that no one since their second spiritual leader, Param Pujya Sri Brahmachariji (1889 to 1954), has reached a level of internal purity consonant with self realisation. Further, because this world is currently in descent towards the sixth phase of the cosmic cycle the chance of someone attaining it is extremely remote. Yet devotees at the 'Raj Sobhag Satsang Mandal' at Sayla claim to have twelve self realised people amongst their number in addition to their guru<sup>83</sup>. It has already been mentioned that disciples believe their *pratyakṣ* gurus to be self realised if they follow one. Although such different opinions obviously contribute towards the Srimad Rajcandra movement's major dichotomy, that is whether to follow a *parokṣ* or *pratyakṣ* guru, they do not actually constitute an ideological difference. Both groups of followers accept Srimad's religious teaching that it is preferable to follow a *pratyakṣ* guru, but disagree about the current availability of such a person. Srimad also taught that to follow a false guru was disastrous and that, to identify a true guru, the disciple required a level of inherent, spiritual grace. Again, both groups described above accept these teachings, but whereas the second group believe they have identified a self-realised guru, the first group doubt not only the

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<sup>83</sup> January 2002.

existence of self realised gurus, but also their ability to identify one. The risk of following a false guru is too high<sup>84</sup>.

Emphasis on the attainment of self realisation is a defining characteristic amongst Srimad's followers. Glimpses of one's own soul are synonymous with an enlightened perception of reality and herald the omniscience anticipated upon completion of the purification process, when soul experience will be uninterrupted. The experiential knowledge that results from the purification of the soul prevails over theoretical knowledge and so the self realised person has religious authority over the non self realised person. This is the distinction between a 'true' and a 'false' guru; the true guru is defined by their self realised state. True gurus have the knowledge and experience essential to successfully guide their disciples because they have already achieved the goal to which their disciples aspire. By worshipping their guru disciples aim to become like the object of their devotion; a self realised person. This is Srimad's principal religious instruction, *sat guru bhakti*, absolute devotion to a true guru.

All of Srimad's followers accept that self realisation is the essential criterion of a true guru. It goes without saying that Srimad's self realised status is unquestioned. However, as demonstrated above, there is disagreement over the self realised status of current, *pratyakṣ* gurus. It was suggested that this dichotomy does not indicate an ideological difference, neither does it indicate a vast difference in religious practices. All Srimad's followers observe his religious instruction of guru *bhakti*. *Bhakti* (devotion) encompasses many different activities, but can be summarised as total submission to one's guru - either Srimad alone, or also to a living guru.

Practices derived directly from Srimad's teaching, which include devotional singing to a

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<sup>84</sup> Srimad's interpretation of self realisation and guru *bhakti*, and their influence on the movement's organisation, are discussed in Chapter Four.

prescribed format, mantra chanting and scriptural study, are common to all communities of followers. Variations in religious practices, which include attitudes towards the treatment of Srimad's image, the range of scriptures studied, and approaches to meditation, are influenced by the spiritual heritage and historical development of each individual community of followers. The objective of religious practice is the same for all, purification of the soul through the gradual eradication of karma. Non self realised aspirants aim for their first soul experience. Self realised aspirants (including *pratyakṣ* gurus) aim to increase the frequency, duration and intensity of their soul experiences.

The emphasis Srimad placed on soteriology has influenced the meaning his followers give to religious practice and religious authority. They do not regard liberation as a goal so distant as to be virtually impossible, but rather as an achievable, even relatively imminent objective. Even those followers who consider self realisation unlikely in their current lives anticipate rebirth soon in an environment more favourable to its attainment. Religious practice, therefore, does more than identify the practitioner's religious affiliation, it is defined by its efficacy in conveying the practitioner closer to self realisation and ultimately *mokṣa*. It is guaranteed effective when the guidance of a true guru is properly observed. As explained, the true guru's internal purity gives them the advantage of knowledge and experience, which is interpreted as religious authority. So, because religious authority is synonymous with soul purification the aspirant's internal state is prioritised over their, relatively superficial, external state. This means that religious authority is not placed automatically with mendicants, but instead with those who are, according to the beliefs of followers, self realised. The observation that all the gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra

movement are lay people makes evident the significance of this shift in religious authority<sup>85</sup>. For example, Param Pujya Sri Rakeshbhai is sometimes referred to as *ācārya* by his disciples. He is not an initiated mendicant, but he is guru to several thousand disciples who believe him to have attained a high level of selfrealisation, so from this perspective he fulfils the criteria of *ācārya* for his disciples.

Srimad's interpretation of Jain philosophy is not the only reason why the Srimad Rajcandra movement developed as a lay organisation that turned away from mendicant supervision. Associated with this are his criticisms that self realisation had become a term coincidental with *dīkṣā*, rather than a genuine, internal attribute of mendicants. This attitude has filtered into the consciousness of his followers causing them to regard the mendicant community with a degree of scepticism. Also, Srimad refused to become associated with any particular sect of Jainism and so anti-sectarianism has become a fundamental principle amongst his followers. Srimad's own lay status is probably the most influential reason why his following developed as a lay movement. He did not oppose the structure of the *saṅgh* in principle and had he lived long enough to become a mendicant himself then this description of the community of his followers would no doubt be very different. The question of who would have initiated him, however, remains unresolved.

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<sup>85</sup> One exception is the Sthānakvāsī *muni* Sri Maharaj Lalluji (1845 to 1936). Lalluji was expelled from his order when he became a disciple of Srimad, although he continued his lifestyle as a mendicant he did not initiate any of his subsequent disciples.

#### 4. Resources

Academic references to the Srimad Rajcandra movement are sparse. Laidlaw describes Srimad's following as a "cult" based in Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Agas. He reports that Srimad's followers

"hold variously that he was the greatest saint of our age, that he attained omniscience, that he has been reborn in Mahavideha where there is a Jina now preaching, or that he was himself a twenty-fifth Tīrthaṅkar"<sup>86</sup>.

In Chapter Three of this thesis it is explained that there is no consensus amongst Srimad's followers about the level of spiritual purity that he attained. Some devotees, but by no means all, believe that he attained *kevalgnān*, which is equivalent to the thirteenth *guṇasthān* and the highest possible level of embodied purity. Nevertheless, followers who I interviewed did not describe Srimad outright as a Tīrthaṅkar, in fact the *pūjā* ritual performed before his image is modified precisely because he was not a Jina<sup>87</sup>. However, as this thesis will show, a number of parallels may be drawn between these devotees' treatment of Srimad and Jains' treatment of the Tīrthaṅkars. Laidlaw also writes that the first *mandir* dedicated to Srimad was built at Agas. The first images of Srimad were installed here, but the first ashram was actually built at Vadva. Shah mentions a "chain of institutions" organised by Srimad's ascetic following. Dedicated ashrams are not world-wide as Shah suggests, and, with the exception of Agas, have been founded by lay people not mendicants<sup>88</sup>. Dundas's comments are more accurate. He writes that it is impossible to quantify Srimad's following, something that my own research corroborates,

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<sup>86</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 234 to 235.

<sup>87</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>88</sup> Shah 1998, p66.

but he mentions the existence of “Srimad Rajcandra temples throughout India and in East Africa, Britain, and North America”<sup>89</sup>.

Little more information is available about Srimad himself. Glasenapp's is the earliest reference, being first published in 1925, only twenty four years after Srimad's death<sup>90</sup>. Glasenapp describes him briefly as a Sthānakvāsī layman, jeweller and poet. Of greater interest is Glasenapp's focus on Srimad's antisectarianism, which he interprets as an effort to unify and strengthen Jainism. He makes no direct reference to Srimad's literature, so perhaps this interpretation represents a contemporary response to Srimad amongst Jains during the time of Glasenapp's research. Glasenapp and Titze associate Srimad with Sthānakvāsī Jainism (probably because this was his mother's sect)<sup>91</sup>. Jaini and Shah comment on Srimad's mixed parentage, his father was Vaisnava, his mother was Sthānakvāsī Jain<sup>92</sup>. Dundas initially describes him simply as a layman, then, in his following section on Kanji Svami Panth, as Digambar, perhaps due to Srimad's influence on Kanji Svami (a fact also mentioned by Laidlaw)<sup>93</sup>. Banks and Laidlaw refer to him simply as a Jain layman from Gujarat<sup>94</sup>. The uncertainty surrounding Srimad's sectarian affiliation confirms the point made earlier in this Introduction that the Srimad Rajcandra movement does not have its roots in an established sect.

Scholars make a connection between Srimad's anti-sectarianism, his lay status and his attitude towards mendicancy. The general assumption is that he rejected all forms of mendicancy and institutional religion. For example, Laidlaw describes him as,

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<sup>89</sup> Dundas 1992, p227.

<sup>90</sup> Glasenapp 1999, p86.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid p86. Titze 1998, p165.

<sup>92</sup> Jaini 1998, p301 n43. Shah 1998, p66.

<sup>93</sup> Dundas 1992, p227. Laidlaw 1995, p235.

<sup>94</sup> Banks 1992, p208. Laidlaw 1995, p235.



“the most prominent, and possibly the most uncompromising recent representative of a line of thought that rejects institutionalized renunciation”.<sup>95</sup>

It would be more accurate to say that Srimad objected to the lowering of mendicant standards than that he opposed institutionalised renunciation altogether. Scholars also assume that his lay status is indicative of his attitude towards mendicancy. Banks writes that Srimad, “refused to become an ascetic”<sup>96</sup>, and Dundas that, “Rajcandra never thought seriously of taking ascetic initiation”<sup>97</sup>. Neither of these authors mention that Srimad desired to take *dīkṣā*, but that he died before he had the opportunity. However, their assumptions are unsurprising, bearing in mind the scepticism with which his lay following now regard the mendicant community.

Laidlaw and Banks both focus on Srimad’s asceticism and particularly on his skeletal physique at the time of his death. Laidlaw states that Srimad’s emaciated condition was “deliberately self-imposed, slowly, carefully, and by degrees”<sup>98</sup>. In two essays Banks uses Srimad as a paradigm to describe the relationship between the body, asceticism and doctrine<sup>99</sup>. He comments on “the extraordinarily emaciated body he [Srimad] cultivated towards the end of his life”<sup>100</sup>. Srimad practised a rigorous ascetic regime and detachment from the physical body is fundamental to his philosophy, but there is no evidence that, as Banks suggests, Srimad practised *sallekhanā* (ritualised, voluntary death by starvation). His emaciated condition was the result of a chronic digestive disorder, perhaps aggravated by excessive fasting, for which he was receiving medical treatment.

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<sup>95</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p235.

<sup>96</sup> Banks 1992, p208.

<sup>97</sup> Dundas 1992, p226.

<sup>98</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p233.

<sup>99</sup> Banks 1999, pages 311 to 323. Banks 1997, pages 216 to 239.

<sup>100</sup> Banks 1999, p320.

Glaserapp, Dundas and Shah refer to Srimad in chapters titled respectively, 'The Present Time', 'Recent Developments' and 'History'. These authors imply their recognition of Srimad's role in the historical development of modern Jainism by placing him in these sections, although his influence is not explored. Glaserapp discusses Srimad alongside other Jains, lay and ascetic, from the same period, who took a reform or modernisation initiative. Dundas groups him with reformers such as Lonka Shah and Kanji Svami. Shah also mentions him alongside Kanji Svami and the influential Jain layman Virchand Raghavji Gandhi (1864 to 1901). Banks categorises Srimad in what he terms as "neo-orthodox" Jainism, which he describes as individual knowledge and discipline that shuns sectarian asceticism<sup>101</sup>. Banks concludes that Srimad aimed to develop a form of Jainism suitable for modern times. Although it is unlikely that this was Srimad's principal intention, particularly towards the end of his life, the Srimad Rajcandra movement that evolved in his wake does in many ways meet Banks's conclusion.

With the exception of Glaserapp, all of the scholars mentioned above refer to Srimad's relationship with Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869 to 1948). This may be because Gandhi's writings provide the most accessible source on Srimad. Linked to this point, as Dundas comments, Srimad is best known outside of the community of his followers for his relationship with Gandhi<sup>102</sup>. Shah and Jaini both credit Srimad with introducing Gandhi to the philosophy of *ahimsā* which, as history records, he used as a "political weapon"<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> Banks 1992, p208.

<sup>102</sup> Dundas 1992, p226.

<sup>103</sup> Shah 1998 vol.1, pages 66 to 67. Jaini 1998, p314.

Dundas's account of Srimad is the most comprehensive and balanced<sup>104</sup>. He has attempted to voice the philosophical motivation behind Srimad's anti-sectarianism and attitude to mendicancy. Dundas writes that

“Srimad Rajcandra was a layman who attempted to point to the truth of Jainism on the basis of direct personal experience”<sup>105</sup>.

Shah also tries to match practice with philosophy. He explains that followers observe the “usual Jain rituals”, but that “Srimad Rajcandra expressed the importance of ethics and self realisation over rituals”, and that he “emphasised the real goal of Jain teachings - the liberation of the soul from karmic bondage”<sup>106</sup>. Jaini, by allowing Srimad to speak for himself, represents Srimad's religious outlook most poignantly. He concludes his book by quoting Srimad's response to Mahatma Gandhi's question, ‘Should a person kill a poisonous snake, or suffer its venomous bite?’, with the remark that it epitomises the “spirit of Jainism”<sup>107</sup>. In summary Srimad's response is that the suffering endured by killing the snake is greater than that of its venomous bite.

The picture of Srimad Rajcandra gleaned by these references is limited and many of the statements made need qualifying. One significant observation of all these accounts is that they do not mention an organised community of Srimad's followers. Other prominent scholars working on Jainism in Gujarat, for example Cort and Kelting, fail to acknowledge Srimad Rajcandra or his following at all.

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<sup>104</sup> Dundas 1992, pages 224 to 227.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid p224.

<sup>106</sup> Shah 1998 vol.1, pages 198 and 257.

<sup>107</sup> Jaini 1998, pages 314 to 315. See Chapter Four of this thesis.

A greater volume of literature about Srimad originates from within the community of his followers. Although, again, little is written about the followers themselves. Accounts of Srimad's life may be regarded as hagiographic<sup>108</sup>. They are, naturally, devotional in tone, treat him with reverence and take every opportunity to expose him as a saintly figure and a man of rare spiritual ability. Even the worldly aspects of his family and business life are given a religious gloss. For example, Srimad's scrupulous honesty in business is stressed and his marriage is justified as a karmic debt to his wife. His mundane life and his supernatural abilities, which are believed to be by-products of his advanced religious state, are overshadowed by the overwhelming nature of his spirituality. Yet these texts do not lose sight of Srimad as an 'ordinary person'. His ordinariness emphasises the extent of his religious effort and achievement.

*Jeevan Kala* is the most comprehensive monograph. It records various aspects of Srimad's life, reviews some of his literature, focuses on Srimad's own spirituality and his relationship with his mendicant disciples. It was written by Sri Brahmachariji Govardhandas (1889 to 1945) who was a close disciple of Maharaj Sri Lalluji (1854 to 1936), who was himself one of Srimad's principal disciples. Lalluji supervised and approved the text of *Jeevan Kala*,<sup>109</sup> and although Shrimad's own writings provide the main source, this personal element shines through. *Jeevan Kala* was first published by the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas in 1938 as part of the inaugural celebrations of the Srimad Rajcandra Mandir at Bhadran in Gujarat. The first English edition was translated from the original Gujarati by Dinubhai. Mulji Patel and published in 1991. It was

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<sup>108</sup> Discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>109</sup> Satiya 1989, p11.

launched as part of the celebrations during the installation of Srimad's photographs in the new *svādhyāy* hall at Agas.

*Shrimad Rajchandra A Life*, by Digish Mehta (Department of English at Gujarat University), was written in English and first published by the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas in 1978 (second edition 1991, third edition 1999). Digish Mehta is not a devotee of Srimad, but his account is nevertheless sympathetic and reverent. He has translated portions of Srimad's writings and made character assessments based on these. The foreword, written by Rasiklal Parikh (Sanskritist and an authority on Srimad's writings), acknowledges the difficulty a modern audience may have in accepting, or at least regarding with an open mind, Srimad's metaphysical characteristics. This issue is significant because the ways in which Srimad's followers interpret these characteristics give an important insight into their perception of him.

*A Great Seer*, by Dr. Saryuben Mehta and Bhogilal G. Sheth, is an expansion of the summary of Dr. Mehta's doctoral thesis<sup>110</sup>. Written in English, it was published in 1971 by the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas. It has a biographical section which emphasises Srimad's spiritual development, a broad selection of his letters translated into English, and reviews of some of his writings. The text also gives information about some of the ashrams and temples that have been established since Srimad's death.

*A Pinnacle of Spirituality*, by Dr. Kumarpal Desai, was published in 2000 by the international Centennial Celebrations Committee<sup>111</sup>. Dr. Desai heads the Ahmedabad branch of the Institute

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<sup>110</sup> Dr. Saryu Mehta's doctoral thesis, written in Gujarati, is about the literature of Srimad Rajeandra and is published by the 'Srimad Rajeandra Ashram' at Agas.

<sup>111</sup> International Centennial Celebrations Committee is a co-operative of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Janmabhuvan Trust' at Vavania, the 'Shree Saubhag Satsang Mandal' at Sayla, the Institute of Jainology and representatives from most other communities of Srimad's followers.

of Jainology. He is sympathetic towards Srimad, but is not a staunch follower. The book is lavishly illustrated and describes some of the important events in Srimad's life, whilst at the same time introducing points of philosophy. It was translated into English by Ashik Shah and Jaysukh Mehta, both of whom are devotees of Srimad and associated with the 'Rag Sobhag Satsang Mandal' ashram at Sayla. During the same year the International Centennial Celebrations Committee also released a film (in Gujarati and English) that follows the same format as *A Pinnacle of Spirituality*, and a double compact disk of some of Srimad's *bhajans*. These were some of the events arranged to raise awareness about Srimad and to mark the centenary of his death.

*Philosophy and Spirituality of Srimad Rajchandra* by Dr. Pungaliya is a reworking of Pungaliya's doctoral thesis. After an introductory section that outlines Srimad's biography, this text analyses Srimad's philosophical teachings with special reference to *Atma Siddhi*. Another text that focuses on Srimad's philosophy is *I Am The Soul*. This is a collection, in two volumes, of discourses on *Atma Siddhi* by the *sādhvī* (female mendicant) Dr. Tarulatabai Mahasatiji and which have been translated from Gujarati into English by a team of translators.

It cannot go unnoticed that the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas is responsible for many of the publications mentioned above. This is also true for the publication and distribution of Srimad's own writings and of his photograph. This is part of this ashram's particular influence on the formation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. In addition to the above mentioned texts there are some dedicated web-sites that provide biographical information and English translations of some of Srimad's works<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> For example, [www.atmasiddhi.com](http://www.atmasiddhi.com) and [www.geocities.com/bhavana\\_shah/shrimad/home.htm](http://www.geocities.com/bhavana_shah/shrimad/home.htm)

A wide selection of Srimad's extant works and letters have been collated and published in a single volume, called *Srimad Rajcandra*, by the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas. Many of his works have also been published independently. Some of Srimad's writings have been translated into English, these include a selection of his letters and three important texts - *Moksa Mala*<sup>113</sup>, *Atma Siddhi*<sup>114</sup> and *Apoorva Avasar*<sup>115</sup> - each of which marks a distinct phase in Srimad's religious outlook. *Moksa Mala* was published in 1886, but was written in 1883 when Srimad was sixteen, the same age when he accepted Jainism. Despite his young age it is regarded as an important work and frequently referred to by followers. *Moksa Mala* contains one hundred and eight lessons (the number of beads on a rosary) drawn from Jain mythology and historical tradition, which give a detailed summary of Jain philosophy and practice. *Atma Siddhi* is Srimad's most celebrated text. It was composed in 1896 when he was twenty-nine, about five years after he claimed to have had his first experience of self realisation. Followers regard this poem of one hundred and forty-two verses as a summary of his teachings about the nature of the soul and its liberation. For this reason it is cited most frequently throughout this thesis<sup>116</sup>. Srimad wrote *Apoorva Avasar* when he was about thirty<sup>117</sup>. It is a poem of twenty-one verses that describes the soul's progression to *mokṣa* and Srimad's desire to attain this state. This poem, like *Moksa Mala* and *Atma Siddhi*, is incorporated into followers' devotional practices. These texts have been studied to gain an understanding of Srimad's teaching and to comment on

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<sup>113</sup> 'Mala' means 'rosary', so the title translates as, 'Rosary of Liberation'.

<sup>114</sup> Usually translated by Srimad's followers as 'Self Realisation'.

<sup>115</sup> Translated by Jain Society of Rochester, New York, as 'Spiritual Progression to Salvation'. (1995).

<sup>116</sup> D.C. Mehta's English translation of *Atma Siddhi* (1978) is quoted frequently throughout this thesis. A full transcript of this translation can be viewed at [www.atmasiddhi.com](http://www.atmasiddhi.com).

<sup>117</sup> The 'Jain society of Rochester', New York, suggest the poem was written in 1897 CE, although the exact date of composition is unknown. (1995, p4).

the way they are used by his followers, but this thesis does not engage in a philosophical critique of their content.

By far the most substantial amount of data used in this thesis was collected during fieldwork.

Fieldwork taught me about the beliefs, practices and expectations of Srimad's followers, about the dynamic of the relationship between guru and disciple, and gave me first hand experience of ashram life. I gained a far greater insight into Srimad's life and world by visiting many different ashrams, temples and memorial sites than from relying on written biographies alone. Gurus and senior disciples instructed me on Srimad's teaching and philosophy. By observing communities of Srimad's followers I was able to record the patterns of organisation that presented themselves. I spent time with various communities, some of which follow a *pratyakṣ* guru and some of which do not. I also visited many places of relevance to Srimad's life. I was also fortunate to meet many Jains who are not connected with the Srimad Rajcandra tradition. I took the opportunity to perform *pūjā* rituals in both Śvetāmbar and Digambar temples. The *pūjāri* and worshippers in the Digambar temple at Deolali were extremely kind and patient when, to my dismay, I spilt the holy water during the ritual! I have referenced ethnographic data by date and location, but, with the exception of the *pratyakṣ* gurus whom I interviewed, names have been mostly withheld to protect the anonymity of those Jains who engaged in discussion with me.

My field-studies took the form of three blocks. The first of these was a period of sixteen weeks in Gujarat and Mumbai (October 1999 to February 2000), the second was six weeks in London (September to October 2001) and the third was ten weeks in Gujarat and Mumbai (December 2001 to February 2002). In addition to these blocks of field-study I also travelled to London on numerous occasions for specific events. For example, Param Pujya Sri Atmanandji's visit to UK



in June 2000 and an exhibition of Srimad's life in pictures during April the same year organised by the International Centennial Celebrations Committee. In the very early stages of my research I travelled to Leicester. There is a shrine dedicated to Srimad, with a large photograph of him, in the Jain temple there. Although there are devotees living in Leicester, my enquiries throughout the course of my research did not lead me to any dynamic and organised communities of followers similar to those who I met in London.

This Introduction has already explained that textual resources about Srimad and his following are very limited. As I knew nothing about Srimad's following prior to my first field-trip I did not have any preconceived ideas about what to expect and no specific theory to test. For this reason my first field-trip to India was a mission of discovery and I was fortunate to gather a substantial amount of data. On returning to the UK the task of organising this data for presentation in this thesis proved to be unwieldy and at times overwhelming. Not least because of the way Srimad's following is organised into distinct communities, each of which has its own historical and ideological perspective. These communities were not distinct enough from each other to be regarded as separate movements within Jainism, but were sufficiently different from each other to prevent me from treating them as one homogenous group. The difficulty of presenting this picture of Srimad's following was resolved by making the structure of the movement, and the reasons why this structure evolved, the central thrust of the thesis. With this in place, my second trip to India, although shorter, was no less fruitful. During my first visit I had amassed a large quantity of data. By the time of my second visit I had sifted this data and so had a clearer idea of the questions I needed to investigate. The purpose of my second visit was to spend time with communities that I had only had the opportunity to visit briefly during my first trip. These included Agas, Sayla and Dharampur - which had not been built at the time of my first visit to

India. Also to test the accuracy of the observations I had made during my first trip and to pursue a more specific line of questioning in my data gathering. All this sounds somewhat clinical. In practice, much of the data gathered by the field-worker is that which the study group chooses to divulge. It is for this reason that I am confident that the authorial voice in this thesis lay largely with the practitioners. The purpose of my field-study in London was to observe diaspora communities of Srimad's followers, which is an important dimension of this Jain movement. It is interesting to note that I first met many London based devotees in India because their visit to their favoured ashram coincided with my own. It was in India then, that I made all the contacts for arranging field-study in London. There are diaspora communities of Srimad's followers in Belgium and North America. Again I met many of these devotees whilst in India, where I was able to ask them about their religious practices when at home. Unfortunately, my funding was not sufficiently elastic for a trip to USA in order to make my own observations.

Before my first field-trip to India I knew nothing of the Srimad Rajcandra movement, so had little idea of what to expect. (Although I had travelled in India two years earlier). Nevertheless, I had clear plans about how I intended to organise my field-study and what I hoped to achieve from it. My intention was to travel independently to as many sites associated with Srimad's life as I could to gain a better understanding of his environment. I had catalogued these sites from reading different biographies of Srimad. Then I intended to stay at the ashrams at Agas and at Koba. I knew of Agas through its publishing activities and I knew of Koba from a pamphlet that my supervisor had given to me. I had written to the trustees of both ashrams before leaving UK to introduce myself and to explain my reasons for wishing to spend sometime at the ashrams. In both cases my request to visit was accepted, although no firm dates were arranged at this stage.

From almost the moment that I arrived in India my own plans were swept from me and replaced, with great improvement, by Srimad's followers themselves.

When I first arrived in India I had one point of contact. My Gujarati teacher in Cardiff had put me in touch, via email, with a family she knew living in Mumbai. This family very kindly agreed to meet me at Mumbai airport and invited me to stay with them for a few days whilst I made my travel arrangements. I knew that the family were Jains and they knew that I was a doctoral student researching modern Jainism. When I arrived I explained the nature of my research in detail to my hosts. They were not followers of Srimad themselves, but the mother of the family told me that her father and her husband's cousin were devotees of Srimad. Phone calls were made and introductions hurriedly arranged. These initial contacts were the result of remarkable providence and proved to be vital in taking me to places and introducing me to communities that it may have been impossible for me to reach on my own.

The cousin in question was a disciple of Param Pujya Sri Rakeshbhai. We spoke on the telephone and he said he would ask Rakeshbhai's permission for me to attend *bhakti*. Permission was granted and arrangements were made for me to be collected and driven almost an hour across town to the venue where Rakeshbhai's disciples meet for *bhakti*. I had to be ready to leave at five am. It was to my extraordinary good fortune then, that within forty-eight hours of arriving in India I was sitting on the floor at five forty five in the morning, on the top floor of an apartment block in Mumbai, along with approximately three hundred of Srimad's devotees who were enjoying their early morning *bhakti*. At the front of the hall facing the congregation was a large, garlanded photograph of Srimad, Rakeshbhai, dressed in white, sat on the floor alongside his disciples, at the head of the congregation. I had not heard of Rakeshbhai before, neither did I

know about the other living gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement, but very soon I learned of their importance in the structure and vitality of Srimad's following. *Bhakti* ended at seven thirty and almost immediately a queue of disciples formed before Rakeshbhai who was now seated at a table. Under the wing of the aforementioned cousin I joined the queue and was hustled towards the front. The purpose of the queue, which appeared to be something of a free-for-all, was an opportunity for disciples to ask their guru a brief question or to request an appointment for a longer interview. The problem was that only the first half dozen or so disciples were seen, so it was important to be at the front of the queue and hence the rapidity with which it formed. My turn came. Covering my mouth with a folded white handkerchief that I had been handed, I introduced myself to Rakeshbhai. To my surprise he already knew of me and my reason for being in India because he had seen the letter that I had sent to Koba ashram. He gave his blessing for my work and suggested we meet the following day for a longer interview.

At that interview he asked me about my plans and strategies for my work, which I told him. He offered the co-operation and assistance of himself and his disciples. Not only was this a great personal honour on my behalf, but also proved to be of vital importance in negotiating relationships within this community. Myself and my work had Rakeshbhai's endorsement, this meant that his disciples had no qualms about my presence among them or about explaining their beliefs to me. In fact, Rakeshbhai's approval encouraged them in this because they equated service to me as service to their guru - Rakeshbhai - and to Srimad. This service included demonstrating endless patience and enthusiasm in discussing their religious beliefs and practices with me. It also covered many practical things such as ensuring I was aware of expected protocols. Rakeshbhai nominated certain of his disciples to cater for my needs. One couple, of a similar age to myself, agreed willingly for me to stay with them in their apartment for the

duration of my seven week stay in Mumbai. Another very intelligent young woman met me daily for several hours over the course of a week to give me a detailed exposition of *Atma Siddhi*. She and her brother accompanied me on a trip to Deolali. Rakeshbhai asked another disciple to orientate me with the libraries and bookshops in Mumbai. For all of these kindnesses I was extremely grateful. Although my Jain friends were gracious in accepting my gratitude, they always responded that it was their greater pleasure to fulfil their guru's instruction, which was to help me. It is clear that had Rakeshbhai not offered me his approval then my fieldwork amongst his community of disciples would have been impossible.

It was not until the latter half of my time in India that I returned to Mumbai to spend time with Rakeshbhai's disciples, for shortly after my first interview with him I left Mumbai for Gujarat. I mentioned that my host family when I first arrived in India also introduced me to another of Srimad's followers, Dirubhai, who was the father of this family's mother. Whereas the previously mentioned cousin was the disciple of a living guru, Dirubhai did not accept the authority of *pratyakṣ* gurus and so it was at a very early stage in my research that I became aware of this major dichotomy in Srimad's following. Dirubhai had planned a ten day tour of sites in Gujarat associated with Srimad to commemorate the anniversary of Srimad's birth November. He asked if I would like to accompany him and of course I willingly accepted his offer. For the most part we travelled by rail and bus, and on occasion hired a taxi for day trips. We stayed frequently with Dirubhai's family and friends, who welcomed me into their homes with warmth and interest, and through whom I gained an insight into the dynamics of Indian family life. The trip that Dirubhai had planned included Srimad's birthplace at Vavania, the site of his death and of his cremation at Rajkot, Nadiad, where he composed *Atma Siddhi* and Uttarasanda, where he

first experienced self realisation. So, my original plan of visiting Srimad related sites in Gujarat was fulfilled, but with the added bonus of an expert guide.

At the end of our tour Dirubhai delivered me to Koba ashram by rikshaw, where I was greeted by some of the trustees. I had phoned the ashram a few days before to secure the date and time of my arrival. I made my farewells to Dirubhai with promises to phone and to see him when I returned to Mumbai. The office manager showed to my flat and arranged for my luggage to be taken up. At Koba I had a flat to myself that consisted of a bed-sitting room, bathroom and kitchen. The kitchen had no real cooking facilities so I took my meals in the communal kitchen with most of the other residents. Sometimes I was invited to eat with people in their own flats or bungalows on site. Before I had time to unpack my luggage the trustees showed me around the site and explained something of the running of the ashram to me. I was conscious that I had not yet met the guru, Sri Atmanandji, to introduce myself, which I felt was a high priority. When I first saw him I recognised him easily because he was dressed in white. I introduced myself and thanked him for allowing me to stay at the ashram. He said someone would come to speak with me soon. The conversation was short, but I felt more at ease having spoken to him. Soon after, a woman disciple of a similar age to myself and a permanent resident at the ashram came to my flat. She questioned me thoroughly about myself, my research and my reasons for wanting to stay at Koba. I had a strong feeling that I was being 'checked-out', but I could understand the reasons for this and I answered her questions as fully as I could. After explaining something about my personal background I told her that I wanted to learn more about Srimad, about his followers and to improve my Gujarati. I learned that at Koba, as well as the other sites that I visited, openness about myself was certainly the best policy for two reasons. Firstly, the people that I met were so open about themselves towards me, that it felt only proper to echo this back to

them. Secondly, I felt it important from an ethical perspective to ensure that my host communities knew the purpose of my staying with them. Throughout the course of our discussion Atmanandji's disciple became convinced of my integrity and the legitimacy of my interest in Srimad and Koba. She explained the rules of the ashram to me. We soon became firm friends. Later the same day I was summoned to a formal, but friendly meeting with Atmanandji and some of the trustees. Like Rakeshbhai, Atmanandji gave his blessing for my work and offered his assistance. Again, this was vital for my acceptance among the community at Koba. I was invited to join a pilgrimage that had been arranged to visit some sites associated with Srimad's life and some of the other ashrams, which I accepted eagerly. Atmanandji also said he would arrange for me to take Gujarati lessons in Ahmedabad, which he did so very swiftly. Atmanandji introduced me and explained my presence to the ashram's residents after morning *pūjā* the following day, whilst everyone remained congregated in the *svādhyāy* hall. I soon settled into a routine at Koba of attending *pūjā* in the morning, taking a forty minute rikshaw journey to Ahmedabad for two hours of Gujarati tuition. Returning to Koba for lunch, after which I concentrated on my research. After dinner I often joined Atmanandji and his disciples for their early evening walk, then attended *bhakti* in the evening. I stayed for seven weeks at Koba during which time I became accepted as a member of the community there and joined in, as far as I could, many of the events that took place.

Problems with the railway meant that my return journey to Mumbai had to be interrupted by a short stay at Rajkot, during which I took a day trip to Sayla. This turned out to be most fortuitous as I was introduced to people who were to become very important to my research. Srimad's followers who are associated with Sayla ashram have formed a dynamic and organised community in London. My entry into this community, which became a major focus for my UK

based field-research, was gained by contacts made with London based devotees during my day trip to Sayla ashram. When back in UK I attended sessions of *bhakti* and meditation (although the community's secret *bīj gnān* was not revealed to me) organised by this community, as well as lectures on Srimad's *Atma Siddhi* led by a senior, self realised, devotee. Here, as with my research in India, I took the opportunity to discuss with disciples their religious beliefs and practices, particularly their needs as diaspora Jains. The contacts that I made in London eased my stay at Sayla ashram during my second trip to India, as I was already a familiar face to some people. Here, as with the other ashrams, endorsement from the guru, Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai, and senior disciples, was important to the success of my field-work.

My experience from field-research in India and in London was that negotiating relationships successfully depended upon winning the approval of whoever was in a place of authority in each community. In the case of ashrams where there was a guru, this had to be the guru. At Agas, where there is no living guru, and where I stayed for ten days during my second visit to India, this was the trustees. The culture of openness and straightforwardness within the Srimad Rajcandra movement facilitated the productivity of my field-research, as did my own willingness to reciprocate this openness. I gained the trust of community members by participating with community activities so that people became used to my presence.

Participation and observation were essential to my data gathering, as was conducting interviews. Most interviews with devotees were informal and better described as discussions. Sometimes I conducted semi-structured interviews if there was a specific line of questioning that I needed to pursue. I would take notes during these interviews if I could, and write them up as soon as possible. Interviews with gurus were almost always structured. In most cases I provided a list of



questions in advance. I taped these interviews on a dictaphone and transcribed them completely on my return to UK. I never interviewed a guru alone. Some disciples, of the guru's choosing, were always present. In the case of Rakeshbhai this was just one other, in the case of Atmanandji - who I interviewed most frequently - it varied. One time our discussion was relayed by tannoy across the whole site, another time my questions were answered before the congregation in the *svādhyāy* hall. One disciple confided that he had appreciated sitting in at one of my interviews with Atmanandji because I was free to ask some very basic questions that he would have felt inhibited about asking himself. Atmanandji sometimes arranged for our interviews to be videotaped, copies of which I was supplied with.

The vast majority of my interviews with gurus and disciples were conducted in English. Rakeshbhai and Atmanandji both spoke English well, as did very many of their disciples. On occasion I required the assistance of a translator. For example, my guide, who was a disciple of Rakeshbhai, translated during my interview with three Sthānakvāsī *sādhvīs* at Deolali. Sri Nalinbhai could understand my English, but could not respond in English, so interpretation was provided by UK based devotees who I had already met in London. The translations in the appendices of this thesis were provided by a native Gujarati speaking Jain, but who is not specifically a devotee of Srimad. My Gujarati lessons provided me with a basic level of literacy and conversation, but not enough to conduct in depth interviews. The primary textual resources I have used in this thesis are English translations of Srimad's writings.

## **5. Methodology**

The objectives of this thesis were set out at the beginning of this Introduction as:

1. To contribute to the broader understanding of Jainism through a detailed investigation into one particular branch.
2. To consider why the Srimad Rajcandra movement has evolved into its currently observed form through an analysis of its origins and development.

It has been suggested in this chapter that academic understanding of Jainism may be advanced by exploring the religion's diversity as well its unity. The first objective clearly addresses this point. The discussion on resources above has show that little information about Srimad and his following is currently available. This thesis aims to expand and improve upon the academic understanding of the Srimad Rajcandra movement by analysis of ethnographic data and, in turn, to broaden general academic perspectives of Jainism.

This Introduction has also argued that it is inappropriate to attempt to identify 'correct' and 'incorrect' forms of Jainism. With this in mind, this thesis makes comparisons between the beliefs and practices of Srimad's followers and other forms of Jainism only when this serves to elucidate our understanding of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. It does not attempt to compare data with an 'orthodox model' of Jainism. By this method the thesis aims to give as faithful a representation as possible of Srimad's following, but hopes to avoid taking an emic approach, described at the beginning of this Introduction, that examines the movement in the reflection of contrived 'norms'.

Within the discipline of religious studies it is usual for an ethnographic researcher to try and maintain objectivity by taking a phenomenological approach. I have adopted this approach throughout this thesis. There is much academic discourse on methodology, so to describe my approach as phenomenological requires some explanation<sup>118</sup>. My interpretation of this method has been to observe what people actually do and believe (rather than what they 'ought' to do and believe) and to discuss these beliefs and practices, as far as possible, from the perspective of the practitioners. I have tried to avoid being judgmental or sceptical. I took the claims of the religious specialists I encountered at face value. On a number of occasions people described religious experiences to me that had happened either to themselves or to a person known to them. The feasibility of religious experience is not questioned or qualified in this thesis for the sake of a sceptical audience. Such events are reported and commented on where this benefits understanding of the religion itself. For example, the descriptions made by one guru about the celestial visitations received by himself and his mother are not met with scepticism, but are compared with other hagiographic accounts. Similarly, when a community states that one or more of their number is self realised, the claim itself is not scrutinised but its relevance is discussed.

This passive, phenomenological approach carries its own issues, as does any methodology. One problem is that, as Bowie comments, "it can encourage scholars...to assume that they are somehow neutral"<sup>119</sup>. The readership is at risk of adopting this assumption if it considers that the researcher has not brought any influence of their own to the study because they have not voiced an opinion. Laidlaw warns against inverted subjectivity. A researcher who draws too close to

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<sup>118</sup> For a discussion on phenomenological methodology see Erricker 1999, pages 73 to 101.

<sup>119</sup> Bowie 2000, p11

the subject of research is at risk of redefining the broad, usually doctrinal, religious tradition to accommodate the quirks of the micro-tradition that is the subject of the research. This approach authenticates popular tradition over classical, or doctrinal, tradition, but in so doing it dissipates the tension between these two streams of a religious tradition. Recognising this tension is usually a crucial part of understanding a religious tradition. Laidlaw writes that the researcher [in his case the anthropologist] should go no further than describing the “processes of adjudication that are at work”, but should not engage in that process of adjudication<sup>120</sup>. Any study conducted by humans about other humans will be influenced by degrees of subjectivity, reflexivity and context. For example, the effect of nineteenth century western textual scholarship on western academic understanding of Jainism was discussed towards the beginning of this Introduction. Today it is in vogue for researchers to identify and expose their own ‘cultural baggage’ in an attempt to dilute inevitable subjectivity. Although this may help to reduce extreme cases of misrepresentation, it is also generally acknowledged that pure objectivity is impossible. The passive, phenomenological approach adopted by this thesis aims to give as representative account of Srimad Rajcandra’s followers as possible.

On occasion it has been necessary for me, as the researcher, to engage in direct dialogue with my research. However, this reflexive approach has been largely avoided because the thesis focuses more upon the institutional context of the Srimad Rajcandra movement than, for example, upon ethics or the meanings of rituals. Of course aspects such as these are accounted for because it is impossible to deconstruct a religious tradition into totally isolated compartments. Examining Srimad’s followers in an institutional context addresses the second objective of this thesis.

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<sup>120</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 10 to 12. Laidlaw refers to *Buddhism in Life* by Martin Southwold as an example of this approach.

Information about the movement is used to show how its origins and development have influenced its current organisational structure. The second objective also facilitates a systematic analysis of the mass of data presented. The diachronic approach of this thesis tackles the problem of organising and presenting data, discussed earlier in this Introduction, by providing a fixed structure on which to anchor it. It is anticipated that the reader will have no prior knowledge of the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

It would have been impossible to conduct this type of study without forging relationships based on mutual trust and respect, which means I have inevitably grown close to the subject of my research. A compromise in presentation had to be reached to maintain a balance of respect towards Srimad's followers, whilst also writing for an academic readership. For example, in early drafts of this thesis I wrote terms such as 'True Guru', adopting the capitalisation from literature internal to the movement which drives home the distinction between this 'True Guru' and the other 'false guru'. This style was dropped following persuasion from my academic influences. Once the distinctions between the 'true' and 'false' guru had been properly explained excessive capitalisation became unnecessary clutter. I was far less willing, however, to drop honorifics and strip proper names to their simplest forms. Not only is this insulting to those concerned, but also, in my opinion, misrepresents the attitudes of the subject group. For this reason honorifics have been retained in their simplest form in most cases, which seemed the best way to appease an academic audience and maintain respect towards Srimad Rajcandra's followers. I am not aware of another device formulated to deal with this situation.

I believe this study to be representative and am confident that it gives a balanced perspective on Srimad's followers, but it does not claim to be exhaustive. Some aspects of the Srimad

Rajcandra tradition were beyond my reach, for example devotees who live in remote villages in Gujarat. There may be other omissions of which I am not aware. Nevertheless, I hope it is a valid contribution to the field of Jain studies.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Devoted Communities**

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This chapter explains how Srimad's followers are organised. The first section describes the structure of the broad community of Srimad's devotees. The second section describes five separate, autonomous communities. Viewed together these descriptions begin to illustrate the diversity of beliefs and practices held by Srimad's followers, but also the common themes which united them into a movement. The themes of diversity and unity introduced in this chapter are explored throughout the course of this thesis. These two sections contain a considerable amount of descriptive, ethnographic data, which have been used to construct the model of the Srimad Rajcandra movement presented here. The rest of this thesis tries to understand how this model evolved. The final section of this chapter scrutinises the relevance of this model to Srimad's devotees and considers their perceptions of self identity.

#### **1. Organisational structure of Srimad Rajcandra's followers.**

It is a little over one hundred years since Srimad's death and his following is already well established, but any description of its social organisation is likely to soon become outdated because it is continuing to evolve. In her doctoral thesis Dr. Saryuben R. Mehta lists over eighty sites and communities associated with Srimad Rajcandra; yet since her thesis was published in 1965 some of the communities she lists have dissolved and many more may have emerged, particularly outside of India.<sup>1</sup> During my first field-trip to India (October 1999 to February 2000) one community of Srimad's followers in Mumbai had purchased land at Dharampur in

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<sup>1</sup> 'Srimad Rajcandra, A Study', 1965, written in Gujarati.



Gujarat on which to build a dedicated ashram. By the time of my second visit (December 2001 to February 2002) the first phase of building had been completed and the ashram was then in use. These examples illustrate that the organisation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement is still mutable. In response to this, the account of it given in this thesis should be understood to represent a ‘snapshot’ of the movement at the beginning of the twentyfirst century.

The previous chapter questioned the existence of an orthodox model of Jainism, but it also proposed that Jainism can be defined as an independent religion because some precepts are universally accepted by all Jains. Cort makes a distinction between “universal history” and “local history”.<sup>2</sup> Universal history records universal precepts, those mythological, cosmological and doctrinal beliefs that are unanimously accepted by Jains, whereas local history is exclusive. Cort writes of local history that,

“a particular text might be local to the entire Śvetāmbar tradition, local to a specific *gacch*, local, to a specific place, or even local to a specific person”.<sup>3</sup>

With few exceptions Srimad’s followers meet these distinctions; they are a group of Jains who concur with the universal precepts of their religion whilst following a specific religious teacher, Srimad Rajcandra, who is not universally accepted by all Jains.<sup>4</sup> The social organisation of the movement itself also reflects a pattern of universal and local histories. The universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement pertains to the events of Srimad’s life and, to a certain extent, to the lives of his immediate disciples (disciples who were his contemporaries). This history is important to all of Srimad’s devotees who, therefore, have a comprehensive knowledge of it.

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<sup>2</sup> Cort 1995a, p473

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p473.

<sup>4</sup> Not all of Srimad’s followers are Jain by birth, many, particularly at Agas and Mumbai, are Vaisnava.

Localised histories pertain to the independent histories associated with the individual communities of Srimad's followers. They usually record the biography of a guru or gurus and the foundation and development of the community in question. Sometimes they are recounted in promotional literature published by that community. Localised histories are by their very nature exclusive, their details are not universally known amongst Srimad's followers because they are relevant only to the members of each particular community. This is only likely to change in the future if the constituent communities either unify or find themselves in conflict with each other. In this thesis some of these local histories have been pieced together from data collected during field research, carried out most often by observation and by interviews with members of the different communities.

The complex arrangement of a universal history supplemented by a range of quite different local histories makes the task of constructing a representative model of the Srimad Rajcandra movement problematic. Some devotees practise independently and do not belong to a localised community at all. No central administrative or religiously authoritative body exists to which all Srimad's followers, either independent or community based, are accountable. However, all the communities with which I became familiar are themselves highly organised. This thesis does not attempt to give an exhaustive list of groups included in the movement. This is partly for the reasons of mutability described above, and partly, because there is no central organisation to issue a register, because some communities are simply not known to me, particularly the smaller ones. In this chapter the names of different ashrams are given in full (but not italicised) at their first mention, but are subsequently identified by their location only. For example, 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Sādhana Kendra' at Koba may then be referred to as simply 'Koba

ashram'. This repeats the form used by devotees themselves. Unless otherwise stated all the places mentioned in this chapter are in Gujarat.

Srimad's teachings emphasise the importance of guru *bhakti*. He states without ambiguity that a guru's spiritual authority comes from self realisation, by which he means experience of one's own soul. The 'true' guru is self-realised, whereas the 'false' guru is not.

“Where there is knowledge of soul, there is sainthood. He is the true Guru.” *Atma Siddhi*  
verse 34<sup>5</sup>

All the gurus discussed in this chapter are believed to be self realised by their own disciples. The Srimad Rajcandra movement also makes a distinction between *pratyakṣ* and *parokṣ* gurus. The *pratyakṣ* guru is present and living, whereas the *parokṣ* guru is not present and living. The term 'parokṣ' can apply to any deceased guru, including the Tīrthaṅkars, but in the context of this discussion it most frequently refers to Srimad. The definition 'not present' requires some qualification. Although Srimad is no longer living, many devotees (including those following a *pratyakṣ* guru) expressed a sense of emotional closeness to him, with comments such as, 'I feel he's with me'. Srimad's presence is also felt by the constant use devotees make of his writings and image. The *pratyakṣ* guru is present and living in a literal sense. It is important to understand that a follower who venerates a *pratyakṣ* guru also worships Srimad, and that Srimad's followers, like other Jains, also venerate the Jinas. The Srimad Rajcandra movement is divided sharply between those devotees who venerate Srimad only, as a *parokṣ* guru, and those who are also the disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru. This dichotomy is a particularly prominent characteristic in the structure of the movement because so much emphasis is placed on the role of

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<sup>5</sup> English translation by D.C. Mehia, 1978.

the guru in the religious beliefs and practices of Srimad's followers. Communities, for example at Rajkot and Vavania, and individuals that follow Srimad only do not generally accept the authority of *pratyakṣ* gurus.

The five communities listed below have had gurus, other than Srimad, involved in their foundation and historical development.

- 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas.
- 'Raj Sobhag Satsaṅg Mandal' at Sayla.<sup>6</sup>
- 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Sāadhanā Kendra' at Koba.<sup>7</sup>
- 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Dharampur. Also 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmick Satsaṅg Sāadhanā Kendra' at Mumbai<sup>8</sup>
- 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Hampi, Kanataka.

The three communities that currently follow a *pratyakṣ* guru are Dharampur (Mumbai), Koba and Sayla. Those based at Hampi and Agas followed a *pratyakṣ* guru until the death of Mathaji<sup>9</sup> and Brahmacarīji Govardhandas (1889 to 1954) respectively, who were the last living gurus at these sites.<sup>10</sup> I have not had the opportunity to visit Hampi so cannot comment first-hand on the

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<sup>6</sup> 'Raj' denotes Srimad Rajcandra. 'Sobhag' refers to Sobhagbhai of Sayla, who was a close disciple of Srimad. 'Sat' means truth and 'sang' means community. 'Mandal' refers to a gathering of people and is usually used in a religious context.

<sup>7</sup> 'Adhyatmik' means spiritual, 'sāadhanā' means religious practice, and 'kendra' means society.

<sup>8</sup> This is the same community of followers. The ashram at Dharampur was opened in April 2001, but is still in an early phase of construction.

<sup>9</sup> I was unable to discover Mathaji's dates or her birth name. She became the spiritual head of Hampi ashram when her guru died in 1970.

<sup>10</sup> Brahmacarīji Govardhandas appears in this thesis in two contexts; as the author of *Jeevan Kala* he is referenced as Govardhandas, as a guru in the Srimad Rajcandra movement he is named as Brabmacarīji.

degree of activity at this site, but I have been told that there is little activity there now. Agas is very active. Its founder, Sri Maharaj Lalluji Svami (1854 to 1936), and his successor, Brahmacariji, were both self realised religious teachers who had disciples, so fulfil the criteria of a guru in the context of this discussion.<sup>11</sup> However, as explained in the next section, they were reticent about being described as gurus. Although they are revered by the community at Agas, Srimad alone is venerated as a *parokṣ* guru here.

Param Pujya Sri Atmanandji, the *pratyakṣ* guru at Koba, has no lineal connection to Srimad and so he may be described as a spontaneous guru. Sahaj Anandji, who founded an ashram at Hampi, is also a spontaneous guru. He initiated Mataji as his successor. In Chapter Four of this thesis it is shown that Srimad's redirection of religious authority from the mendicant to the self realised lay person has allowed spontaneous gurus to emerge.

The rest of the gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement have a lineal connection to Srimad as well as the authority of self realisation. Param Pujya Sri Rakeshbhai was initiated by Mataji of Hampi when he was in his teens, but he did not go on to become the guru of this community of Srimad's followers. Instead he founded the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Dharampur (although the majority of his disciples are currently located in Mumbai). His initiation does not appear to bear as much weight amongst his disciples as his claim to be a reincarnation of Sri Maharaj Lalluji Svami, which is of far greater significance to them because it associates him directly with Srimad. His capacity to remember his previous lives also endorses his spiritual purity and consequently his religious authority. Lalluji (who founded the ashram at Agas) was one of

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<sup>11</sup> Sri Maharaj Lalluji is also known as Sri Laghuraj Svami and Prabhu Sri. Cort observes that all contemporary mūrtipūjak (image worshipping) mendicants are given the title 'Maharaj', "Great King", (Cort 1995a, p492). The use of the term in association with Lalluji suggests that it was also applied to Sthānakvāsī mendicants.

Srimad's immediate disciples, so the lineage at Agas begins with Shrimad, but it ends with Lalluji's successor, Brahmajariji, who did not himself nominate a successor. The only community that currently has an active lineage is 'Raj Sobhag Satsang Mandal' at Sayla. These followers trace their spiritual heritage through a line of gurus back to Srimad via Sri Sobhagbhai, who, like Lalluji, was one of Srimad's immediate disciples. Furthermore, this lineage is protected because the penultimate guru, Param Pujya Sri Ladakshand, nominated not only his own successors (Nalinbhai Kothari and Sadgunaben Shah) but their successors also (Vikrambhai and Minalben). It is too early to say whether Rakeshbhai or Atmanandji will continue their own lineages by nominating successors.<sup>12</sup>

The communities at Dharampur (Mumbai), Koba and Sayla are each centred spiritually around their *pratyakṣ* guru and physically at the ashram in which the guru is the spiritual head. Each community is also geographically extensive because not all members remain permanently at their respective ashrams. Atmanandji is the only guru who resides permanently at his ashram.

Rakeshbhai and Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai both divide their time between Mumbai and their ashrams at Dharmapur and Sayla. Disciples remain active members of their respective 'guru-centred' community even during periods when they are distanced geographically from their guru and ashram. This is evident from the constant contact they maintain with their guru via regular visits to the ashram, letters, phone calls and email, by the structured programme of religious practice they keep, and by their regular contact with neighbouring members of their community.

Atmanandji and his disciples provide an example. Atmanandji is the spiritual head and founder of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Sādhana Kendra' ashram at Koba. He is the spiritual

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<sup>12</sup> Personal interviews, December 2001 and January 2002, respectively.

centre of his community of disciples, and Koba - where he spends most of his time - is its geographic centre. Some of his disciples live permanently at this ashram, some live in other parts of India and some outside of India altogether. Disciples who are not permanent residents visit the ashram regularly, sometimes for up to six months every year, or less if they have family or work commitments. Some of Atmanandji's disciples live in London. One retired couple that I met spends the winter months at Koba, but whilst in London meet weekly with other devotees of Srimad (some of whom are disciples of Atmanandji) for *bhakti* (devotional worship) and *svādhyāy* (scriptural study). They continue to perform their personal guru *āgnā*, which is the religious instruction given to them by Atmanandji, they often watch video cassettes of his *satsaṅg* (religious discourses) and also speak with him on the telephone. So, although they are apart from the geographic centre of the community, the ashram at Koba, they remain very much part of the community through their continued, active devotion to its spiritual centre, Atmanandji. From time to time Atmanandji and his entourage will travel abroad to meet with disciples in their own countries. This used to be every two to three years, but is being reduced now that Atmanandji, who is in his seventies, is growing older.

Similar examples could be given of Atmanandji's disciples in other parts of India or in the USA. The 'Raj Sobhag Satsaṅg Mandal', whose geographic centre is at Sayla, has an active satellite group in north London of approximately fifty followers.<sup>13</sup> The group meets five times a week for *bhakti*, *dhyān* (meditation) and *svādhyāy* led by a senior member of this community. In addition to these congregational meetings, disciples also continue to practise the individual *āgnā*

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<sup>13</sup> Attendance increases to approximately eighty when the meeting is held at the 'Kenton Derasar' (temple) on Tuesday mornings. Two reasons may account for the increase; firstly this meeting is held in a Jain temple rather than a private home, and includes *bhav pūjā* before consecrated Jina images, and secondly, this meeting is not exclusively for devotees associated with Sayla ashram so the meditation unique to that community of followers is not performed.

given to them by their guru, Nalinbhai. Many of his disciples living in London (also USA and East Africa) will visit the ashram at Sayla annually, or as often as they can manage, and Nalinbhai makes regular visits abroad. The dedicated ashram at Agas neither has nor endorses a pratyakṣ guru, but it also has an extensive community. Devotees from UK and USA visit the ashram regularly. It is clear that although the majority of Srimad's devotees live in India, predominantly in Gujarat, there is also a significant following amongst diaspora Jains living in East Africa, Europe and USA.<sup>14</sup>

Some ashrams dedicated to Srimad support communities of devotees and some do not. Agas, Koba and Sayla, for example, accommodate permanent residents, as well as visitors who may stay for long or short periods of time. Dharampur will accommodate permanent residents once more of the site has been built. Other ashrams, for example at Deolali (north east of Mumbai), Idar and Vavania welcome visitors for short stays, but do not accommodate permanent residents. There are other sites associated with the Srimad Rajcandra movement that offer no accommodation and are intended only to be visited, for example a small oratory at Morbi and another in Sayla town (the ashram itself is a twenty minute walk from the town). Only sites where people stay, rather than just visit, can be truly described in terms of communities. So, for example, Koba supports a community of Srimad's followers, whereas Idar does not.

A devotee who belongs to one community may well visit the site of another community.

Therefore a disciple of Atmanandji at Koba may, for example, visit the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas, which is of particular interest to all of Srimad's followers because of its

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<sup>14</sup> To my knowledge all of Srimad's followers are of Asian decent, he has not attracted any white western followers as, for example, Chitrabhanu has. Chitrabhanu was born in Rajasthan in 1922 and now lives in USA where he is the head of fifty seven centres, as well as other centres in Africa, Canada, Japan and UK. ([www.jainmeditation.org](http://www.jainmeditation.org)).



connection with Lalluji. Not all communities of followers are physically located at ashrams. At Rajkot, for example, the room in which Srimad died has been converted into a *svādhyāy* hall (room where people meet for religious practice) and there are also two guru *mandirs* (temple containing images of Srimad), one opened in 1989 and another in 2002, to accommodate its substantial community of devotees, but there is no ashram here. When they are not at Dharampur, Rakeshbhai's disciples in Mumbai meet daily for *bhakti* at their *svādhyāy* hall, which is in an apartment building and which was their permanent meeting place before the ashram was built.

Locations connected with Srimad are obviously of special importance to his devotees and are part of the universal history of their tradition. Rakeshbhai and his disciples were particularly keen to purchase land at Dharampur for their ashram because Srimad had stayed there and so the place was felt to have a particularly spiritual atmosphere. 'Raj Sobhag Satsang Mandal' is located at Sayla, the native village of Sobhagbhai, who was one of Srimad's closest disciples and vital to this ashram's spiritual heritage. After Sobhagbhai's death Srimad sent a letter of condolence to his son in which he wrote, "in this place, in this time, I feel there will be many powerful men like Sri Sobhagbhai".<sup>15</sup> Nalinbhai, the guru here, believes that this is a reference to Sayla and the lineage of gurus associated with this ashram. The location of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas is believed to have been prophesised by Srimad himself. Once, when he had disembarked from a train at Agas, he stooped to grasp a fist full of earth from a nearby field and foretold that at that place there would one day be a great spiritual community. A similar story is told about 'Srimad Rajcandra Nijabhyasa Mandap' at Vadva. According to tradition Srimad was sitting beneath a Banyan tree (which still remains) at Vadva giving a

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<sup>15</sup> Letter number 782 in Srimad Rajcandra. Translated by Ashik Shah, December 2001.

religious discourse, when he predicted that one day the place would be of great religious significance. This ashram, which was the first to be dedicated to Srimad, was founded in 1916 by Sri Popatlalbbhai Mohakamchand. It still receives visitors, but there are no permanent residents here and no guru. There is a small museum at the site in which photographs and artefacts from Srimad's life are displayed, including a branch, decorated with silver foil, said to be from the tree in which he hid when he experienced *jāti smaraṇa gnān* (memory of his previous incarnations).<sup>16</sup>

Some places that are associated with significant events in Srimad's life are famous within the movement and regarded by many followers as pilgrimage sites. One example is the ashram and guru *mandir* at Srimad's birthplace in Vavania. A short distance from the main ashram is a small oratory at the site where Srimad first experienced *jāti smaraṇa gnān*.<sup>17</sup> His first experience of *samyag darśan* (self realisation) occurred at Uttarasanda, just outside Nadiad, whilst he was meditating beneath a mango tree. When I visited this site in November 1999 the tree was long gone, but in its place a shrine was in the final stages of construction. There is also an ashram and a guru *mandir* here. Srimad is believed to have reached particular heights of ascetic and spiritual magnificence in the remote landscape of Idar, where he preached to his mendicant disciples. This is also now the site of an ashram and guru *mandir*. Srimad died at Rajkot. The room where he died has been converted into a *svādhyāy* hall which contains a life-size fibreglass image of him on his deathbed.<sup>18</sup> The *Samadhi Mandir*, one of the two other temples dedicated to Srimad at Rajkot, has been built at the site of his cremation and was opened with great celebration in

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<sup>16</sup> Details of this incident are given in Chapter Three. These artefacts are not believed to be spiritually empowered, neither are those of Lalluji or Brahmachariji discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>17</sup> The site at Vavania was destroyed in the earthquake of 2000 and is currently being rebuilt.

<sup>18</sup> See plate 8, figure 13.

January 2002. Some sites have no connection with Srimad, but are selected for their suitability. Two examples are 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Sādhana Kendra' at Koba and 'Srimad Rajcandra Svādhyāy Mandir' at Deolali. In fact, the ashram at Deolali was built simply to accommodate the hordes of devotees visiting the guru *mandir* there. A degree of spiritual kudos is therefore given to locations that have a material connection with Srimad, but this connection is by no means imperative for the location of a community.

This description has shown the Srimad Rajcandra movement to be an organisation of places and people that is still mutable. It is structured on two levels. On one level is a universal history that links constituent communities and individual devotees that are otherwise autonomous and disparate. Later in the thesis this concept of unification by history is translated into unification by ideology. The second level consists of the individual histories that relate to each independent community of followers. This thesis will go on to demonstrate how these individual histories have influenced the particular religious outlook and practices of different communities.

Srimad's followers are not governed by a central administrative, authoritative body, so they are not restricted to a particular code of practice. Communities and individual devotees may be categorised by whether they venerate a *pratyakṣ* or *parokṣ* guru, which is the most significant dichotomy in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. The guru's authority is validated by self realisation, however, most *pratyakṣ* gurus in the tradition have the additional verification of a lineal connection to Srimad. To my knowledge, all of the locations associated with Srimad are in India, particularly in Gujarat where most of his followers also live, yet many followers live abroad, from where they maintain links with their Indian based communities. The following

chart lists some sites of the Srimad Rajcandra movement and summarises the ways in which I have classified them.

<b>SITE</b>	<b>FOUNDER</b>	<b>SUPPORTS A COMMUNITY</b>	<b>ASHRAM</b>	<i>Pratyakṣ / Parokṣ</i>	<b>LINEAGE</b>	<b>UNIVERSAL HISTORY</b>
<b>Agas</b>	Sri Lalluji Svami	Yes	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	Yes	Yes
<b>Deolali</b>	Jaysinbhai Narayandas	No	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	No	No
<b>Dharampur / Mumbai</b>	Sri Rakeshbhai Jhaveri	Yes	Yes	<i>Pratyakṣ: Sri Rakeshbhai Jhaveri</i>	Yes	No
<b>Hampi</b>	Sahaj Anandji	-	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	No	No
<b>Idar</b>	-	No	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	No	Yes
<b>Koba</b>	Sri Atmanandji	Yes	Yes	<i>Pratyakṣ: Sri Atmanandji</i>	No	No
<b>Rajkot</b>	-	Yes	No	<i>Parokṣ</i>	No	Yes
<b>Sayla</b>	Sri Ladakchandbhai Vora	Yes	Yes	<i>Pratyakṣ: Sri Nalinbhai Kothari</i>	Yes	No
<b>Uttarasanda</b>	-	No	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	No	Yes

<b>Vadva</b>	Sri Popatlalbhair	No	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	No	No
<b>Vavania</b>	Ranchhoddas Mody <sup>19</sup>	Yes	Yes	<i>Parokṣ</i>	Family Connection	Yes

## 2. Five Communities of Srimad Rajcandra's followers.

This section expands the model of the Srimad Rajcandra movement outlined above with descriptions of five different communities of followers. Each is an account of the individual community's local history, including details of origin, current activities and organisation. Although efforts have been made to include corresponding information, this has not always been possible because of the variation between the different groups. The majority of data presented here was collected during field research. Members of the different communities were keen to discuss with me the things that they held to be most important, so the character of the information given here is itself an indicator of the nature of each community. Therefore, in keeping with the phenomenological approach of this thesis, the authorial voice of these accounts is largely that of the communities themselves.

### The 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram', Agas

The 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' was established in 1920 by the Sthānakvāsī *muni* Sri Lalluji Maharaj, who was one of Srimad's closest disciples. After Srimad's death in 1901, Lalluji maintained his lifestyle as a wandering mendicant, spreading the message of Srimad's teachings,

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<sup>19</sup> Srimad's son-in-law by his daughter Javalben. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p143.

until illness persuaded him to settle at Sandesar village, near Agas, where he had many devotees. The people here were not Jains, but Vaiṣṇava Hindus, members of the Patel (Patidar) caste.<sup>20</sup> Lalluji's discourses impressed the villagers to the extent that landowners donated land for the purpose of building an ashram with Lalluji as its spiritual head. Govardhandas identifies Sri Jijibhai as a principal donor.<sup>21</sup> Initially a different site was offered, but Lalluji specifically requested land near to the railway station, perhaps to fulfil Srimad's prophecy described earlier, or perhaps for the convenience of visitors. Srimad had spent time at Agas and the surrounding area, including the neighbouring town of Anand, yet prior to Lalluji's appearance there he does not seem to have been well known amongst the local Patel community.<sup>22</sup> Lalluji did not identify Srimad as the source of his religious discourses until he had won the villagers' devotion and taught them 'correct' religious practice, then he instructed them to worship Srimad and not himself. When the ashram had been completed Lalluji's disciples erected a sign which read, 'Prabhu Sri Ashram' (Prabhu Sri is a devotional name by which Lalluji is known). Lalluji told them to throw it away at once and replace it with a sign saying, 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram'. The original sign is said to be kept out of sight at Agas - I never saw it. Villagers and other devotees made their residence at the ashram where they enjoyed continuous contact with Lalluji, who remained there for sixteen years until his death aged eighty two.<sup>23</sup>

Lalluji holds an important position not only in the local history of this ashram, but also in the universal history and foundation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Four of Srimad's immediate disciples are believed to have attained self realisation, but Lalluji is the only one to

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<sup>20</sup> See Pocock 1973, pages 5 to 6 for a brief history of the rise of the Patidars as a dominant caste in Gujarat in the mid eighteenth century.

<sup>21</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p186.

<sup>22</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p92.

<sup>23</sup> Govardhanadas 1991, pages 186 to 187.

have survived him for any length of time. He is celebrated for recognising Srimad's spiritual qualities and for promoting them after his death. One devotee at Agas suggested to me that had Lalluji not continued to preach Srimad's religious message he may have been remembered only for his extraordinary memory, which earned him fame during his teenage years. Srimad claimed to have achieved self realisation in 1891, when he was twenty four years old.<sup>24</sup> Lalluji is said to have achieved it whilst he was Srimad's disciple, and Sri Brahmachariji Govardhanadas as a disciple of Lalluji. Lalluji nominated Brahmachariji as his successor, but when Brahmachariji approached the end of his life he could not identify anyone of appropriate spiritual calibre to succeed him, so the ashram has operated without a living spiritual leader since his death.

Lalluji and Brahmachariji both fulfil the criteria of a guru: each was the spiritual head of a community of disciples who accepted them as self realised religious teachers. Yet neither of these men accepted the title 'guru' for themselves. They regarded Srimad as the only true guru, telling disciples to bow only before his image and not before them.<sup>25</sup> This spiritual hierarchy has been maintained by devotees at Agas. Nevertheless, Lalluji and Brahmachariji are certainly revered here as self realised, religious teachers. The rooms where they stayed, along with some of their artefacts, have been kept undisturbed as a place for devotees to sit in quiet contemplation. The hand operated lift used to carry Lalluji between the ground and first floors when he had become too frail to climb the stairs is also still present. Lalluji and Brahmachariji are represented throughout the site by photographs - but not statues - against which the resident *pūjāri* places a fresh flower and incense stick everyday.<sup>26</sup> Their cremation shrines receive

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid p96.

<sup>25</sup> This type of humility before one's master, despite ones own spiritual success, was commonly observed.

<sup>26</sup> In Jainism a *pūjāri* is someone (often Hindu) employed to attend to the necessary requirements of temple ritual.

similar treatment. Residents at Agas visit the photographs of Lalluji and Brahmachariji and circumambulate their shrines daily, but this attention is respectful rather than ritualistic (in the sense of a religious practice). The self realised status of these two men is beyond question, but the reverence with which they are held by the community at Agas has not been transformed into worship, as it has for Srimad. Only Srimad's images are consecrated and receive ritual attention. Lalluji and Brahmachariji pointed to Srimad's teachings as the source of their spiritual success and Srimad, who is regarded here as the only true guru, has remained the dominant, constant spiritual presence at Agas.

The method of self realisation that Lalluji learned from Srimad, and that he taught his own disciples, has been preserved by Brahmachariji who arranged for it to be engraved on a marble slab. This engraving records the vows the aspirant should take and the mantra and devotional hymns they are expected to recite daily.<sup>27</sup> The slab is cemented onto a wall in Brahmachariji's old room at the ashram. According to the tradition at Agas it represents a pure form of religious practice, having come directly from Srimad. Brahmachariji's action of preserving it, literally in stone, reflects this community's belief that the technique is perfect and immutable. The daily programme of *bhakti* and *svādhyāy*, which commences at four am, was formulated by Lalluji according to the teachings he received from Srimad. It too is regarded as perfect and immutable, and the programme has remained constant since the foundation of the ashram. Devotees at Agas believe that their religious practices, given by Srimad and taught by Lalluji and Brahmachariji, guarantee self realisation for them in the near future, although probably not in this lifetime. Full attendance at all of the daily programmes is officially compulsory for residents and visitors, although this did not seem to happen in practice. Many residents have a personal address system

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix One.



installed in their apartments so they can participate in *bhakti* without necessarily attending the *svādhyāy* hall.

Srimad is represented throughout the ashram by statues and photographs. Opposite the original *svādhyāy* hall, set at the highest point of the ashram, is a shrine containing an image of him in a standing meditation posture. It stands aloof from the general goings-on of the ashram just as Srimad set himself apart from worldly life. Lalluji arranged its position so that it looks over the *svādhyāy* hall, as if Srimad is watching over his disciples. The image is caste from an alloy of five metals which gives it a silver appearance. From the balcony, the shining face of the Jina's image in the Śvetāmbar temple opposite can be clearly seen. This metal image of Srimad, and the marble image in the guru *mandir* at the site, were commissioned by Lalluji when he founded the ashram. They were crafted by a certain Talimbhai of Mumbai, a master sculptor selected for his superior craftsmanship. The project was supervised by Lalluji, who knew Srimad's features so well, to ensure a perfect representation. Both these images of Srimad, as well as the Jina images in the Jain temples, were consecrated by Lalluji so require daily ritual attention. Unlike the Jinas, Srimad is not a *siddha* so his image receives a modified form of the *pūjā* ritual.<sup>28</sup>

Srimad's photograph hangs in each of the two *svādhyāy* halls at Agas and in the rooms of Lalluji and Brahmacarīji. When he was alive Srimad's disciples often asked him for his photograph, but he consistently declined the request. Eventually he conceded and two black and white studio photographs were taken whilst he was recuperating from ill health at Wadhawan Camp. This was Srimad's final illness, for he died in Rajkot only a few weeks after the photographs were taken.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence they show him in a highly emaciated condition, which give the

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<sup>28</sup> Discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>29</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p177.

photographs an ethereal quality. Both photographs depict Srimad in the same two meditation postures in which his images are always made; one in the standing position, one sitting crossed-legged in the *padmāsan* (lotus) position.<sup>30</sup> The originals of the two photographs are no longer available. I was told that the photograph of Srimad in the standing position that hangs in the original *svādhyāy* hall at Agas is the oldest known copy. This enlargement was made in Paris by re-photographing the original. The paper is now so fragile that it cannot be removed from its frame. Copies of both these photographs are common amongst all the communities of Srimad's followers and are available in a range of formats from small laminated 'wallet sized' copies to large framed portraits hanging in temples. All the pictures are generated from Agas, which also produces photographs of Lalluji and Brahmacarīji.<sup>31</sup>

Today 'The Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas is probably the most widely known ashram dedicated to Srimad. The president is Manubhai B. Modi, Srimad's grandson by his daughter Javalben. It is managed by a self elected and exclusively male board of thirteen trustees. The central complex is twenty acres with a further thirty-five acres of accommodation blocks. The ashram employs about seventy people and has approximately three hundred permanent residents. The number of temporary residents and visitors varies, for example during the four month monsoon period the population increases by between five to six hundred and during popular festivals, such as *Dīvalī* and *Paryuṣan*, it may increase to approximately two thousand five hundred.<sup>32</sup> I was informed that numbers are increasing annually. The ashram is being expanded and its facilities are being improved to meet the needs of this growing community of devotees.

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion of these postures.

<sup>31</sup> See plate 1 figure 1, plate 2 figure 2, and plate 3 figures 3 and 4.

<sup>32</sup> See Cort 1989, pages 157 to 185 for a description and historical survey of Paryuṣan, and pages 189 to 203 for a description of Dīvalī.

Accommodation blocks radiate from the aesthetically pleasing central complex. When entering from the original gate, which, on Lalluji's instruction, is large enough for an elephant and rider to pass under, one is confronted with the original *svādhyāy* hall.<sup>33</sup> Below it is the guru *mandir*, which houses a marble image of Srimad in the *padmāsan* meditation position. Next to the *svādhyāy* hall is a Śvetāmbar temple, above and slightly behind that is a Digambar temple. Srimad was not committed to one particular Jain sect, indeed his followers believe that his religious message is universal. In keeping with this antisectarian attitude Lalluji arranged for the construction of a Śvetāmbar and a Digambar temple on the site. Although there is no designated Sthānakvāsī prayer hall the two *svādhyāy* halls and other quiet rooms satisfy this function.<sup>34</sup> Lalluji's intention was to build an ashram that appealed to Jains of all sects thus avoiding a culture of sectarian exclusivity. To the left of the *svādhyāy* hall are the rooms in which Lalluji and Brahmacariji stayed, and to the right, a little way down the path, a new *svādhyāy* hall is in the final stages of construction.

Built from Italian marble with a capacity for five thousand, this hall is large, airy and impressive. It has undergone some reconstruction to correct an architectural error that caused an echo effect inside the hall that made devotional singing impossible, especially with such a large congregation. Further down the path from the new *svādhyāy* hall, set in an attractive flower garden, is a footprint shrine dedicated to Lalluji, and a polygonal shrine dedicated to Brahmacariji. Also on the site is a dining hall, small library and a shop selling photographs of

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<sup>33</sup> See plate 6 figure 9.

<sup>34</sup> Sthānakvāsī Jains do not worship before the image of a Jina. Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jains do worship before images, but Śvetāmbar Jains, unlike Digambers, adorn their images.

Srimad, Lalluji and Brahmachariji, as well as a selection of the many books published by the ashram.

Agas is a prolific publishing house. Its most significant publication is *Srimad Rajcandra*, a chronologically arranged anthology of Srimad's writings in their original Gujarati which is sold at a subsidised price and treated as scripture by the whole community of Srimad's followers.<sup>35</sup> Agas also publishes a broad variety of other books associated with the Srimad Rajcandra movement, including *Bodh Amrut*, a collection of Brahmachariji's sermons and expositions,<sup>36</sup> and *Nitya Kram*, a *bhakti* manual compiled by Lalluji, which is used by many groups of Srimad's followers.<sup>37</sup> The ashram has commissioned translations of some of Srimad's works into Indian languages other than the original Gujarati, and also into English. Examples of English translations are *Bhavana Badhi* and *Mokṣa Mala*, both translated by Dinubhai Muljibhai Patel, and *Atma Siddhi* translated by Brahmachariji Govardhanadas. Before Brahmachariji met Lalluji he had gained a bachelor's degree in English from Wilson College in Mumbai, and taught English at Vaso and Anand.<sup>38</sup>

For devotees already living at Agas, the ashram is a spiritual haven removed from the distractions of worldly life, where all their time can be devoted to the far more urgent matter of working towards self realisation and ultimately *mokṣa*. When I asked some of the trustees if they had any intention of establishing another site, in India or abroad, with the same religious programme and facilities, the idea was not entertained. The 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' had

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<sup>35</sup> Devotees use of Srimad Rajcandra is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>36</sup> '*Bodhi*' meaning 'sermon', and '*amrut*' meaning 'nectar'.

<sup>37</sup> *Nitya* meaning eternal, '*kram*' meaning sequential or 'step' refer to the daily ritual obligations. Devotees described this manual as a 'step by step' guide to their daily religious practices.

<sup>38</sup> Satiya 1989, pages 1 to 2.

been established by Lalluji at Agas, a location that had been earlier endorsed by Srimad, and aspirants with genuine devotion and dedication were expected to make their way there.

'Srimad Rajcandra Svādhyāy Mandir', Deolali, Mumbai.

There has never been a *pratyakṣ* guru at 'Srimad Rajcandra Svādhyāy Mandir' at Deolali. It is a place where only Srimad, as a *parokṣ* guru, is venerated. The site welcomes visitors, but not permanent residents, so it does not support a defined community of followers in the same way that Agas does. Although classified here as a '*parokṣ* guru' site, visitors may be disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru. For example, I was accompanied by two of Rakeshbhai's disciples during my visit. The information presented here is taken from a personal interview with the ashram's founder, Jaysingbhai Narayandas.<sup>39</sup>

Jaysingbhai is Vaiṣṇava by birth. He is not a guru and does not claim to have attained self realisation. During our interview he described himself as "an A+ personality". As a young man he was an Olympic sprinter, then, following his athletic career, became a successful and famous classical musician. Jaysingbhai explained that despite being successful in many areas of his life, in retrospect he realised that he had felt spiritually impoverished. He first heard about Srimad when he was asked to set one of his poems to music. Although initially reluctant to take on the work Jaysingbhai agreed and soon became profoundly influenced by Srimad's writing. He read more of Shrimad's work, then began to hold regular sessions at his home where about twelve people met to perform *bhakti*. During one of these sessions Jaysingbhai had a "revelation" to build a guru *mandir* dedicated to Srimad.

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<sup>39</sup> January 2000.

The *mandir* was built in 1964 over a period of four months, during the monsoon season, with very little skilled labour. Jaysingbhai described a number of mysterious events that occurred during construction. Shortly before the official opening, the mason laying the floor tiles developed an acute case of boils on his hands which prevented him from working, but that were ‘miraculously’ cured the following day and the floor was completed in time. Three days before the opening, the artist commissioned to paint the life size portrait of Srimad, which now hangs in the *svādhyāy* hall, had proceeded no further than the outline. *Bhakti* was held in the artist’s studio and the portrait was completed in time. No one was more astonished than the artist. Two hundred and fifty people were invited to the temple’s inauguration and food was prepared for this many guests. Seven hundred and fifty people attended the event, yet there was food enough for everyone. After the ashram was established Jaysingbhai needed six hundred rupees to pay staff. An anonymous donor gave one thousand rupees the day before the staff were due to be paid. The devotee may interpret such events as providence, even divine endorsement, and Jaysingbhai’s decision to include them in his narrative about the *mandir* illustrates the significance with which he regards them.

The *mandir* is built on two storeys. The *svādhyāy* hall, where *bhakti* is held before the life size portrait of Srimad, is on the ground floor. On the lower ground floor are three chambers; one housing a marble image of Srimad, one a marble image of Lalluji and one a painting of a *siddha*. The statues were crafted by Talimbhai who also made the images at Agas. (According to Jaysingbhai there are now eight other craftsmen who may be commissioned to make statues of Srimad and Lalluji). Jaysingbhai said that Lalluji represents the perfect disciple, which is why he commissioned the statue of him. Echoing the sentiments held at Agas, Jaysingbhai felt that Lalluji’s devotion to Srimad, despite his own mendicant status and Srimad’s lay status, helped to

establish Srimad as religious figure in his own community. The statues of Srimad and Lalluji at Deolali are not consecrated and do not receive daily *pūjā*.

Deolali was a small village when the *mandir* was first built. Devotees travelling to worship there had difficulty finding lodgings so the ashram was constructed a short while afterwards to accommodate them. This quiet ashram is now a favourite retreat for many of Srimad's followers. Visitors may stay for up to seven days, unless special permission for a longer visit is granted by the managing board of trustees. The ashram has segregated accommodation, a communal dining hall, a small library of Gujarati literature and a picture gallery displaying paintings that depict scenes from Srimad's life. Jaysingbhai decided not to install a Jain temple on the site to avoid the trouble of maintenance and the expense of employing a *pūjāri*, and to avoid alienating any particular sect by installing a Digambar rather than Śvetāmbar temple, or vice versa. Also, there are several Jain temples in Deolali within a short walk of the ashram.

Deolali offers a daily programme of *bhakti* and *svādhyāy*, which is usually led by Jaysingbhai. During *svādhyāy* he reads from *Srimad Rajcandra*, but does not offer his own expositions on the text because he is not a guru. Similar to other sites in the Srimad Rajcandra movement, Deolali has borrowed from, rather than reproduced, the arrangement of *bhakti* at Agas. Visitors are expected to attend at least three events from the programme daily. This type of rule is common to most ashrams, it aims to preserve the religious atmosphere and deter people from using them as cheap hotels. However, Jaysingbhai suspects that of the thousands of visitors Deolali receives annually only a minority are true seekers. "Ten people in the temple, a hundred people in the dining hall!", he remarked with a sardonic smile. It is also likely that some people attend to hear Jaysingbhai's exquisite *bhakti* for which he is famous.

The accounts of these two ashrams at Agas and Deolali begin to illustrate some of the similarities and differences located within the structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Features that are common to these two sites belong to the universal history of the movement and are present at all the constituent sites. These are the features that identify Srimad as the central religious icon. They are his iconographic representation by photographs and images, the use of his literature as scripture and the worship he receives from devotees as part of their religious practice. The differences are influenced by the particular origins (the local histories) of each site, and are the features that are unique to each site. The ashrams at Agas and Deolali both venerate Srimad only as a *parokṣ* guru, but for different historical reasons. There has never been a living guru at Deolali because Jaysingbhai does not accept the current availability of a *pratyakṣ* guru, whereas Agas had a guru lineage that was arrested. The presence of self realised, therefore religiously authoritative, people in the historical development of Agas means that at this site some features have been made sacred. For example, the consecrated images of Srimad that require daily ritual attention, the immutable order of *bhakti* arranged by Lalluji and the arrangement of vows carved in marble. Sacred features such as these do not appear at Deolali because Jaysingbhai is not self realised and so does not have the religious authority that Lalluji or Brahmacariji had. The statue of Srimad at Deolali is not consecrated because there is no one to consecrate it. There is a statue of Lalluji at Deolali, but not at Agas. Jaysingbhai is aware of the spiritual hierarchy, that none of Srimad's disciples is believed to have been his equal in spiritual purity, but he is not influenced by the same sentimental restrictions found at Agas, where the influence of Lalluji's presence is so cogent.



'Sri Raj Sobhag Satsang Mandal', Sayla.

'Sri Raj Sobhag Satsang Mandal', like other ashrams in the Srimad Rajcandra movement, is managed and administered by a board of trustees. It also has an impressive guru lineage traced back to Srimad via his immediate disciple, Sri Sobhagbhai (1823 to 1897). Whereas devotees at Agas emphasise the relationship between Lalluji and Srimad, devotees at Sayla emphasise the relationship between Sobhagbhai and Srimad. Here Srimad and Sobhagbhai are referred to as "soul mates" and the mutual spiritual benefit they shared is celebrated.<sup>40</sup> Sri Sobhagbhai, a Jain layman from Sayla, was more than forty years Srimad's senior, Srimad's devotees at Sayla believe he was Srimad's most cherished disciple, trusted confidant and the closest he had to a spiritual mentor. In correspondence Srimad addressed him as "revered" and "most loving".<sup>41</sup> Just over nine hundred and fifty of Srimad's letters have been published, of these more than three hundred and fifty are addressed to Sobhagbhai, and they include some of Srimad's most personal correspondence.<sup>42</sup> Other disciples noticed their intimacy and sometimes asked Sobhagbhai to approach Srimad on their behalf.<sup>43</sup>

The story of their first meeting is one of the best known examples of Srimad's telepathic ability. Upon losing his wealth Sobhagbhai's father, Lallubhai, (not to be confused with the *muni* Lalluji who founded the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas) sought the guidance of a "famous [Jain] saint" from Marwad.<sup>44</sup> Rather than showing Lallubhai the way to recover his fortune, the saint encouraged him to take up a spiritual life and revealed to him the powerful '*bīj gnān*', "the basic

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<sup>40</sup> Ashik Shah, unpublished paper delivered at School of Oriental and African Studies November 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p89. Mehta and Seth 1971, p137.

<sup>42</sup> From literature produced by Sayla ashram.

<sup>43</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p86.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p83.

seed of knowledge for regaining one's soul".<sup>45</sup> The saint told Lallubhai that if he ever encountered a person worthy enough to receive the *bīj gnān*, he should offer it to them for their spiritual benefit.<sup>46</sup> Lallubhai was an old man when Srimad's reputation reached him, but believing Srimad to be worthy he sent Sobhagbhai as his emissary to Morbi to meet him and offer him the *bīj gnān*. When Sobhagbhai arrived, to his amazement, Srimad already knew his name and the purpose of his visit, despite never having met Sobhagbhai before, nor being forewarned of his visit or its intention. According to most accounts of this story Srimad then produced a copy of the same *bīj gnān* for Sobhagbhai to read.<sup>47</sup> He went on to describe the layout of Sobhagbhai's house at Sayla even though he had never been there.<sup>48</sup> Duly impressed, Sobhagbhai left his existing guru, Sri Dungershibhai Gosalia, and became Srimad's disciple from the moment they first met.<sup>49</sup> Sobhagbhai is believed to have attained self realisation as Srimad's disciple.<sup>50</sup> He died about five years before Srimad, who predicted his death, and who wrote him three inspiring letters to help maintain his equanimity during that period.<sup>51</sup>

Govardhandas describes the *bīj gnān* as an "incantation".<sup>52</sup> Mehta and Sheth describe it as a "mantra".<sup>53</sup> Neither term is accepted by Srimad's followers associated with Sayla, who describe, and practise, the *bīj gnān* as a meditation technique. They also have a different perspective on the exact details of its exchange between Sobhagbhai and Srimad. A leading member of this community explained that although Srimad had devoted his life to spiritual awakening and had

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid p83.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid p83

<sup>47</sup> Ibid p84.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p84.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p85. MehtaandSheth 1971, p136.

<sup>50</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 85 and 114.

<sup>51</sup> Mehta and Seth 1971, p138.

<sup>52</sup> Govardhandas 1991. p83.

<sup>53</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p136.

immense spiritual knowledge, he was aware of gaps in his knowledge. Meeting Sobhagbhai reminded him, in some mystical way, of the *bīj gnān* which was a crucial forgotten element. Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai, the guru at this ashram, said that Sobhagbhai had actually told Srimad the technique, that Srimad had not had prior knowledge of it. Srimad's disciples Ambalalbai, Lalluji and Sobhagbhai attained self realisation by this technique under Srimad's guidance, but only Sobhagbhai received permission from Srimad to pass it on. This version of the story may be difficult for some followers to accept, so the account of mutual exchange had evolved.<sup>54</sup>

The account of the *bīj gnān*'s transmission between Sobhagbhai and Srimad is paradigmatic of the two historical levels in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. The record of Srimad's first meeting with Sobhagbhai belongs to the universal history of the movement and is well known amongst the broad community of his followers. Sobhagbhai, like Lalluji, is universally respected because of his particularly close relationship with Srimad, because of his pious and spiritual nature and because he ultimately became self realised under Srimad's guidance. However, the particular version of the exchange held by devotees at Sayla belongs to their own local history. It emphasises the role played by Sobhagbhai in the origin of their community. The *bīj gnān* technique has been passed, from Srimad and Sobhagbhai, through a lineage of gurus to current devotees who still practise it as a means of attaining self realisation. Sobhagbhai is hence vital to this community's spiritual heritage because he revealed the method of their own salvation. Sobhagbhai's status is elevated in the local history of this community, relative to his place in the universal history, but this does not in any way subordinate Srimad. It is Srimad's superior

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<sup>54</sup> Personal interview, December 2001.

spiritual knowledge that rendered the *bīj gnān* effective. Sobhagbhai had not been able to attain self realisation by the technique alone without Srimad's guidance.

In 2002 Sayla acknowledged fourteen of its members - eight women and six men - including the two current *pratyakṣ* gurus, as having attained self realisation by the *bīj gnān* technique. To my knowledge this community is unique in the Srimad Rajcandra movement for its uniform practice of meditation. Also, with the exception of other *pratyakṣ* gurus - Atmanandji and Rakeshbhai - it is the only community that claims to have self realised people amongst its number. Atmanandji and Rakeshbhai both anticipate that some of their own disciples may attain self realisation in their current life-times.<sup>55</sup> Devotees at Agas believe that no one since Brahmacarīji has attained it and that the likelihood of someone attaining it during the current cosmic cycle is very remote. The different attitudes towards self realisation in the Srimad Rajcandra movement are discussed further in Chapter Four.

The lineage of gurus, all from Sayla, which forms the spiritual heritage of this ashram is listed below chronologically. Those gurus for whom it was not possible to ascertain birth and death dates are thought to have died somewhere between 1950 and 1965.<sup>56</sup>

1. Srimad Rajcandra(1867 to 1901)
2. Sri Sobhagbhai (1823 to 1897) 1
3. Sri Samaladasbhai
4. Srimati Maniben
5. Sri Kalidasbhai

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<sup>55</sup> Personal interviews January 2002 and December 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Sayla. December 2001.

6. Sri Vajabhai
7. Sri Chotabhai (died 1976)
8. Sri Ladakchandbhai Manekchand Vora (1903 to 1997)
9. Sri Nalinbhai Kothari (born 1943) and Srimati Sadgunaben Shah (born 1928).

The importance of this spiritual genealogy to Sayla ashram's history is indicated by the portraits of these gurus that are displayed in the *svādhyāy* hall; by its representation, with pictures of the gurus, in promotional literature; and by *Mokṣa Marg Prakash*, a book published by the ashram that records Ladakchandbhai's accounts of the guru's lives and teachings. The important position Sobhagbhai holds in Sayla's history is expressed by his inclusion in the lineage after Srimad, particularly considering that Sobhagbhai was not himself a guru and that he died before Srimad. As further justification for his inclusion it was explained that when Srimad was busy Sobhagbhai often worked as his emissary.<sup>57</sup> The third guru in this lineage, Samaladasbhai, was Sobhagbhai's cousin, to whom, with Srimad's permission, he gave the *bīj gnān*. The fourth, Maniben, was Samaladasbhai's daughter. The two gurus who will be tenth in this lineage (Vikrambhai and Minalben) have already been nominated by Ladakchandbhai and will succeed Nalinbhai and Sadgunaben when these two gurus decide it is appropriate. Sadgunaben Shah spends most of her time in Mumbai. She is now very elderly and described as "fragile" by her disciples. Nalinbhai undertakes the larger share in meeting disciples' needs. He divides his time between his family, who live in Mumbai, and the ashram at Sayla and makes every effort to be available to his disciples.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> It is common practice for a guru to delegate responsibilities to a senior disciple when necessary.

<sup>58</sup> Nalinbhai is generally called 'Bhai Sri' by his disciples, and Ladakchandbhai is called 'Bapuji'. This practice of disciples calling their guru by a respectful, yet affectionate, alternative name is usual. For example, Atmanandji is referred to as 'Sahebji', and Rakeshbhai as 'Gurudev'. Srimad himself is often called 'Param Krupalu Dev', shortened by some followers to 'P. K. D.'

He currently has approximately seven hundred disciples, of which about two hundred live outside of India. At least one self realised person, although generally more, will always be present at the ashram.

The origin of the physical structure of the 'Raj Sobhagbhai Satang Mandal' at Sayla, and the onset of this community of devotees in its current organisation, began with Ladakchandbhai, the eighth guru in the list above. Previous gurus in the lineage had preached from their homes in Sayla town, but Ladakchandbhai's disciples built an ashram for their guru.

Ladakchandbhai was a Jain householder with a respectable government job. According to his disciples he attained self realisation whilst in his late twenties and within only a week of receiving the *bīj gnān* from his guru, Chotabhai, the seventh guru in the list. There is no expected duration that it may take to attain self realisation, but the astonishing speed of Ladakchandbhai's transformation indicates the influence of much *sāadhanā* (religious practice) from previous incarnations. He did not speak of his achievement and it was not until decades later that his self realised status became known. Ladakchandbhai was in his sixties when a man named Shantilal, who was in search of a guru, recognised that he was self realised and requested to become his disciple. Ladakchandbhai refused to undertake this role whilst his own guru was still living. Shantilal was about to board a train to return to Calcutta when he received news of Chotabhai's death, thus he became the first of Ladakchandbhai's disciples. From the beginning Ladakchandbhai stipulated that he would accept no more than one thousand and eight disciples. The network expanded, particularly when three distinguished families from Sayla began to follow him, this sparked the interest of friends and other family members. Ladakchandbhai retired from his position as the spiritual head of Sayla ashram in 1994, when he passed the responsibility to his two nominated successors,

Nalinbhai and Sadgunaben. By this time he had disciples in India, Kenya, UK and USA. He was in his mid nineties when he died at Sayla in December 1997. Despite Ladakchandbhai's retirement and subsequent death, it is clear that he continues to 'hold office' in the hearts and minds of his disciples. Even after their succession, Nalinbhai and Sadgunaben would not give religious discourse in his presence unless he specifically instructed them to do so. It is not surprising that disciples who received the *bīj gnān* from Ladakchandbhai, and who venerated him as their guru for many years, should continue to feel a strong emotional attachment to him, yet they accept Sadgunaben and Nalinbhai willingly because this was his *āganā* to them. The spiritual credentials of these two are indisputable because of Ladakchandbhai's endorsement. The custom of nominating successors therefore, secures the guru lineage for generations to come.

The ashram was originally constructed in Sayla town in 1976. (The silver jubilee celebrations were held on 31st December 2001.) By 1985 more space was required so it was rebuilt on its current, larger site just outside the town. A girl's school, funded by the ashram, now runs from the original site, although a new school building is under construction. Approximately one thousand eight hundred disciples are associated with the ashram, of which about forty are permanent residents.<sup>59</sup> The site covers thirteen acres. It consists of accommodation blocks, dining hall, a Śvetāmbar temple and a *svādhyāy* hall in which, in addition to the customary photographs of Srimad and Lalluji, there is also a portrait of Sobhagbhai, and, as mentioned, portraits of all the gurus in the lineage. This is the only site that displayed a picture of Sobhagbhai in its *svādhyāy* hall.<sup>60</sup> Below the *svādhyāy* hall is the guru *mandir* which

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<sup>59</sup> It cannot go unnoticed that this figure, as well as Ladakchandbhai's limit of one thousand and eight disciples, are both auspicious figures in Jainism.

<sup>60</sup> See plate 4 figure 6.

contains a marble image of Srimad in the *padmāsan* position. Ladakchandbhai's bungalow has been preserved as a place where disciples can spend some quiet moments. Sobhagbhai's house has been removed from its original location in Sayla town and restored within the grounds of the ashram. It now houses a small gallery of paintings depicting scenes of Sobhagbhai and Srimad's relationship. There is also a memorial to Ladakchandbhai in the grounds, at the site of his cremation, which includes a foot-print shrine. This memorial, and the preservation of Ladakchandbhai and Sobhagbhai's residencies, echo the shrines and preservation of Lalluji and Brahmacariji's rooms at Agas. The daily programme at Sayla includes morning and evening *bhakti*, *svādhyāy* and, for those who are initiated, *dhyān* (meditation) following the *bīj gnān* technique. When he is not at the ashram, Nalinbhai gives *svādhyāy* regularly in Mumbai where many of his disciples live.

This community of Srimad's devotees prides itself for achieving a balance of *dhyān*, *bhakti*, and *sevā* (service or charitable works). The culture of *sevā* began with Ladakchandbhai's teachings that his disciples had a responsibility to the surrounding community because they remained householders, rather than renouncing worldly responsibilities by taking mendicancy. Now a considerable amount of funding and administration is designated to the broad range of charitable works undertaken by the ashram. For example, a boarding school, with attached farm, has been built at Chorvira, a nearby village and the birth place of Ladachandbhai. The house where he was born has been converted into what promotional literature describes as an "assembly hall" and nursery school. Sewing courses lasting six months and leading to a "nationally recognised certificate" are available free of charge to women who, upon successful completion, receive a complimentary sewing machine. The aim of this is empowerment rather than charity. Grain and other essential provisions are



delivered monthly to local households where it is needed. The ashram funds the Sri Raj Sobhag Sarvajanic Dispensary' which provides discounted or free health care and medicines to an average of eighty patients daily. It also funds projects run by the 'Blind Persons' Association' in Sayla and Limbdi to assist and rehabilitate people with disabilities. Diagnostic eye camps are held on a regular basis at the ashram and at nearby villages. Regions nearby Sayla were badly affected by the earthquake that devastated large areas of Gujarat in November 2000. The ashram responded immediately with donations of food, tents and other essential aid items. It has since established an ongoing project to rebuild an entire village that was destroyed.

Srimad's presence - iconographically, through his literature and as an object of veneration - has already been identified as a universal and unifying feature of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Apart from this, the ashrams at Sayla and Deolali are significantly different. Sayla, unlike Deolali, supports a community of devotees that is dedicated to a *pratyakṣ* guru. There are, however, some interesting parallels between Sayla and Agas. A comparison of these two sites illustrates how the local histories of the different communities of the Srimad Rajcandra movement are uniquely influenced by their particular origins. The spiritual heritage of both Sayla and Agas is traced back to Srimad via his immediate disciples; Lalluji at Agas and Sobhagbhai at Sayla. Lalluji and Sobhagbhai both had the religious authority of self realisation endorsed by Srimad and the extra benefit of being directly associated with him, for which they are acknowledged by the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Although both men are respected at both sites, the prestige of each is noticeably elevated by the particular community with which he is associated. Sobhagbhai's portrait hanging in the *svādhyāy* hall at Sayla is one example of this. Lalluji and Sobagbhai had the

religious authority to formalise religious practice. At Agas this is the set of vows that Brahmacariji immortalised in marble and the immutable programme of *bhakti* that Lalluji devised. At Sayla it is the *bīj gnān* meditation technique, immortalised in this case by guru lineage. Devotees at both communities believe their particular form of practice was endorsed, and therefore ultimately given and authenticated, by Srimad. Yet these two forms of religious practice are different. *Bhakti* is an important aspect of religious practice for devotees at Sayla, as it is for all of Srimad's devotees, but the precise format established by Lalluji is not followed. Meditation, which is a vital component of religious practice at Sayla, is not practised at Agas. Both forms of religious practice have originated from each community's local history and is particular to that individual community, but neither is practised universally in the Srimad Rajcandra movement.<sup>61</sup> This is one example of diversity in the movement.

Devotees at Sayla and Agas believe that they will attain self realisation, in a relatively short period of time, by the correct performance of their religious practice. This is one example of unity in the movement, in this case ideological unity. The majority of Srimad's followers believe in the proximity of self realisation for lay people that follow Srimad, but this is not a belief shared by most Jains. Devotees at both Agas and Sayla regard self realisation as an imminent possibility, but their attitudes towards its how imminent it may differ substantially, which is a further illustration of the unity and diversity in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Both groups agree that self realisation is possible soon for someone who follows Srimad, but whereas at Sayla 'soon' can mean in this life, at Agas it means perhaps in the next life, or one

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter Four for further discussion on this point.

soon after that.<sup>62</sup> The difference in attitude towards self realisation is reflected by the difference in attitude towards the *pratyakṣ* guru. It is also noteworthy that, despite their similarities in heritage, Sayla does not share the same universal significance as Agas. To my knowledge Sayla, unlike Agas, is not generally regarded by Srimad's followers as a pilgrimage site. This may be due to Lalluji's influence as a mendicant, and as the only one of Srimad's disciples to survive him and gather his own community of disciples. He not only founded Agas, but also lived there for a number of years, which cannot be said of Sobhagbhai at Sayla ashram. The high profile that Agas enjoys is also generated in part by its prolific publishing activities.

*The 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Sāadhanā Kendra', Koba.*

The 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Sāadhanā Kendra' was founded by Pujya Sri Atmanandji (born 1931), known as 'Sahebji' by his disciples and formerly as Mukund V. Soneji. Like Jaysingbhai at Deolali, Atmanandji was Vaiṣṇava by birth, but converted to Jainism later in life. Biographical literature produced by the ashram describes how his enthusiasm for religion and spirituality began at an early age. He studied religious literature avidly throughout his life and met with a number of renowned saints. In 1954 he studied the philosophy of Kundakacarya, which had a deep and lasting effect on him, followed, in 1957 by the teaching of Srimad Rajcandra, which left an equally profound impression.<sup>63</sup>

Atmanandji qualified as a medical doctor in 1956 and married Dr. Sharmishtaben in 1960.

Between 1961 and 1966 he and his wife took post-graduate training courses in the UK. In

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Four for further discussion on this point.

<sup>63</sup> Kundakunda was a Digambar ācārya who lived probably in the second or third century CE. His philosophy teaches the internalisation of religious practice and effect. Dundas 1992, pages 91 to 94.

1967 they established a maternity hospital in Ahmedabad together. Then, in October 1968 he fell ill with stomatitis and suffered a severe allergic reaction to the antibiotics he was prescribed. Atmanandji managed the pain of his condition by immersing himself in scriptural study and spiritual contemplation with the effect that, on 14 February 1969, he achieved self realisation, during which he experienced, “a total inner sublime transformation of his personality”.<sup>64</sup>

Following this profound spiritual experience Atmanandji curtailed his professional activities and spent more of his time in religious practice and study. He travelled throughout India during 1970 to 1974, giving religious discourses and visiting many of the places where Srimad stayed. He established an ashram near Ahmedabad, called ‘Satshrut Seva Sādhana Kendra’, on May 9th 1975. This is an auspicious date because it is believed to be the same day that Mahavir attained omniscience. In 1976 he took a vow of celibacy. Then, at Girnar in 1984, he took the Jain *aṇuvrats* (lay vows) from a Digambar *muni* Sri Samantabhadra Maharaj of Kumbhoj, Kohapur in Maharashtra, who gave him the name Pujya Sri Atmanandji. Since 1984 he has travelled in Africa, UK, and USA giving religious discourses, participating in *śibirs* (religious seminars) arranged by the ashram, and offering individual instruction to his disciples. One pamphlet produced by the ashram includes a photograph of Atmanandji alongside other Jain notables at Buckingham Palace as a guest of Prince Philip. In 1993 he was invited to lecture at the centenary gathering of the ‘World’s Parliament of Religions’ held in Chicago. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Atmanandji’s disciples, but over the past twenty five years in excess of five hundred thousand people have passed through the ashram. Subscriptions to Koba’s monthly in house

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<sup>64</sup> From literature produced by Koba ashram.

magazine, '*Divya Dhvani*', exceed five thousand and come from India, East Africa, UK, and USA. However, neither of these figures is likely to represent the number of actively committed disciples, which, one trustee suggested, is probably closer to one thousand with about three hundred deeply devoted disciples, approximately twenty-five percent of whom come from East Africa, USA and UK. Every few years a *śibir* is conducted abroad for overseas disciples. Atmanandji most recently visited UK and USA in the summer of 2000.

'Satshrut Seva Sāadhanā Kendra' was renamed 'Srimad Rajchandra Adhyatmik Sāadhanā Kendra' in 1982, and, having outgrown its previous location, was relocated to its current site at Koba, sixteen kilometres from Ahmedabad and twelve kilometres from Gandhinagar. This is now Atmanandji's permanent residence. The site covers just over seven acres, employs fifteen staff and can accommodate up to seven hundred people in modem flats. Tents are erected during festival times when the number of visitors may exceed one thousand. At these times the communal dining hall expands into the courtyard. There are approximately sixty full-time residents, some with their own bungalows; so with visitors the population is usually in the region of eighty to one hundred. Everyone is expected to respect the ashram's rules and values. This includes attendance at a minimum of four programmes daily, of which Atmanandji's *svādhyāy* and at least one *bhakti* are compulsory. The ashram does not stipulate that residents or visitors must be disciples of Atmanandji, or even of Srimad, although most people are, with the exception of the occasional visitor.

Atmanandji is influenced by Digambar Jainism, and there is a small but elegant Digambar temple on the site where *ārṭi* is performed every evening. *Bhāṇ puṇjā* (*puṇjā* without substances) takes place every morning in the much larger *svādhyāy* hall where there is a

small metal image of Vimalnath, the thirteenth Tīrthaṅkar, on a *samavasaraṇ* (tiered pedestal containing the Jina image), as well as the customary photographs of Srimad and Lalluji, and a portrait of Kundakundacarya.<sup>65</sup> Atmanandji explained that arranging *dravya puṇā* (*puṇā* with substances) would be expensive, time consuming and attract insects inevitably resulting in *himsā* (harmful actions). The *svādhyāy* hall has a capacity of six hundred, below it are meditation cells and a library. There is no guru *mandir* at Koba ashram and no statues of Srimad.

There is a shop selling over forty-five publications in Gujarati, Hindi and English, some written by Atmanandji himself. Audio and video cassettes of his discourses are also available and are purchased by many of his disciples who do not live permanently at the ashram. In keeping with its promotion of education, the ashram has plans to establish an information centre (in Gujarati, Hindi and English) in its grounds. Also on site is a medical centre which caters for the health needs of residents and visitors. Outreach work includes health care for local people and health promotion events such as blood donation and eye camps. The ashram also provides for twenty-one boys of school-age. The boys board at the ashram, where they are an active part of the community, and go to school nearby in Koba village by means of a bicycle donated by the ashram. In addition to this ashram at Koba, Atmanandji has also founded the ‘Srimad Rajchandra Prayer Mandir’ at Rakhiyal and, in December 1999, another *mandir*, ‘Sri Sat Guru Prasad’, at Ahmedabad.

Promotional literature describes ‘Srimad Rajchandra Adhyatmik Sādhana Kendra’ as “a centre dedicated to spiritual knowledge, purity of life and universal brotherhood”. When I

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<sup>65</sup> See plate 5 figure 7.

asked one long term, permanent resident why he and his wife had decided to retire to Koba he responded simply, “for a peaceful life and peaceful death”.<sup>66</sup> This ashram, like the others described in this chapter, provides Srimad’s devotees with an environment free from the distractions of worldly life where they can concentrate their time and energy on their religious practices and spiritual development.

The local history of this community of devotees at Koba begins with Atmanandji. His religious authority rests entirely with his self realised state. Lalluji, Brahmacariji, and the lineage described at Sayla, all had the religious authority of self realisation, but also the added endorsement of an established guru lineage. Atmanandji was born a Vaiṣṇava (like Jaysingbhai and Brahmacariji) and turned to Jainism, specifically Digambar Jainism, later in his life. The portrait of Kundakundacarya which hangs in the *svādhyāy* hall is one indication of this influence on Atmanandji. This was not seen at other sites because it is specific to the local history of Koba, in a similar way that Sobhagbhai is specific to the local history of Sayla and whose portrait is seen in the *svādhyāy* hall there. The Digambar influence at Koba is seen in the Digambar temple (it may be remembered that Sayla has a Śvetāmbar temple) and in Atmanandji’s decision not to install a guru *mandir* because he believes only the Jinās are worthy of *mūrti pūjā* (image worship).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Koba, November 1999

<sup>67</sup> Personal interview, January 2002.

'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Satsang Sāadhanā Kendra', Mumbai and 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram', Dharampur.

Param Pujya Sri Rakeshbhai (born 1967), referred to as Gurudev by his followers, has approximately three thousand disciples in India, the majority in Mumbai, and an extensive following abroad (a precise figure was not possible to verify). His disciples are grouped into twenty-seven centres world-wide; one at Antwerp, five in USA, one in Nairobi, and the rest in India, (in Mumbai, Gujarat, Bangalore, Chennai, and Calcutta). Rakeshbhai is the spiritual head of this community and all decisions are made ultimately by him. He has a 'first circle' of six male disciples who remain with him, perform any duties that are required and act as a buffer between him and the rest of his following. The social structure of disciples based in Mumbai and Gujarat evolved dramatically over the course of my research. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, during my first visit to 'Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Satsang Sāadhanā Kendra' (in November 1999 and January 2000) the group was based in Mumbai, but land had been purchased and plans were well under way to construct a large ashram at Dharampur in south Gujarat. By the time of my second visit (December 2001) the first phase of the ashram complex at Dharampur had been completed, so the focus of the community had shifted. Activities in Mumbai continue, but Rakeshbhai, along with a section of his community of followers, now spent half their time at Mumbai and half at Dharampur.

Rakeshbhai spends every second week at the ashram at Dharampur. He is accompanied each time by a different group of disciples, usually between sixty to one hundred, whom he has nominated to join him. The group includes a wing of fourteen (in 2001) *brahmacāri* disciples. These are young people, who, with Rakeshbhai's permission, have decided to



remain unmarried and devote their lives to religion. This will be the first group to move to the ashram permanently when it is ready. All of Rakeshbhai's younger disciples depend upon him to decide their marriage arrangements; whether or not they will marry, and if they are to marry, to choose a partner from within the community of his disciples. This community is endogamous. It is the only group that has a high percentage of younger followers, so it is the only community where the issue of endogamy is relevant. His followers have been divided into several teams, each responsible for a different area of ashram maintenance - kitchen, reception, horticulture and so forth (a chef and cleaners are also employed) - so everyone has an active input into the organisation and running of the community. *Bhakti* takes place at six to seven thirty in the morning, followed by half an hour of *prāṇāyāma* (yoga breathing exercises), and seven thirty to nine thirty in the evening. For one weekend during my visit only the manager, another lady and myself were present at the ashram, but *bhakti* took place in the *svādhyāya* hall nevertheless. The programme throughout the day is currently more flexible. During the weeks when Rakeshbhai is not present *sibirs* are run by senior disciples. When he is present he devises an appropriate programme. For example, during my stay much time was devoted to discussing the future plans of the ashram and its community.

The 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Dharampur was opened with much celebration in April 2001. Amongst the honoured guests were Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai of Sayla and Param Pujya Sri Atmanandji of Koba. It is built on the foundations of the ruined palace of the last Raja of Dharampur, situated in hilly countryside approximately three miles from Dharampur village. The Raja died about thirty years ago leaving the property to his daughter, but she had moved to Bangalore and had not maintained its upkeep. The site covers two hundred

and twenty acres, when complete it is intended to be a huge ashram complex dedicated to Srimad, and a centre for the community of Rakeshbhai's disciples. The first phase of construction is now finished, it includes a communal dining hall and accommodation for one hundred people, or more if bed rolls are used. There is a *svādhyāy* hall in which a large photograph of Srimad is mounted in a marble surround; above this photograph is a small metal image of Chandraprabhu, the eighth Jina.<sup>68</sup> Unlike other sites described in this chapter there is no photograph of Lalluji here, or at this community's *svādhyāy* hall in Mumbai. A garden is being cultivated, a gazebo and small amphitheatre have already been built in the grounds and there are swings on the terraces. A large, magnificent temple is planned for the summit of the hill opposite the current building, but the construction of a smaller temple is planned in the interim.

At Mumbai the top floor of an apartment block has been converted into a *svādhyāy* hall where Rakeshbhai and his disciples meet daily for *bhakti* when they are not at Dharampur. Rakeshbhai also gives *satsaṅg* (religious discourse) every fortnight on a Sunday. This is held at a more spacious venue nearby because it attracts such a large audience. The congregation at this *satsaṅg* is interested to hear Rakeshbhai's lecture, but not all those present are necessarily his disciples. For example, I attended in January 2000 with a couple who are disciples of Atmanandji and regular visitors to Koba ashram, but whose son is a disciple of Rakeshbhai. Some disciples invest considerable effort to attend Rakeshbhai's *satsaṅg*. One family to whom I spoke took an overnight train journey in order to attend. In addition to daily *bhakti* and fortnightly *satsaṅg*, Rakeshbhai's disciples in Mumbai are organised into study groups that meet fortnightly. These are led by a group leader nominated by

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<sup>68</sup> See plate5 figure 8.

Rakeshbhai. Groups are arranged according to age, marriage status and location. The Mumbai centre houses a library and administrative centre, from where video and audio cassettes of Rakeshbhai's discourses are sent to the different communities of his disciples in India and abroad. Transcripts are also typed and posted to individual members who are on a mailing list.

The local history of this community of Srimad's followers is entwined with Rakeshbhai's personal history. Described below is the account that Rakeshbhai gave of his own spiritual development and the emergence of his community of disciples.<sup>69</sup> The words in direct speech are Rakeshbhai's own.

Rakeshbhai's parents were influenced by a Jain *muni* called Sahaj Anandji (died 1970). Sahaj Anandji has been mentioned previously in this chapter as the founder of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Hampi. Originally named Bhadra, he had been a mendicant in Rajasthan for twelve and a half years, but was dissatisfied with his religious progress, particularly his inability to attain self realisation. He left the *upāśray*, where the *munis* stayed, for the solitude of the Rajasthan wilderness where he sheltered in caves. In this seclusion Sahaj Anandji began an intensive study of Srimad Rajcandra's writings, which led him to the experience of self realisation he had been craving. He did not reveal his self realised state to anyone, but continued his reclusive existence, immersed in religious study and meditation. The local mendicants opposed his lifestyle and condemned him for living in the caves because it broke the rules of their mendicant order. He told them that he no longer wanted their name, clothes or identity because he had found something far more valuable,

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<sup>69</sup> Personal interview, January 2000.

which was ‘*Sahaj Anand*’ - happiness of the soul. From that point he changed his name, began to wear orange robes to distinguish himself from the order to which he had previously belonged, and started to journey south until he reached Hampi where he settled. It was here, whilst in deep meditation, that Sahaj Anandji experienced *jāti smaraṇa gnān* (memory of his previous lives), during which he realised that in a previous incarnation he had stayed at Hampi where he had practised much *sāadhanā*.

When Sahaj Anandji arrived at Hampi he was already known amongst the Gujarati and Rajasthani communities there because of the time he had lived in Rajasthan. Rakeshbhai said they regarded him as a, “real *sādhū*, in the genuine sense”. However, Srimad Rajcandra was not known to these people. Sahaj Anandji lived in a cave at Hampi for the rest of his life from where he lectured about Srimad’s teachings. Many people came to hear him and in 1960, after he had lived at Hampi for two years, a *dharamśālā* was built to accommodate them, which was the origin of the ashram. Sahaj Anandji insisted it was named the ‘Srimad Rajcandra Ashram’. No *mandir* was built, but Srimad’s photograph was displayed in the cave where aspirants met. In 1968 Sahaj Anandji travelled to Palitana to give religious lectures.<sup>70</sup> Rakeshbhai’s maternal aunt’s husband was a disciple so he took Rakeshbhai’s father and Rakeshbhai, then only a baby, to hear Sahaj Anandji. It was from this point that Rakeshbhai’s family began to learn about Srimad Rajcandra. Before his death in 1970, Sahaj Anandji nominated Mataji (meaning ‘Mother’) as his successor. She was a staunch disciple who had attained self realisation under his guidance. In concluding this part of the story Rakeshbhai said of Sahaj Anandji,

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<sup>70</sup> Palitana is a massive temple complex in South Gujarat and a major Jain pilgrimage site.

“He was a very blessed soul. There were miracles and all that, but that’s not important. He would sit in meditation for hours and hours”.

Rakeshbhai visited Hampi twice. In 1978, when he stayed for eighteen months, and in 1983, when he stayed for two years. It was during the second visit that Mataji, who was by then the spiritual head of the ashram, initiated him.

“She gave me the *sāadhanā*, the path of meditation. She considered me as a *śiśir*, she gave me the powers also. ... She initiated me, and she gave me some vows. I had to wear only white clothes, and I had to do so much religious practice a day. I had just passed my tenth standard. I used to meditate in the caves over there”.<sup>71</sup>

After Sahaj Anandji’s death, there had been some concern amongst the members of Hampi ashram about the authority of a woman guru. Rakeshbhai said that some people felt, “the place was empty” unless a man succeeded Mataji. Following Rakeshbhai’s initiation Mataji nominated him to succeed her after her death. “So”, he continued, “they got a *svāmī* that way”. Devotees there began to bow first to Rakeshbhai and then to Mataji.

Rakeshbhai was a young man when Mataji selected him as her successor, however his own story begins much earlier. He is the eldest child, having a younger sister and brother. He said that whilst his mother was pregnant with him she dreamed of celestial visitations during which gods told her, “our friend is coming in your womb” and promised to protect her unborn son. Rakeshbhai was born prematurely, he was weak and was not expected to survive. At midnight for the first two weeks of his life Dharanendra, the snake god, came to

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<sup>71</sup> *śiśir* means ‘disciple’.

his cradle and spread his Cobra-hood over the baby's head. Rakeshbhai said that many people witnessed this event, which continued until the paediatrician confirmed that he was out of danger. Even when the visitations ceased Rakeshbhai's mother continued to dream of Dharanendra, by whom she was given the ability of future prediction. As he grew older, Rakeshbhai began to display supernatural and psychic abilities. People from his community, at Chowpatti in Mumbai, commented to his mother that her son was unusual. From the age of four he began speaking about Jain philosophy and spent long periods of time in, what he described as, a trance. People began to approach him for religious advice when he was only six years old. He would enter a trance then answer their question, not always knowing or understanding what he was saying.

“They asked me for solutions to problems, and I don't know from where I was speaking but it used to come out true. My whole image was that of a mystical person”.

Rakeshbhai remembers first encountering Srimad's writing when he was eight years old. An indoor game caused a copy of *Srimad Rajcandra* to fall on his head. When he saw the photograph of Srimad inside the book he went into deep meditation for seventy-two hours during which he realised that Srimad was his guru and had been “since so many births”, by which he meant that their souls had been in communion throughout many incarnations. Rakeshbhai had knowledge of this through his own experience of *jāti smaraṇa gnān*. He said, “I have seen flashes of my past births, as you see television”. The vision of Srimad's picture triggered Rakeshbhai's first experience of self realisation,

“When I was born I was in a dormant state. At the age of eight, when I saw his photograph, I attained that experience”.

The seeds of the ‘Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Satsaṅg Sādhana Kendra’ were sown in 1978 when a small group of devotees began meeting with Rakeshbhai for *satsaṅg* and *bhakti*. By 1980 some people began to call him guru and bow to him, but Rakeshbhai was not prepared for this and tried to stop them,

“I was in my own world, I had not read any scripture, I was still a student in the school and I was not so serious about the whole thing”.

He was an accomplished student who was expected to succeed academically. Although Rakeshbhai was clearly devoted to his religion, at that point in time he had not decided whether to pursue a secular profession or a religious career. A couple of years later a family incident prompted him to seriously consider his future. He went to Jaipur to stay with his aunt and whilst there recited ten thousand *Namaskār Mantras*, between six am and midnight, during a single day.<sup>72</sup> Before commencing this austerity he prayed.

“What do you want from me, what do you want me to do in this life, do you want me to have a normal life, what do you have in store?”.<sup>73</sup>

As a result of this, Rakeshbhai decided to return to Hampi where he desired to live simply on the ashram, but his parents were unenthusiastic about his decision. He was their elder son, they were strongly attached to him and believed a secular profession would be more suitable. Rakeshbhai confessed,

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<sup>72</sup> The Namaskār Mantra is accepted by all branches of Jainism (Śvetāmbar Jains do not accept the final two lines) and is the most widely known and recited prayer of this religion. For a more detailed explanation see Dundas 1992, pages 70 to 72 and Jaini 1998, 162 to 164.

<sup>73</sup> It was not clear from our interview whether Rakeshbhai was uttering a general plea or directing it specifically towards Srimad.

“I was in a very different mood, I did not care for them, which was wrong. I just left to go to Hampi [in 1983] and did not return to Mumbai for two years. I did *sevā* with Mataji, did *sāadhanā* and all, but this was not the right way to do it. Unless I had the consent of my parents, I would not be successful in my *sāadhanā*”.

Rakeshbhai returned to Mumbai in 1985. At this time his parents gave their consent for him to pursue a religious career, but insisted that if this was his choice he should study scripture and Sanskrit. From 1985 to 1990 Rakeshbhai practised *moan* (silence) from nine in the morning to nine in the evening. He became engrossed with his *sāadhanā* and with the study of scripture, language, classical music and yoga.

“I was cut off from all other social activities. I was totally within me. We used to do *bhakti*, *satsaṅg* and everything, but from morning to night, from nine to nine I was totally silent”.

By this time the ‘Srimad Rajcandra Adhyatmik Satsaṅg Sāadhanā Kendra’ had grown from a small group of devotees into almost five hundred who met with Rakeshbhai every fifteen days for *satsaṅg* and *bhakti*.

His parents suggested that Rakeshbhai directed his studies towards a doctorate. He agreed, on the condition that he could write about Srimad Rajcandra. However, he did not have the undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications necessary for doctoral entry. At that time he was reluctant to enter college. He had a change of heart during a family holiday in Nepal in 1987. It was not Rakeshbhai’s usual practice to attend family holidays, but he believed that during an earlier incarnation as a prince Srimad had lived at Nepal. By visiting the country



Rakeshbhai hoped to experience spiritual vibrations and perhaps have more visions about his past lives. Whilst he was there he realised that in the future, when the time came for him to travel, preach and continue the mission of Srimad Rajcandra, a doctorate would be of great benefit to him. With this in mind he began to meditate and received the name and address of the professor who was to become his supervisor.<sup>74</sup> On his return to Mumbai, Rakeshbhai visited him, but was told that he would not be considered for a Ph.D. until he had gained graduate and postgraduate qualifications.

Rakeshbhai first visited Antwerp in 1989 when he stayed for one month whilst his father received medical treatment. During this time he gave *satsaṅg* which was attended initially by only four or five people, but by the end of the month a gathering of between forty and fifty met daily for *bhakti*, *satsaṅg* and to take guidance from Rakeshbhai. On his return to India he enrolled at Mumbai university where he gained a first class Bachelor's degree, followed by a Master's, for which he won a gold medal, the highest award. Rakeshbhai returned to the professor, who by this time had retired, however the University granted a special dispensation for him to supervise Rakeshbhai and he began his doctoral studies in January 1994. By this time he had over five hundred disciples, most of whom met for *bhakti* early every morning, an audience in the region of two thousand was attending his fortnightly *satsaṅg* and a further two thousand pilgrims joined his regular pilgrimage to Palitana. Rakeshbhai had vowed not to give public *satsaṅg* until his work had been published.<sup>75</sup> His doctorate, on Srimad Rajcandra's *Atma Siddhi*, was awarded to him on second December

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<sup>74</sup> Since Rakeshbhai gained his doctorate this professor has become a follower of Srimad Rajcandra and a disciple of Nalinbhai at Sayla.

<sup>75</sup> By 'public' Rakeshbhai means an invited guest speaker at a public event.

1998. He gave his first public *satsang* at Rajkot on thirteenth of April 2001, as part of the centenary celebrations of Srimad's death.

Rakeshbhai's account is interesting because it highlights the qualities of a guru and traces his gradual adoption of this role.<sup>76</sup> It is clear that he did not elect to become a guru, but rather that the role was ascribed to him by those people who recognised his special qualities. At first the community was small with an informal structure. Longstanding disciples spoke fondly of discourses they had with Rakeshbhai during walks along Chowpatti beach in Mumbai. At this time meetings were still small enough to take place in disciples' homes. As the community increased in size it required more formal management and organisation, this 'formalisation' has in turn attracted more followers. It is now far less easy for Rakeshbhai's disciples to approach him directly, although he does spend much of his time engaged in personal interviews. Yet despite this, all his disciples with whom I spoke felt they had a deep and personal relationship with him., and believed him to be highly attentive to their spiritual needs.

The five accounts given in this chapter have described communities at different stages of maturity, Agas being the oldest thriving ashram community and Dharampur being the most recent. The descriptions illustrate by example that the Srimad Rajcandra movement consists of numerous autonomous communities, as well as independent devotees. Each community has its own local history that is influenced largely by its particular founder. This has contributed to the diversity of beliefs and practices within the movement. Examples of such diversity are: the range of religious practices that guarantee self realisation; veneration

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<sup>76</sup> The required qualities of a guru are discussed further in Chapter Three.

towards absent gurus and veneration towards present gurus; gurus with no lineage and gurus who trace their lineage back to Srimad; different attitudes towards the appropriate veneration of Srimad's image, and different attitudes towards the attainment of self realisation. Yet these five communities, along with all those that constitute the Srimad Rajcandra movement, also share areas of conformity. This conformity rests principally with Srimad who, as a religious icon that is tangibly expressed by literature and iconography, links the many facets of the movement that have sprung from his teachings. Therefore, whilst Srimad represents the universal history and ideology that unites the movement, it is not necessary for one community (or individual) to incorporate the particular history or experience of another in order for them all to join as a single tradition.

#### *Future developments.*

The Srimad Rajchandra movement evolved with a fragmentary organisation from its origins; it never existed as a single body from which splinter groups broke off. Its fragmentary structure may even lessen the risk of sharper divisions into sects or sub- sects. The earliest 'split' of which I am aware occurred when Lalluji, who had spent some time with Popatlalbhair at Vadva, left to found the ashram at Agas. Today inter-community relations are generally polite and co-operative, although devotees are inevitably partisan towards their own guru and community. The most significant schism in the movement is caused by the issue of whether or not to venerate a *pratyakṣ* guru. Devotees who only venerate Srimad as a *parokṣ* guru do not accept the authority of existing *pratyakṣ* gurus. The community at Agas, for obvious reasons, is particularly dismissive of Rakeshbhai's claim to be an incarnation of Lalluji.

Some devotees across the different communities have recently begun to consider their relationships with each other, as well as how they are perceived externally. They feel that the broad spectrum of Srimad's followers could benefit from the co-ordination of the combined efforts of the independent communities. In 2000, the centenary year of Srimad's death, representatives from the different communities began to discuss the proposal of establishing a corporate identity. An agreement has not yet been reached, but my informant implied that a "successful agreement" was anticipated in the near future. (Although I am not entirely clear what he meant by a "successful agreement"). The aim is co-ordination not unification. It is obvious from the descriptions given in this chapter that the various communities which constitute the Srimad Rajcandra movement are unlikely to homogenise and would not respond to a dictatorial central administration. Co-ordination and co-operation between communities are already being implemented at a grass roots level. For example, the communities at Koba and Sayla recently both celebrated their silver jubilees.

Representatives from all the sites were invited. Atmanandji and Nalinbhai both attended the opening celebration of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Dharampur. Representatives from all sites attended the inaugural celebrations of the new temple opened in Rajkot in January 2002. Of course the future development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement is unknown, but its membership and activity is increasing. Dharampur, Koba and Sayla all reported an annual increase in their membership, Agas is full to capacity and has a waiting list of people wanting to move to the ashram. Atmanandji's comments about the future development of the community of Srimad's followers represent the general outlook. He suggested that the prospects are good and that Srimad's following will probably continue to increase for the

foreseeable future. However, he also added a cautionary note that an increase in volume inevitably risked a lowering of spiritual values.<sup>77</sup>

### **3. Perceptions of identity.**

The process of identifying and mapping the organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement has undergone deconstructive and reconstructive phases. The first - deconstructive - phase involved stripping the movement down to its constituent parts (the individual communities) and then identifying the relationships between these parts. As these relationships revealed so many differences, the second - reconstructive phase - involved identifying the features that linked them together - a case of taking something apart to find out how it works. I believe the model of structural organisation presented here is accurate according to the empirical data upon which it is based. It is a useful device for a holistic understanding and explanation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement and Srimad's followers would be unlikely to deny the existence of the relationships identified. However, to Srimad's devotees the model, as well as their particular place in it, is actually irrelevant because the 'Srimad Rajcandra movement' only exists as an academic construction within the context of this thesis. It does not exist in an actual institutional context. The organisational structure mapped above is 'real' and based on practical observations, but it is 'academic' because it has no influential meaning for followers. Devotees are often curious about other communities, but only from the perspective of human interest.

The fact that Srimad's followers do not operate within an institutional context is apparent because I had to devise a criterion of inclusion, of membership to the movement, in order to

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<sup>77</sup> Personal interview, January 2002.

define the subject, the 'Srimad Rajcandra movement', for study. It has already been stated that there is not a single, regulating body that stipulates the movement's central articles of belief and conduct, therefore there are no rigid central concepts of orthopraxy or heteropraxy. A person cannot be expelled from the movement because it does not exist as a single institution, although someone who flouts the rules of a particular community within the movement can be excommunicated from that community. My criterion for inclusion in the movement is: anyone who venerates Srimad Rajcandra. This is a broad index of definition which intends to be as inclusive as possible and also embraces any devotees who are not mentioned throughout the course of this thesis. The process of classifying those who meet this criterion has resulted in the structural model presented in this chapter. Although this model is useful for organising information about Srimad's followers to facilitate coherent discussion and analysis, it is in danger of imposing an identity upon them that they do not necessarily recognise for themselves. One thing is clear, not all of Srimad's followers identify themselves as I have classified them in this chapter. It is important, therefore, to redress this balance by considering their perceptions of self identity. A starting point is the term 'movement'.

The term 'movement' describes a group of people with a shared ideology. 'Srimad Rajcandra movement' is used throughout this thesis as a passive literary device to describe collectively all of Srimad's followers - that is anyone who worships Srimad. At least, that is what I thought. However, when I used this term at a conference there was considerable debate amongst delegates, some of whom were Jains and followers of Srimad, about its appropriateness.<sup>78</sup> For some people the word had sectarian connotations which challenged

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<sup>78</sup> School of Oriental and African studies, London, November 2000.

their belief in the universal nature of their religion and seemed to devalue the religious truth of Srimad's teaching. Their response made an important statement about the sense of self identity of these Jains.

Throughout the course of my research Stimad's followers frequently repeated to me this proverb, "truth is truth". The meaning is straight-forward. Reality, as it really exists (rather than the multifaceted ways in which it is perceived by the unenlightened), is truth. There is only one 'real' reality and therefore only one truth. 'Real truth' is understood by experiencing pure soul.

"There is no difference in the path of the knowers of self, who were in the past, who are in the present and who shall be in the future (for realising the self)." *Atma Siddhi* verse 134.<sup>79</sup>

*Siddhas* know 'real truth' because they are omniscient, but synonymous with their omniscience is their inaccessibility, Srimad also understood 'real truth' because of the high level of self realisation, or internal purity, he had attained. Devotees believe that Srimad's teachings represent 'real truth' because they originate from this practical revelation rather than from intellectual theorising. 'Real truth' must be universal; it must apply to each and everything because there can only be one true reality. If Srimad's teachings represent this truth they must also be universal, which, according to his followers, they are.

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<sup>79</sup> Translation by D.C. Mehta 1978.

Sectarian difference is an anathema to ‘real truth’ because, for the reasons described above, where there is sectarianism there is no truth.<sup>80</sup> Anti-sectarianism is a familiar theme amongst practitioners who emphasise the spirituality of their religion. For example, Laidlaw writes of the mendicant Shanti Vijay Suri-ji (1889 to 1943) who, by the end of his life, lived more as a hermit than a mendicant and “declared himself to be a member of no specific Jain order”.<sup>81</sup> Another example is the pious Jain layman called Shriman Amarcand-ji Nahar (died 1976), who was a devotee of Srimad. Amarcand-ji’s family was of the Khartar Gacch, but he “disclaimed affiliation to any Jain order”.<sup>82</sup> Dundas comments on the broad universal approach to religion that some prominent twentieth century Jains have taken. For example, the Śvetāmbar mendicant Vijayavallabha Suri described himself as,

“neither Jain nor Buddhist, Vaishnava nor Shaiva, Hindu or Moslem, but rather a traveller on the path of peace shown by the Supreme Soul, the god who is free from passion.”<sup>83</sup>

Universalism and anti-sectarianism are values that have permeated the religious consciousness of Srimad’s followers and influenced their perceptions of their own identity. They regard, what they describe as, sectarian Jainism with a degree of suspicion. Under no circumstances do his devotees view themselves as another Jain sect, but rather as the followers of the universal truth. This is why some devotees are uncomfortable with the term ‘movement’. (It should also be mentioned that many of Srimad’s followers accept the term

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<sup>80</sup> Govardhaadas 1991, p53. Also Atmanandji personal interview, October 1999. Atmanandji said that true Jainism is universal and not sectarian; and that Srimad’s teaching is the same as Mahavir’s teaching, which is the same as all true religious teachers.

<sup>81</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 61 to 62.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid p238

<sup>83</sup> Dundas 1992, p195.



in the spirit of my intention, as an unbiased, descriptive, literary device). The response of those who were disturbed by the term taught me to be sensitive towards imposing an identity, and values that may be inferred from that identity, upon this community of Jains. It would be a dismay if Srimad's followers became known by the attributed label, 'The Srimad Rajcandra movement', particularly if it does not rest easily with some of them. This is one reason why the term was abandoned as a title for this thesis.<sup>84</sup>

It is typical of any ideology to claim "cognitive sovereignty" and to "provide the very criterion for telling truth from falsehood".<sup>85</sup> This claim is challenged when the followers of an ideology are categorised as a sect because of the inherent implication that one sect is equal to another. From an academic perspective the term 'sect' may be intended as an impartial description of a group of people who share the same religious beliefs, but from the perspective of religious practitioners the term can be meaningless and pejorative. It is meaningless when practitioners do not recognise themselves as belonging to a sect. It is pejorative because it assumes an equality with the 'limited' or 'false' ideologies of other people's sects. Each sect regards its own ideology as the epitome of truth. For example, each branch of Jainism regards itself as representative of true Jainism. Wilson points out that the label 'sect' is usually externally attributed and that members of religious groups are generally disinclined to acknowledge this identity for themselves.<sup>86</sup> This is the case with the Srimad Rajcandra movement. The movement's refusal to adopt a sectarian identity is further represented by its social organisation into a collection of autonomous communities that have,

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<sup>84</sup> This type of labelling has occurred in the case of the 'Kanji Svami Panth'. However, to my knowledge Kanji Svami's followers do not have an ethical objection to this title.

<sup>85</sup> Banks 1992, p2 12 and p225, (after Gellner Spectacles and Predicaments 1979, p117 to 132). Also in Banks 1991, p256.

<sup>86</sup> Wilson 1990, p2.

so far, evaded a corporate identity. In the early phases of the movement's development Lalluji attempted to avoid sectarianism by catering for all sects through the provision of a Digambar and a Śvetāmbartemple at Agas. Today this approach seems to be unnecessary as devotees identify themselves directly with Srimad and with their *pratyakṣ* guru if they follow one.

It is expected that an analysis of Jainism within a social context will make reference to caste. My enquiries into caste relationships amongst Srimad's followers reinforce the perceptions of religious identity expressed above. The Jains that Laidlaw met in Rajasthan explained to him that caste is a worldly institution, "which is firmly subordinate to religious values".<sup>87</sup> Banks, in his study of Jains in Gujarat and Leicester (UK), comments that caste plays little, if any, part in Jain ideology, but the results of his fieldwork clearly demonstrate its role in Jain sociology.<sup>88</sup> He identifies Oswal and Srimali as the two predominant castes of Gujarati Jains, from which a number of sub-castes have branched. On this point my own findings correspond with Banks's. He observed that Srimali Jains in Leicester (during the mid 1980s) identified more strongly with their secular (caste) identity than with their religious (Jain) identity. This point was not echoed by my fieldwork amongst Srimad's followers in London in 2001. These Jains placed a greater emphasis on their religious identity than on their secular identity. Their religious identity is comprised of membership to their guru-centred community (all the devotees that I met in London were disciples of either Atmanandji, Nalinbhai or Rakeshbhai), of devotion to Srimad Rajcandra and of their identity as Jains. Unlike the Jains that Banks interviewed in Gujarat, who seemed keen that he understood

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<sup>87</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p115.

<sup>88</sup> Banks 1992, p64.

their social (caste) history, Srimad's followers that I interviewed wanted to make sure that I understood their religious philosophy, but were frequently dismissive of my questions about caste. The response was the same in London and in India. One reason for this response is the emphasis on soteriology in their religious beliefs.<sup>89</sup> The identity of a person is often referenced to caste, ethnographic and geographic origin; but these are indices of a material identity that Srimad's followers believe to be subordinate to their spiritual identity and that they are striving to master in their quest for liberation. For example, ashrams are religious not secular environments. For the duration of the aspirant's stay their attention is focused utterly on religious progression, whilst professional and householder concerns are postponed. Under these conditions caste and secular identity are irrelevant, so it is not surprising that people were not interested in discussing the mundane issues of caste with me.<sup>90</sup>

Caste identity does not have the same level of irrelevance in devotees' secular lives, but my contacts knew I was there to learn about their religion, so this is the face I was shown. Only on rare occasions did I have a glimpse of the other. For example, I accompanied one family on a business dinner. As the mother of the household put on expensive clothes and jewellery, and eyed with despair my own, by now rather tatty, Punjabi dress, she explained that it was "expected of her". She meant that these luxurious clothes were her secular uniform. The nature of my research, and perhaps my gender, may be external reasons why people were sometimes unenthusiastic to talk about caste with me. Yet my impression was not that they were avoiding the issue, but rather that they relished the opportunity to discuss their religion, which they believed to be far more important.

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<sup>89</sup> This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion about Jains' attitudes towards caste see Laidlaw 1995, pages 111 to 116.

Srimad's followers embrace anti-sectarianism and universalism as principal religious values, so regard themselves as an inclusive community - anyone can become a follower of Srimad. This ethical stance was constantly articulated, so the actual range of social backgrounds was more difficult to gauge. Srimad wrote in Gujarati and the majority of his followers are from Gujarati or Hindi speaking backgrounds. Literacy and a level of education is important because scriptural study is an important religious practice for these Jains. I met a number of devotees who had invested a lot of time and effort into learning Gujarati when it was not their first language.<sup>91</sup> Most of Srimad's devotees that I met in India and Britain were comfortably or well-off financially. Many earn their livings by trade or manufacturing, for example as diamond merchants, manufacturing computer parts, or in the textile industry. Rakeshbhai said that the *baniyā* (business, also *vaniyā*) class is probably the most dominant amongst Srimad's followers, but that followers come from all economic backgrounds.<sup>92</sup> Economic self sufficiency is necessary for those living at an ashram because residents are not in paid work, although the cost of living is minimal.

Another interesting consideration in the issue of identity is the secular social status of Srimad's women devotees. Women who fall outside the categories of being either married, widowed or religious renouncers are anomalous to Indian society. Atmanandji renounced his obligation as a householder in 1976 when his son was ten years old. This raises the question about the status of his wife. When I asked her about this she said that from a societal perspective she was considered to be a married woman, even though her husband had

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<sup>91</sup> For example, Jains living in Mumbai who were educated in English medium schools and Jains who were born in Europe or USA.

<sup>92</sup> Personal interview, December 2001. This was also observed by Humphrey and Laidlaw, (1994, pages 20 to 21). Laidlaw (1995, pSS) explains that 'baniya' is used as a generic term for 'Jain' in western India and actually incorporates a number of castes. Also see Cort 1989, pages 135 to 137.

renounced his family.<sup>93</sup> Atmanandji's renunciation increased his wife's workload and responsibilities. She had the hospital to run, a young son and a responsibility to her household, which included her parents-in-law, yet she said that she made no attempts to obstruct his decision. He has always remained available to his family in the case of household problems, although these rarely occur. Atmanandji's wife admitted that it took a long time for her to fully accept the change in their relationship, but now she is a disciple of Atmanandji and a member of the board of trustees at Koba ashram. With her (now adult) son and daughter-in-law she continues to run the maternity hospital that she and Atmanandji established in Ahmedabad. During our discussion she showed no hint of regret at Atmanandji's decision to renounce his family life and said that the spiritual benefits she has gained from his guidance outweigh the difficulties she had to face.

The status of young women who, with their guru's permission, have decided to remain unmarried is more precarious within a secular social context because they are neither wives nor renunciators associated with an established mendicant order. Another of Atmanandji's disciples, a woman in her thirties, told me that some families of prospective bridegrooms for her younger sister were anxious about her own unmarried status. It has already been mentioned in this chapter that a number of Rakeshbhai's young adult disciples intend to remain unmarried. The women to whom I spoke were very content with this situation themselves, but confided that their social status was sometimes difficult to explain to inquirers who were unfamiliar with their religious commitment to Rakeshbhai. and to Srimad.

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<sup>93</sup> Koba, November 1999.

The religious background of Srimad's followers is as difficult to evaluate as their social and economic backgrounds. The majority are hereditary Jains who come from Śvetāmbar or Sthānakvāsī families because the community is predominantly Gujarati speaking (Digambar Jainism predominates in south India). Religious affiliation with Srimad may lead devotees to reassess the beliefs and practices associated with their hereditary sect. For example, devotees who originate from the non-image worshipping Sthānakvāsī branch of Jainism become convinced that idol worship is an important religious practice because it was advocated by Srimad. Devotees also adopt the traditions of their local community of followers. For example, the majority of Atmanandji's disciples are not from a Digambar background, but whilst staying at Koba ashram they worship in a Digambar style temple because of Atmanandji's influence. Most devotees at Agas are hereditary Vaiṣṇava, although all those with whom I spoke now describe themselves as Jain. Rakeshbhai also has many Vaiṣṇavas amongst his disciples, but they also now describe themselves as Jain. Only one couple that I met described themselves first as disciples of Rakeshbhai and then as Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>94</sup>

Although Srimad's devotees do not regard themselves as another Jain sect it is perhaps inevitable that this is how they are often perceived by Jains outside the movement. A number of devotees from different communities of Srimad's followers reported the fears of their friends and family that they had joined a "fringe movement" that may not even be Jain. Srimad's lay status is one cause for concern. According to devotees Srimad's external status as a layman is superseded by his internal spirituality which gives him religious authority. Jains who are not convinced of Srimad's internal purity regard the veneration of a layman as

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<sup>94</sup> This is not the only example of Vaiṣṇavas converting to Jainism. For example, see Babb's accounts of the Saciya Mata temple in Osiya, Rajasthan. (1996, p154.)

a massive break with tradition. Some Jains assume, similarly to the scholars described in the Introduction to this thesis, that Srimad was opposed to mendicant initiation. This may be regarded as a threat to the fabric of the Jain tradition that depends upon an exchange between the lay and mendicant communities.

Despite these concerns, and Srimad's catholic attitude, he may be described as a Jain teacher. The following chapter describes that after a degree of religious searching Srimad made an informed choice to follow Jainism because he believed it offered the best path to salvation. Some of Srimad's writings, for example *Atma Siddhi*, reflect his universal approach to religion, but others, for example *Moksa Mala* are located within the traditional landscape of Jainism. The majority of Srimad's followers describe themselves as Jain, even if they are not Jain by birth. Most perform the usual Jain rituals, as well as rites of veneration towards Srimad. At ashrams where there is a Jain temple the two Jain rituals of *pūjā* and *ārṭi* are performed as part of the daily programme. One of Atmanandji's disciples at Koba confided that he now performs *pūjā* daily, whereas prior to following Srimad it had been an occasional ritual for him. Followers also rigorously maintain Jain dietary restrictions, such as avoiding garlic, onions and root vegetables, and not eating after sunset or until forty-eight minutes after sunrise. Jains living in London, for whom such restrictions are impracticable, are an exception to this, Srimad and his following may therefore be identified with a degree of certainty as Jain. However, there is strong Vaiṣṇava influence in Srimad's teachings, and consequently in the practices of his followers, that cannot be ignored. This is most apparent

in the emphasis on guru *bhakti*, and followers' devotional hymn singing as a form of *bhakti*.<sup>95</sup>

The majority of Srimad's devotees have their ethnic origins in Gujarat, are educated and are financially secure. Claims that Srimad's following is an inclusive community are, to a certain degree, justified because the movement seems to ignore sectarian boundaries within Jainism, as well as those between Jain and Vaiṣṇava religious traditions. To broaden these perspectives it is necessary to mention briefly another group of followers, but one that does not fall within the social and economic brackets described above. This is a village in rural Gujarat whose entire population, in excess of fifteen hundred people, are disciples of Atmanandji. These villagers do not study Srimad's writings independently, but a photograph of Srimad hangs in their community hall and Atmanandji visits regularly to give religious lectures. A brief mention of this community is included here to illustrate the point that, in its broadest sense, the Srimad Rajcandra movement is not easily defined by social, economic or even religious indices.

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<sup>95</sup> This is discussed further in Chapter Four.



## **Chapter Three**

### **From Householder to Saint**

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Chapter Two suggested that the Srimad Rajcandra movement has two historical layers, a universal history to which the whole movement ascribes and a collection of localised histories that are each unique to individual communities of followers. This chapter considers the principal motif of the universal history, namely Srimad Rajcandra. It considers Srimad Rajcandra in the roles of a lay religious practitioner, a saint and as a religious icon.

The first section of this chapter gives an account of Srimad's biography. The Introduction to this thesis stated that no prior knowledge of Srimad or of his community of followers is assumed of the reader. The discussion of available resources in the Introduction showed that he is little known and often poorly understood outside of his immediate following. For these reasons it is pertinent to continue this investigation of Srimad's followers with a discussion of the object of their veneration. The biography presented here focuses primarily on Srimad's characteristics, and the events in his life that his followers believe render him worthy of veneration. It also considers the people and events that had an important impact on the formation and historical development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

The second section of this chapter analyses Srimad's venerable status further by comparing his biography with that of other Jain saints. It is highly unusual in Jainism for a layman to receive the degree of veneration that Srimad does, so from this perspective he is unconventional. Yet from another perspective he conforms to a customary model because many of the qualities

recorded in his biography correspond with attributes of saintly criteria found throughout Jain hagiography.

The final section of this chapter considers how Srimad's life has influenced the development and structural organisation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement as it was presented in Chapter Two. To his followers Srimad is a rare, recent representative of the Jain ideal who offered an effective and speedy route to self realisation and independence from the assumed deficiencies of sectarianism. Followers are encompassed by the universal history of his life story in which they identify his saintly qualities and find evidence of his religious authority. This universal history extends into ideological unification because devotees are united by their shared veneration of Srimad as a religious icon and saviour. However, Srimad's anti-sectarian values also helped to shape the movement into an inclusive, lay organisation with a random organisational structure.

### **1. Srimad Rajcandra - a Jain layman.**

Srimad Rajcandra (November 1867 to April 1901) lived and worked in Gujarat and Mumbai. He was a householder, businessman and poet who was famed for his phenomenal memory and remarkable mental agility. He was also a religious practitioner, mentor and spiritual healer who adopted a monastic routine and lived as a religious recluse and ascetic. His followers believe that during his life he made the transition from a precocious child to an adult of the highest spiritual calibre.

The account of Srimad's auspicious and supernatural birth sets the tone for the rest of his life. His spiritual greatness was predicted prior to his conception when his mother, Devabai, received a prophecy that she would bare two sons and was shown a vision of the eldest, Srimad, at various

stages of his life.<sup>1</sup> After his birth astrologers assessed his horoscope as one “of rare best yoga” which destined the infant for “perfection and God-hood”.<sup>2</sup> Srimad’s parents came from the *baniyā* community and were of the *daśā śrimali* caste<sup>3</sup>. He was born at Vavania, a port town in Saurashtra (also known as Kathiavad) on the north coastal peninsula of Gujarat. Originally named Laksminandan Mehta, his parents changed his name to Raichand (Raychand) when he was four years old. Later this was ‘Sanskritised’ into Rajcandra. Devotees and biographers conventionally refer to him as ‘Srimad’, a name that was attributed to him posthumously.<sup>4</sup> It is an honorific term used to describe a highly virtuous person.<sup>5</sup> Followers also call him by the honorific title Param Krupalu Dev, Lord of the Highest Compassion<sup>6</sup>. Multi-naming of religious figureheads is commonplace. For example, Williams observes this in the life of Sahajanand (1781 to 1830) the founder Svami Narayan Hinduism.<sup>7</sup> It was mentioned in Chapter Two that *pratyakṣ* gurus are often given an alternative name by their disciples.

From a young age Srimad displayed a keen interest in religion and aspired to be a great ascetic and spiritual leader. He adopted Jainism at the age of sixteen. His father, Ravjihbhai, and paternal grandfather, Panchanbhai, were Vaiṣṇava Hindus, devotees of Krisna, but his mother was a Sthānakvāsī Jain, so Srimad’s early years were influenced by Hinduism and Jainism.<sup>8</sup> As a child he was attracted to the Krisna *bhakti* cult favoured by his father and grandfather and was

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<sup>1</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p14.

<sup>2</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p13.

<sup>3</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p13. See Chapter Two note 91.

<sup>4</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p3.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Raja’, king; ‘chandra’, moon. ‘Sri’, denotes respect; ‘mad’, many.

<sup>6</sup> Desai 2000, preface.

<sup>7</sup> Williams 1984, p8.

<sup>8</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p33. Digish Mehta 1999, p30.

initiated into this tradition by the group's *sādhū*, Ramadas.<sup>9</sup> As a dedicated devotee of Kṛṣṇa, Srimad attended religious gatherings and lectures daily and looked forward to a time when he would, “become a great leader of the devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa”.<sup>10</sup> Although devoted to Kṛṣṇa, Srimad also studied scriptures from India's other religious traditions. He rejected Jainism initially because it denies the existence of a creator God, but was later attracted by the Jain doctrine of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). When the string of beads symbolising his initiation as a Kṛṣṇa devotee snapped he did not replace it.<sup>11</sup> By this time he was convinced that of all the religions he had studied Jainism offered the best path to salvation.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the Vaiṣṇava influence had a profound and lasting effect on him. Dundas comments,

“the influence of Hinduism was to colour his writings and he often talked about God in the vocabulary of Vaiṣṇava theism”.<sup>13</sup>

Biographers portray Srimad as a boy of extraordinary intelligence, maturity and confidence, with an attractive, charismatic personality and a propensity for teaching and religious discourse.

Govardhandas writes,

“By his poetical power, power of giving discourses and addresses to others on ethical and spiritual matters and by his possession of virtues he was in his young age regarded as an extra-ordinary genius”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p17. Research suggests that Srimad's father and paternal grandfather belonged neither to the Svami Narayn nor the Pushtimarg sects of VaiṣṇavaHinduism, but Srimad's teachings on guru bhakti show some remarkable similarities with those of the Hindu *Sants* described by Gold (1987).

<sup>10</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p6.

<sup>11</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, pages 30 and 31. Govardhandas 1991, p7.

<sup>12</sup> Dundas 1992, p225. Also, Gandhi writes that Srimad “believed that the *Jinagamas* [“sacred books of the Jains”] contained the perfection of spiritual knowledge”. Gandhi 1944, p12.

<sup>13</sup> Dundas 1992, p224. Also Digish Mehta 1999, pages 15 and 74.

<sup>14</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p18.

Srimad's intellectual and emotional maturity is evident from early in his childhood. He is described as an eager and brilliant student who, due to his sharp intellect and excellent memory, completed seven standards of study in only two years.<sup>15</sup> His scholarly understanding is said to have exceeded that of his teachers to the extent that he would often lead the class himself. One story tells how he absconded from school one day following an admonishment by his teacher. The rest of Srimad's classmates came out in sympathy until the teacher apologised.<sup>16</sup> He was popular with all those around him, both in and outside of the classroom.<sup>17</sup> He seems to have been a naturally cheerful child who was sensitive to the emotional state of others, but with a competitive streak, often wanting to be the champion in childhood games.<sup>18</sup>

Srimad left school as he approached his teenage years and was sent to work in his father's shop. Despite his lack of any higher education his intellectual ability is never disputed and he continued to study independently whenever he had the opportunity.<sup>19</sup> Mehta and Sheth find evidence of "intense study" of approximately one hundred and twenty five religious texts.<sup>20</sup> Shrimad's lifelong reputation as an accomplished poet and writer began while he was still a child. He began to compose poetry when he was eight years old and by nine had written verse synopses of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. By the age of eleven he had written newspaper articles and prize winning essays, including one on "the usefulness of female education".<sup>21</sup> He mastered several languages, including Hindi, Sanskrit and Magadhi, and translated portions of Jain scripture into Gujarati, for example Kundakundacarya's *Panchastikaya* and Anandghanji's

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid pages 16 to 19. Digish Mehta 1999, pages 4 and 19.

<sup>16</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p5. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p4.

<sup>19</sup> Some accounts say Srimad was eleven when he left school, others say he was thirteen.

<sup>20</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p19.

<sup>21</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 17 and 18. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p15.

devotional tributes to the twenty four Tīrthaṅkars.<sup>22</sup> He wrote expositions on these and other scriptures, as well as composing original works, the majority of them in Gujarati. The quality of Srimad's literary output is lauded by his followers. Mehta and Sheth describe him as "a poet with extraordinary genius".<sup>23</sup> Govardhandas comments that he left an "indelible mark of excellence and success in whatever field he would select for writing".<sup>24</sup> This is matched by the speed and competence with which he wrote. Most famously, when he was twenty-nine, he composed *Atma Siddhi* in a single sitting of under two hours without making a single error.

By the time he reached teenage Srimad's reputation had spread beyond the confines of his village. His personal and intellectual qualities had earned him the respect, even honour, of prominent members of Gujarati society. For example, when he was thirteen, Sri Manibhai Jash, a diwan (head of the revenue office) to the ruler of Kutch, invited him to give a religious lecture, which, Govardhandas comments, was very well received.<sup>25</sup> Also when he was thirteen he formed a relationship with Sri Dharsibhai, the Justice of Morbi. Govardhandas describes the relationship as follows,

"he [Sri Dharsibhai] was much impressed by his [Srimad's] virtue of clear knowledge and right understanding and so in the beginning he asked Sri Raichandbhai to sit with him on his seat, but knowing these exceptional qualities in him he used to sit in all humility in front of him giving him his honoured seat. He began to revere him and showed every respect to him. The more he knew about him, the humbler he became in his behaviour towards him and as he came in greater contact with him he accepted him i.e. Srimad Rajcandra as his true teacher and sought his spiritual protection from him".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p18.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p15.

<sup>24</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p51. Govardhandas describes many of Srimad's written works, pages 45 to 58.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p22

This passage describes a highly respected member of the community ignoring the outer persona of a thirteen year old boy and honouring Srimad by accepting him as a religious teacher. The apparent incongruity of Dharsibhai's disposition towards the young Srimad as his spiritual superior recurs throughout Srimad's life. He was later to become a householder guru to initiated mendicants. This apparent incongruity continues today as devotees worship him and ignore his outer persona of a layman. The discord is overcome by his devotees' belief that the spiritual qualities which so inspired Dharsibhai are a manifestation of the purity of Srimad's soul and that his internal state supersedes his external state. This chapter continues to describe the purity of Srimad's soul as 'internal purity'. In specific terms this means that the quantity and potency of karma infiltrating Srimad's soul was relatively reduced, which enabled him to have a clearer vision of 'universal truth' (described in Chapter Two) than most Jains may expect to have. All of Srimad's abilities - his intellectual prowess, emotional maturity and deeply religious outlook - are regarded as manifestations of his internal purity, which is of far greater significance to devotees than his external state.

Devotees also consider his physical endurance to be an indicator of his internal purity. This is illustrated by a favourite story which tells how Srimad, when only ten years old, solemnly led his grandfather's funeral procession without complaining about a painful thorn that had lodged in his foot.<sup>27</sup> Devotees' beliefs in Srimad's high level of internal purity is reinforced by attributing his personal qualities and achievements to this state. Srimad had 'supernatural' abilities too, such as telepathy, future prediction, remarkable mental agility and the memory of his previous lives, which his devotees also attributed to his internal purity.

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<sup>27</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p18.



Srimad claimed to have first experienced *jāti smaraṇa gnān* (knowledge of previous incarnations) when he was seven years old. A family friend, a particular favourite of Srimad, was killed by a snake bite. The event prompted Srimad to ask his grandfather about death. He was told that his friend's soul had left its body and that the body, now a useless thing, would be burned. Curious, Srimad secretly watched the cremation from the seclusion of a nearby tree. Although he was initially appalled by what he saw, the burning of a good man, as he witnessed the funeral he began to contemplate the nature of life and death. Through this meditation he experienced *jāti smaraṇa gnān*<sup>28</sup>. This profound episode in Srimad's life offers further proof of his internal purity to devotees.

The level of purity required to experience *jāti smaraṇa gnān* can only be achieved by much *sādhana* (religious effort).<sup>29</sup> Srimad's young age at the time of this experience confirms for followers that his soul 'carried over' the effects of *sādhana* from previous incarnations. For this he is imparted with an age-old wisdom despite his youth. The incident draws much attention and is frequently represented iconographically. A narrative painting depicts Srimad hiding in the tree watching the cremation,<sup>30</sup> one of the dedicated temples in Rajkot displays a large plaster model of the scene. The tree that Srimad climbed no longer stands, but a single-roomed oratory, which housed a marble image of Srimad and a set of paintings showing scenes from his life, was erected on the site. This building was a physical monument marking a biographical event in Srimad's life. It, and the ashram at Vavania, were both destroyed in the earthquake that devastated Gujarat in November 2000.

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<sup>28</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 9 to 10. Mehta and Sheth 1971, pages 5 to 6.

<sup>29</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p16.

<sup>30</sup> See plate 6, figure 10.

Between the ages of seventeen and twenty Srimad gave public displays of *avadhāna* (remarkable memory and intellectual feats) around Gujarat and Mumbai. Govardhandas comments that

“He was already famous as a learned man and a poet, but now he acquired fame as a person possessing exceptional powers of retentive memory”<sup>31</sup>.

His performances included paying attention to as many as one hundred activities simultaneously, as well as more obscure exercises, such as predicting the salt content in food without tasting it and remembering book titles by feeling their size whilst blindfolded.<sup>32</sup> Srimad had no specific training in this ‘art’. When he was sixteen he watched a Vedic master, Sri Shankaral Maheswar Bhatt, perform eight *avadhāna*. He gave his own first performance of twelve *avadhāna* shortly afterwards before an audience of about two thousand at Morbi.<sup>33</sup> Mehta and Sheth describe his talent as a “natural flowering” not “artificial memory training”.<sup>34</sup> Srimad said it could not be taught, but resulted from “the purification of his mind”.<sup>35</sup> Whilst on business in Jamnagar he gained the title ‘*Hind na Heera*’ (Diamond of India) for a display of sixteen simultaneous activities. During a private meeting at Botad village with his friend Seth Harilal Shivalal he performed *avadhāna* of fifty two activities.<sup>36</sup> When he was nineteen years old he gave a performance of *śatāvadhāna* (simultaneous attention to one hundred activities) at the Framji Cawasji Institute in Mumbai before a large audience of Indians and British, for which he was awarded a gold medal and the title ‘*Sakshat Saraswati*’ (‘Incarnation of the Goddess of

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<sup>31</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p32.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid pages 34 to 39.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p32. Mehta and Sheth, p8.

<sup>34</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p11.

<sup>35</sup> When asked how he could tell by the knot in a man’s turban whether he was left or right handed. Govardhandas 1991, p43.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p33.

Learning’).<sup>37</sup> Some British administrators invited the bright young Srimad to visit London, but he declined on the grounds that he could not practise his religion outside of India. When he was twenty Srimad stopped giving public displays, with the exception of rare, private presentations, because by then he believed they impeded his religious progress.<sup>38</sup>

Srimad’s displays of *avadhāna* were reported in regional newspapers. His display of *avadhāna* at the Framji Cawasji Institute received national coverage, including articles in the ‘Times of India’ (24.1.1887) and the ‘Indian Spectator’ (18.11.1886) (in which Srimad is described as a ‘Hindoo’).<sup>39</sup> His performances are well documented throughout his biographical literature and the event at the Framji Cawasji Institute is the subject of a narrative painting. Such attention illustrates the significance with which devotees view his talent. Srimad’s decision to stop giving performances intensifies this significance. Performances of *avadhāna* made Srimad a celebrity and may have led to fame and fortune, so his decision to cease giving public displays demonstrates the extent of his religious integrity. Biographers stress that Srimad sacrificed worldly opportunities in favour of a religious life. The renunciation of his successful gem business is another example of this. Yet another is his choice to stop practising astrology, his expertise in which led him to, “the same height of glory and honour as the feats of his memory power”.<sup>40</sup>

Srimad’s devotees believe that his ‘supernatural’ abilities are the consequence of his internal purity. Srimad ratifies this in his own writing, “By my own experience I have learnt that the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid p43.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p44. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p11.

<sup>39</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p10. Govardhandas 1991, pages 43 to 44, and p82.

<sup>40</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p12

*avadhāna* is the normal activity of the powerful self’.<sup>41</sup> In addition to *avadhāna* biographers also describe instances of telepathy and future prediction. For example, when he was ten years old two men from Kutch visited Srimad, without any prior introduction he addressed them by their names. When asked how he could possibly know who they were he responded, “There are infinite powers of the soul and by that I came to know”.<sup>42</sup> He gave the same explanation to a *muni* named Jivananji whose birth date he knew before being told.<sup>43</sup> Whilst at Uttarasanda Srimad predicted that the wife of his disciple Motilal would attain liberation in her eighth life,<sup>44</sup> and at Idar he knew the location of manuscripts in temple libraries that he had not previously visited.<sup>45</sup> One of the most frequently cited examples of Srimad’s telepathic ability is his first meeting with Sobhagbhai that was described in Chapter Two. Srimad’s description of his supernatural abilities as natural competencies of an elevated soul is further validation for his devotees of his spiritual status. Srimad’s internal purity enabled him to exercise these competencies, and it is this level of purity, not the supernatural abilities themselves, that renders him worthy of veneration in the hearts of his followers. Such talents are a by-product of spiritual advancement, but as they do not contribute to it they are, from this perspective, unimportant. Srimad’s abilities, for example of *avadhāna*, may serve as an initial attraction, but if aspirants become true devotees they will quickly realise the irrelevance of such mental gymnastics to the religious path and disregard them, as Srimad himself did.

Srimad would have preferred to remain unmarried, but conceded to his parents’ wishes and married when he was twenty. He believed his marriage had been ordained by karma and tried to

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<sup>41</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p41.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p21. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p35.

<sup>43</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p166.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p151.

<sup>45</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p101.

face it with equanimity by adopting an attitude of indifference towards his wife, saying that she neither pleased nor displeased him.<sup>46</sup> His wife, Zabaken, was the niece of Revashankar Jagjivandas Zavari, a diamond merchant who later became Srimad's business partner.<sup>47</sup> Zabaken and Srimad had two daughters and two sons.<sup>48</sup> The tension of trying to balance familial and business obligations with the spiritual quest from which they distracted him began a phase of inner turmoil for Srimad.<sup>49</sup> This portrait of him as a troubled man contrasts with the picture so far. It shows that, like anyone else, he had to confront the challenges of human anguish. Had he refused to marry, his disobedience would have dishonoured his parents. Instead he placed his obligations as a son, and then a husband, above his own desires. This expression of piety further endorses his religious commitment. Some devotees find a degree of comfort in his situation as they, like Srimad, are also trying to balance their business and family lives with their own spiritual progression.

Mehta and Sheth observe from his letters that Srimad gained internal equanimity when he attained self realisation (experience of his own soul) four years after he married.<sup>50</sup> It is his self realised state, above anything else, for which he is venerated. He claimed to have had his first experience of self realisation when he was twenty four, whilst on retreat at Uttarasanda meditating beneath a mango tree beside the tranquil lake there.<sup>51</sup>

“In VS 1947 [1890 CE] right perception and knowledge of my real self has fully shone in my being and all spiritual scriptures gradually unfold their truths to me and this is an ever

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<sup>46</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 60 and 61. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p20 and pages 22 to 28.

<sup>47</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, pages 34 to 35 and p77.

<sup>48</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p26.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p106 Govardhandas 1991, p61. Digish Mehta 1999, pages 37, 58, and 71.

<sup>50</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p26.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p105. Srimad's interpretation of 'self realisation' and its influence on his following is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

increasing condition and this way my true self has fully manifested its all virtuous nature in my being”.<sup>52</sup>

By the time of my visit in October 1999 the mango tree was long gone. In its place, facing the still placid lake, a memorial shrine was in the final stages of construction, another example of a physical monument marking an important biographical event.

There is no consensus amongst Srimad's followers about the level of self realisation that he achieved and he makes contradictory statements about it in his own writings. For example, Shah and Pungaliya observe that,

“Even though he is a householder, he sometimes declares himself to be a *vītaraga jñānī* like Mahāvīra, while on other occasions, he admits to be only a householder of the 4th or 5th spiritual stage.”<sup>53</sup>

At Dharampur and Koba I was told that his level of spiritual purity was not known, although Atmanandji suggested that somewhere between the fifth and sixth *guṇasthāns* was most likely.<sup>54</sup> The received view at Sayla is that he attained the seventh *guṇasthān*.<sup>55</sup> Devotees at Agas believe that Srimad attained the thirteenth *guṇasthān*. This is *kevalgnān* (pure knowledge), which is the highest possible level of embodied purity. Their belief is based on the example of Srimad's life and teachings, the endorsement of Lalluji and also on a private diary entry that Srimad wrote in April 1896 during the annual celebrations of Mahavir's birthday.<sup>56</sup> In it he describes himself as

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<sup>52</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p96.

<sup>53</sup> Shah and Pungaliya 2001, page 11.

<sup>54</sup> Dharampur, December 2001. Koba, January 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Sayla, December 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Reference 680 in *Srimad Rajcandra*. See Appendix Two.

vītrāg (without desire), even his desire for *mokṣa* having subsided. He likens himself to Mahavir and to the Hindu god Ram because, he says, he is in a constant state of self realisation. He signs the entry “Aum Sri Mahavir”. This is ambiguous. It may simply be a homage to Mahavir, but devotees sometimes interpret it as a statement by Srimad that he is Mahavir’s spiritual equal. This diary entry is obviously evocative, although it should be remembered that it was a private note that was not intended for general readership and that was discovered only after Srimad’s death. Initially there was some apprehension about including it in the published anthology of Srimad’s writings because some devotees feared that it could be used to discredit him, but Lalluji insisted on its inclusion.<sup>57</sup> Despite the lack of consensus among devotees regarding the precise level of internal purity that Srimad attained, followers are united by their belief that he attained a high level of self realisation for the current age. It is this that has attributed him with divine status. As the following chapters discuss, Srimad’s divine status gives him the religious authority to qualify as a guru and as the author of scripture.<sup>58</sup>

Srimad continued as a householder and business man for a further six years after his first experience of self realisation. His gem business succeeded. He is described by his biographers as a shrewd and profitable merchant, yet who never compromised his scrupulous morals. He was known for his honesty as well as his skill in professional dealings.<sup>59</sup> Srimad is also shown to be compassionate in his biographies.<sup>60</sup> For example, he nursed his long-standing servant who died of tuberculosis and, “breathed his last with his head in Srimad’s lap”.<sup>61</sup> He attended to

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<sup>57</sup> Agas, December 2001.

<sup>58</sup> Devotees’ beliefs about the level of internal purity that Srimad achieved have influenced their attitudes towards the current attainability of self realisation (discussed in Chapter Four) and the appropriate treatment of his image (discussed in Chapter Five).

<sup>59</sup> Govardhandas 1991, P78. Gandhi 1944, p9. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p27.

<sup>60</sup> It was mentioned in Chapter Two that devotees refer to him as Param Krupalu Dev, Lord of the Highest Compassion.

<sup>61</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p70.

Tokershibhai, a family friend in Mumbai, during the final days of a terminal illness.<sup>62</sup> This touching account illustrates the tender side of Shrimad's nature. Biographers also point out the beneficial effects of Srimad's presence, his calming influence enabled Tokershibhai to experience equanimity in death, which is vital for a 'good' rebirth.<sup>63</sup> However, moments of irritation are also seen to burst through Srimad's generally passive disposition. His renown made it increasingly more difficult for him to find the solitude he required for his own religious practice. He was sought out regularly by people hoping to engage him in discourse and by his disciples who were keen to be with him at any opportunity<sup>64</sup> He made his frustration clear to his disciple Lalluji,

“Why are you after me? What more now? I have told you everything you had to learn.

Therefore you should return away tomorrow ... I wish to stay here incognito and I do not want to be in contact with anybody”.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout most of his adult life Srimad fulfilled his obligations as a householder and business man, although he laboured persistently to disengage from the spiritually restricting obligations of temporal life. Once or twice a year he would go on retreat to remote areas of Gujarat where he could practise his religion in solitude.<sup>66</sup> He finally renounced his worldly responsibilities when he was thirty, a decade after his marriage, by taking a vow of celibacy and retiring from business life that was already occupying less and less of his time.<sup>67</sup> It is from this point that parallels are

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid pages 71 to 72.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid p72.

<sup>64</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p30.

<sup>65</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 158 to 159.

<sup>66</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p30.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p.26, p108 and p109.



made between Srimad's lifestyle and that of a mendicant. For example, Digish Mehta comments on the same year that Srimad retired from business,

“[Srimad] arrived again in Charotar to spend the customary four months of the year-end when one is supposed to remain stationary at one place and practise austerities”.<sup>68</sup>

Mehta and Sheth write that since the previous year he had spent much of his time alone in remote places where, “he used to live a life of a *muni* without any encumbrances internal or external”.<sup>69</sup>

Although Srimad had not yet made his mendicant status ‘official’ by initiation, devotees regarded him as equal to a *muni* according to his virtues and practices. By his late twenties he yearned to take initiation. His disciples were equally keen to have their bond with him as their religious teacher legitimised according to Jain tradition, but Srimad's mother refused to consent to his renunciation. She finally conceded, but with the condition that he should wait until he had recovered from his current illness.<sup>70</sup> Srimad never did recover. He died at Rajkot before fulfilling his wish to take initiation as a mendicant. Had he recuperated and lived a longer life, then the organisational structure of his following would no doubt be very different. However, his campaign against sectarianism leaves one wondering exactly how his initiation might have taken place and which mendicant order he would have entered, if any.

For about seven years prior to his retirement from family and business life, Srimad had an alter ego as a religious teacher and guru.<sup>71</sup> Crowds gathered to hear his religious discourses. When he met with his disciples, “a good many people who had assembled to hear Srimad” were also

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<sup>68</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p96.

<sup>69</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, pages 107 to 109.

<sup>70</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p175 to 176. Mehta and Sheth 1971, p31.

<sup>71</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p32.

present.<sup>72</sup> The exact number of “a good many” is impossible to know. Four of his closest disciples are believed to have benefited from his guidance in the most important way possible, by achieving self realisation. These were Juthabhai Ujamshi (1866 to 1889), Ambalalbhair Lalchand (1869 to 1904), the Sthānakvāsī mendicant Sri Lalluji Maharaj (1853 to 1935), and Sobhagbhai of Sayla (1823 to 1897).<sup>73</sup>

Sobhagbhai's first meeting and relationship with Srimad was discussed in the previous chapter. Juthabhai first met Srimad when he arrived at Ahmedabad to arrange the publication of *Moksa Mala*. Juthabhai assisted him and it was during this time together that he developed a great respect for Srimad.<sup>74</sup> Their relationship continued through correspondence and when he visited Ahmedabad, Srimad stayed with Juthabhai's family. Juthabhai died when he was only twenty-three.<sup>75</sup> In a eulogy, Srimad affirmed that Juthabhai had attained self realisation.<sup>76</sup> Ambalalbhair met Srimad through Juthabhai, who had shown him some of Srimad's letters. Ambalalbhair took copies of the letters back to Khambat (also called Cambay) where he and some friends studied them. Impressed by what they read, Ambalalbhair and his friends wrote several times to Srimad asking him to visit them at Khambat. Srimad stayed with Ambalalbhair for eight days, during which time Ambalalbhair became his disciple.<sup>77</sup> Ambalalbhair famously held the lantern whilst Srimad wrote *Atma Siddhi*, a scene which is often represented in pictures and displays.<sup>78</sup> He is also renowned for his excellent memory, which enabled him to transcribe Srimad's lectures word

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<sup>72</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 80,93, 108, and 113.

<sup>73</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p126.

<sup>74</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p79.

<sup>75</sup> Srimad predicted the time and date of Juthabhai's death. He blamed the slight error in his prediction (Jutha died during the day and not at night as Srimad had foreseen) on “some obstruction in my knowledge”. Govardhandas 1991, p81.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid pages 81 and 82. Mehta and Seth 1972, p127. (Juthabhai died before Srimad's own experience of self realisation in 1891).

<sup>77</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p55.

<sup>78</sup> See plate 7 figure 11.

for word. Devotees comment that this indicates the level of Ambalalbhai's devotion to Srimad. Ambalalbhai died less than three years after Srimad, but not before making an important contribution to the formation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement by collating Srimad's writings into a single volume called *Shrimad Rajcandra*. The significance of this to the formation and development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement is discussed in Chapter Five.

Lalluji is said to have attained self realisation when he spent a month with Srimad at Vaso in 1898.<sup>79</sup> He first came to hear about Srimad when Ambalalbhai took some of Srimad's letters to the *upāśray* at Khambat which distracted him and his friends from paying attention to the usual lectures given by *munis*.<sup>80</sup> Lalluji approached to admonish them, but when Ambalalbhai recommended Srimad as a teacher with greater knowledge than Sri Harakhchandji Maharaj who was the *ācārya* there, Lalluji asked to meet Srimad. On the first day of Srimad's arrival at Khambhat, Harakhchandji requested a demonstration of his memory feats. On the following day Srimad explained some difficult Jain scripture to the *munis*. Lalluji was so impressed by his exposition that he asked permission from Harakhchandji to learn more from Srimad. Permission granted, he went upstairs to find Srimad and prostrated himself before him, which was a gesture of utmost respect.<sup>81</sup>

Lalluji's attraction to Srimad was instantaneous and for the rest of his life he remained one of Srimad's most devoted disciples. Lalluji later spoke of the immense joy he had felt at their first meeting, "as if I was your kin from previous births".<sup>82</sup> During Srimad's first week at Khambhat

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<sup>79</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p148. Mehta and Seth 1971, p135.

<sup>80</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p88.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid p90. Digish Mehta 1999, pages 54 to 55, and p66.

<sup>82</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p67.

Lalluji met with him frequently and from then on whenever he was able.<sup>83</sup> Lalluji spent one monsoon season in Mumbai during which time he visited Shrimad's gem shop daily to study scripture with him.<sup>84</sup> Another monsoon season Lalluji spent at Khambhat. Although Srimad was close by, in the neighbouring town of Raij, the travel restrictions placed on mendicants during the rainy season prevented him from going to Srimad. Lalluji was distraught by the enforced separation, then "overwhelmingly pleased with spiritual joy" when he heard that Srimad would visit him.<sup>85</sup> On another occasion Lalluji, along with some other mendicants from Khambhat, spent a full twenty four hours with Srimad "in prayer and meditation".<sup>86</sup> This flagrant disregard for the rules of the *upāśray*, which prohibited overnight absence, implies that Lalluji's devotion to Srimad exceeded his mendicant commitment. Lalluji became increasingly more frustrated by the restrictions mendicancy placed on their relationship. His frustration peaked at Vadva when, in a flurry of intense emotion, he tore his *muh patti* (mouth covering), a symbol of his mendicancy, from his face and exclaimed his yearning to abandon mendicant life so he could be free to follow Srimad completely.

"O! my protector, keep me always near your lotus like feet. I do not want to keep this *muh patti*....I cannot bear any separation from your contact".<sup>87</sup>

Immediately embarrassed by his emotional outburst Lalluji begged Srimad's forgiveness. After a period of silence Srimad returned the *muh patti* (via another *muni* present), telling him to keep it "for some time".<sup>88</sup> Perhaps Srimad told Lalluji to keep his *muh patti* because he detected

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid p67.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid p68.

<sup>85</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p109.

<sup>86</sup> Digish Mehia 1999, pages 91 and 92.

<sup>87</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p110. Digish Mehta 1999, pages 94 and 95.

<sup>88</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p110.

passion in Lalluji's request to remove it, which would have been detrimental to Lalluji's spiritual progression. Or perhaps he realised that Lalluji's abandonment of his mendicant order would have antagonised the Sthānakvāsī Jain community, which would have been a situation better avoided. Lalluji commended Srimad to the lay community, urging them to seek the benefit of his teachings.<sup>89</sup> Whilst this endorsement may have swelled Srimad's audiences, it can have done little to endear him to other mendicants who relied on the laity for their alms.

Lalluji had been born in to a wealthy family, he was twice married and once widowed. He contracted what he feared to be a life threatening illness and vowed to renounce if he survived. Upon his recovery, Lalluji left his wife and one month old son to be initiated as a Sthānakvāsī *muni* at Khambhat by *ācārya* Sri Harakhchandji Maharaj.<sup>90</sup> At this time the order had dwindled to only four members. Lalluji's example encouraged a further four initiations, after which membership increased steadily to fourteen. After a period of about six years, Lalluji, now an *upādhyāy*, was Harakhchandji's foremost disciple and successor.<sup>91</sup> The impact on the Jain community of this highly respected mendicant turning to venerate a 'mere' layman fourteen years his junior cannot be underestimated. Six of the *sādhus* under Lalluji's guidance also began to follow Srimad.<sup>92</sup> The obvious threat that this, and Srimad's teachings refuting sectarianism and warning people against false gurus, posed to the survival of the order dismayed the lay and ascetic communities alike.<sup>93</sup> Mendicancy authenticated by initiation is the bedrock of Jainism. Mendicants depend on the laity for their few material needs and the laity look to mendicants as personifications of the religious ideal who, through their teachings and the example of their lives,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid p142.

<sup>90</sup> Mehta and Seth 1971, p134.

<sup>91</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p90. Digish Mehta 1999, p91.

<sup>92</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p110.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid p140. Digish Mehta 1999, pages 66 and 90.

instruct the laity in spiritual matters. Since mendicants are seen as exemplars of spiritual purity, the laity need to be certain that their way of life is religiously valid. Srimad was uninitiated, so he operated as an ‘unofficial’ religious figure. His success in this role was a potential opening for the laity to question both the necessity and the religious authority of mendicants. Institutional Jainism may have been disconcerted by Srimad’s activities as a lay guru, but to have initiated mendicants amongst his flock, particularly such a successful and respected *muni* as Lalluji, was a far more contentious issue. By the time of Harakhachandji’s death (1893)<sup>94</sup> the remaining *munis* worried that more of their *gacch* might turn to Srimad and establish a dissident order of rival mendicants. These *munis* thought the ‘dissenters’ should be disciplined but, with Harakhachandji gone, there was no one in authority. Instead they compelled their counterparts to, “keep to the existing religious faith and to leave off any talk about the new path shown by Srimad Rajchandra”.<sup>95</sup> Ambalalbai had faced similar harassment from the lay community.<sup>96</sup> Srimad was aware of the difficulties faced by his followers. He wrote consoling letters to the *munis* but, in keeping with his opposition to sectarian division, advised them to be discrete about their contact with him and to avoid any confrontation that might lead to disunity.<sup>97</sup> This is perhaps one reason why he returned Lalluji’s *muh patti*. After Srimad’s death his mendicant followers, with the exception of Lalluji, vanish from the historical record.

Lalluji’s mendicant identity is an important endorsement of Srimad’s religious authority. It also upholds Srimad’s criticisms of institutional renunciation. Lalluji’s decision to renounce indicates that he was searching for spiritual fulfilment, but he had not attained self realisation, according to

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<sup>94</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p91.

<sup>95</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p140.

<sup>96</sup> Mehta and Seth 1972, p132.

<sup>97</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 140 and 141. Digish Mehta 1999, p87.

Srimad's definition of it, when he took *dīkṣā*. Neither did mendicancy fulfil his search for spirituality, which was realised only when he came into contact with Srimad. The hardships Lalluji suffered to follow Srimad are a measure of his commitment to him. He had already renounced worldly wealth when he took *dīkṣā*, his ostracism from his order finished any mendicant ambition he may have had and severely restricted the households he could approach for alms.<sup>98</sup> Lalluji was the only one of Srimad's self realised disciples to survive him for any considerable length of time. He continued his peripatetic lifestyle around Gujarat, spreading Srimad's teachings wherever he went. It is likely that his mendicant status assisted his mission to attract followers. There is no evidence that Lalluji actually renounced his mendicancy (he did, after all, finally achieve self realisation), but neither did he initiate any of his own disciples. This may be because none achieved a high enough level of spiritual purity, the historical record speaks only of Sri Brahmajariji Govardhandas having achieved self realisation under Lalluji's guidance. It is significant to the development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement as a lay organisation that Lalluji did not initiate his disciples because he would have been the most likely source of establishing a mendicant community within the movement. Lalluji finally settled at Agas where, as described in Chapter Two, he founded the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram', which was fundamental to the formation of the movement.

Srimad is probably best known outside his immediate following for his association with Mohandas Gandhi (1869 to 1948) who was two years his junior. Gandhi held Srimad in great respect. He devoted a chapter of his memoirs to him, in which he refers to Srimad as 'the Poet',

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<sup>98</sup> During fieldwork in London, in September 2001, I learned of one devotee whose late father had offered refuge to Lalluji during these difficult times.

but Gandhi was never his disciple.<sup>99</sup> They were raised in the same social milieu in the coastal region of Saurashtra, but first met in Mumbai when Srimad was twenty five. They were introduced by Dr. Pranjivan Mehta who was Gandhi's mentor in England and the brother of Srimad's father-in-law.<sup>100</sup> They remained in close contact for two years, after which their relationship continued through correspondence until Srimad's death.<sup>101</sup> (Only three of Srimad's letters to Gandhi are extant).<sup>102</sup> In his memoirs Gandhi wrote of Srimad,

“He had such freedom and such powers in a much larger measure than the ordinary man or woman, and so in common speech we may describe him as one who was free from attachment or who possessed superhuman powers. I am sure, however, that Srimad had not attained to the perfect freedom from attachment which we attribute to a *mukta purusha* [a liberated soul] or acquired the *vibhuti* which we believe that a Tīrthaṅkar would manifest. I do not say this with the intention of pointing out any shortcoming in a great character worthy of our highest reverence; I say it in order to do justice both to him and to the cause of truth. We are all worldly creatures, whereas Srimad was not. We shall have to wander from existence to existence, whereas Srimad may have only one life more to live. We are perhaps running away from, *moksha*, while Srimad was flying towards it with the speed of wind”.<sup>103</sup>

Gandhi is, of course, a monumental figure in Indian history and Srimad gains kudos through their association. His devotees are proud of their relationship and eager to publicise it. Gandhi's

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<sup>99</sup> “I entered into correspondence with every person in India in whom I had some trust, Raychandbhai being the chief among them. ... Nevertheless I have not accepted him as my guru”. Gandhi 1944, pages 3 and 4.

<sup>100</sup> Gandhi 1944, p5. Gandhi 1959, p63.

<sup>101</sup> Gandhi 1944, p6. Gandhi 1959, p99.

<sup>102</sup> Dundas 1992, p226.

<sup>103</sup> Gandhi 1944, p2.



comments about Srimad are often quoted in literature that originates from within the Srimad Rajcandra tradition and a booklet of Srimad's answers to Gandhi's questions is published in English.<sup>104</sup> There is a popular picture in circulation on which the photographs of these two men have been pasted next to each other, there are also paintings that depict them in religious discourse.<sup>105</sup> Gandhi did not become famous until long after Srimad's death, so his endorsement had a posthumous impact, but an important one nevertheless. Although Srimad had been rejected by the establishment in his Jain community he won the recommendation of a figurehead of the Indian nation. A small number of devotees first become aware of Srimad through Gandhi's writings. Many attribute Gandhi's faith in *ahimsa* to Srimad's influence, and in this way Srimad is thought to have made a valuable contribution to India's fight for independence.<sup>106</sup> Revashanker Jagjivan asked Gandhi to write the foreword to the second edition of Srimad's collected works, *Srimad Rajcandra*, which was a fitting memorial to the mutual respect these two men held for each other.<sup>107</sup>

After his retirement Srimad increased the amount of time he spent in solitude. The remote, rocky landscape of Idar was a favourite location.<sup>108</sup> One of his stays here, when he was thirty-two, draws particular attention from biographers who describe it as something of a spiritual climax.<sup>109</sup> On this occasion Srimad spent three months on retreat at Idar, the first five days of which he was

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<sup>104</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi and Kavi Rajchandrajii. Questions Answered.* 1989.

<sup>105</sup> See Jaini 1998. p265 illustration 32.

<sup>106</sup> The Svami Narayan sect of Vaiṣṇava Hinduism also developed in Gujarat and also claims to have influenced Gandhi's thinking. Williams refers to 'The Vaiṣṇavas of Gujarat' by N. A. Toothi (1935, p279) who concluded that Gandhi was influenced by Swami Narayan more than any other religious leader or philosopher. However, Williams comments that, "Toothi may have overlooked the significant influence of the Jain community and teaching on both Swaminarayan and Gandhi". (Williams 1984, p149. Williams refers to Jaini's, *The Jaina Path of Purification*).

<sup>107</sup> Gandhi 1944, p1.

<sup>108</sup> He also took retreats in Vaso, Nadiad, Kheda, Khambat and other places in Gujarat.

<sup>109</sup> The importance given to this episode may be due to Lalluji's influence who, in *Jeevan Kala*, describes it in the first person. Govardhandas 1991, pages 159 to 167.

accompanied by the seven *munis* who had become his disciples. He had wanted to stay at Idar incognito so initially he berated them for following him, but then agreed to spend five days with them in intense religious practice and discourse.<sup>110</sup> This incident illustrates how desperate the *munis* were to be with Srimad and to benefit from his religious guidance. They belonged to the non-image worshipping Stānakvāsī branch of Jainism, nevertheless obeyed his instruction to visit Digambar and Śvetāmbar temples at Idar.<sup>111</sup> Srimad also told them to remove their *muh pattis* (which was counter to the instruction he had previously given Lalluji at Vadva).<sup>112</sup> These two instructions illustrated to the mendicants the futility of sectarian division and their retelling in the biographical accounts communicates this message to his current devotees. Regardless of their own mendicant status, these *munis* accepted Srimad's absolute religious authority. Srimad identified a large flat stone on the mountain side at Idar as '*pudhvi śila*' the stone upon which Mahavir was supposed to have sat in meditation, and it was seated on this that Srimad preached to the *munis*.<sup>113</sup> A dedicated ashram has now been built at the site and its *svādhyāy* hall is erected over the rock on which Srimad sat. A marble image of Srimad has been placed above the rock and it is flanked by paintings of the seven *munis*, which complete the scene.<sup>114</sup> Devotees can sit quietly in the *svādhyāy* hall and imagine themselves to be present at Srimad's discourses.

Srimad sometimes displayed remarkable physical strength driven by religious fervour. For example, at Idar he strode up the mountainside so fast the *munis* could barely keep up with him.<sup>115</sup> Yet he also had a history of physical frailty. Since his youth he had complained that his

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<sup>110</sup> The seven *munis* with Srimad at Idar were - Lalluji, Mohanlalji, Narsinhrakhji, Devkaranji, Velshirakhji, Lakshmichandji, and Chaturlalji. Govardhandas 1991, p158 Digish Mehta 1999, p101.

<sup>111</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p160. Digish Mehta 1999, p107.

<sup>112</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p162.

<sup>113</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 161 and p163. Digish Mehta 1999, p106.

<sup>114</sup> See plate 7, figure 12.

<sup>115</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p163.

full mental capacity was restricted by imperfect health and throughout most of his adult life he suffered phases of sickness, which he attributed to the effect of karma.<sup>116</sup> Towards the end of his life he seems to have suffered a chronic digestive disorder, although no specific condition or cause of death was diagnosed other than “extreme weakness”.<sup>117</sup> During his final year Srimad was under the medical supervision of doctors and nursed by his disciples.<sup>118</sup> He travelled in the coastal regions of Gujarat, advised by his doctors that this might benefit his failing health. His family travelled with him, aware that he was critically ill.<sup>119</sup> In 1900 he weighed sixty five pounds, a year later his weight had plummeted to only forty five pounds.<sup>120</sup> Studio photographs taken less than a month before his death show how tragically emaciated he was. It has already been discussed that scholars sometimes assume that he deliberately cultivated his emaciated state by fasting and asceticism.<sup>121</sup> Srimad did follow a strict ascetic regime that may have aggravated his condition, but this alone was not the cause of his demise. Srimad’s untimely death was not self-inflicted and he did not practice *sallekhanā* (voluntary death by starvation). He continued to receive visits from devotees whilst on his deathbed, but because he was so weak these visits were regulated by attending doctors and disciples.<sup>122</sup> When he became too sick to write letters he dictated them, his final one was addressed to his disciples Ambalalbai, Tribhovanbai and Lalluji.<sup>123</sup> Srimad died, aged only thirty four, on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1901. Consistent with the spirituality of his life, Srimad is described as having the perfect end; peaceful, controlled and devoid of the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid p41. Digish Mehta 1999, p118.

<sup>117</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p175. Digish Mehta 1999, p118.

<sup>118</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p183.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid p177.

<sup>120</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971. p29.

<sup>121</sup> This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

<sup>122</sup> Govardhandas 1991. p177.

<sup>123</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p120.

physical indignities that generally accompany illness and death.<sup>124</sup> A small black and white photograph of him, taken moments after his death, is on display in the library he established at Khambhat. The room in which he died at Rajkot is now a *svādhyāy* hall, wherein lies a life-sized, fibre-glass model of him in his final moments, which is a memorial to the final event of Srimad's life.<sup>125</sup>

Srimad's religious career began with his childhood ambition for spiritual greatness. By the time of his early death he had, in the eyes of many, achieved this. His devotees believe his life to have been an example of pure spirituality, that he had attained self realisation and that, in the capacity of a guru, he had led some of his followers to the same state of internal purity. Yet Srimad remained a provincial figure, perhaps because he wrote almost exclusively in Gujarati and perhaps because during his adult life he sought solitude rather than celebrity.

There is no doubt amongst Srimad Rajcandra's devotees that he is destined to attain *mokṣa* very soon, but there is some difference of opinion regarding the precise nature of his current incarnation. Srimad's life-story is drawn largely from his own writings and forms part of the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement so it has little flexibility. Beliefs about his next (current) life are not fixed, but belong to the local histories of the individual communities of followers. Some devotees believe Srimad's soul to be in the presence of a Tīrthaṅkar at *Mahāvideha*, where it is in a state of *kevalgnān* (pure knowledge) and experiencing its final incarnation prior to liberation. For example, Sri Rakeshbhai holds this belief which, he says, is

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<sup>124</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 179 and 180. Srimad is recorded to have said to his brother Mansubhai, "take care of mother". (Mehta and Sheth 1971, p32). One devotee pointed this out as a sign that he still had some familial attachment.

<sup>125</sup> See plate 8 figure 13.

confirmed by clairvoyant communication with Srimad in his current incarnation.<sup>126</sup> However, Sri Atmanandji believes Stimad's soul is currently in the celestial realms of *dev lok* enjoying its penultimate incarnation prior to liberation.<sup>127</sup> One of the trustees at Agas summarised the situation. He said that many people have made different claims about Srimad's current incarnation, but that the truth was unknown to us. Further, it was during his incarnation as Srimad that he showed his devotees the way to *mokṣa* so it is as this incarnation that he is venerated. His current incarnation should not concern us.<sup>128</sup> Whatever the opinion about Srimad's current incarnation, his spiritual status has been elevated yet further by his death. Today Srimad is venerated as a saint by his devotees, and it is to an analysis of his saintly status that this chapter now turns.

## **2. Srimad Rajcandra - a Jain Saint.**

### *Srimad as a model saint.*

From the accounts of Mahavir, the preceding twenty-three Tirthaṅkars, the saints of the ages, right up to modern times, women and men who have exchanged lavish life styles for the renounced life of mendicancy have been glorified in Jain literature. The renunciation of material wealth and social power in favour of an ascetic lifestyle is part of the Jain religious statement. During the *dīkṣā* ceremony a novice is first bejewelled and paraded like royalty before renouncing all their worldly associations.<sup>129</sup> Affluence prior to renunciation accentuates the

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<sup>126</sup> Personal interview, December 2001.

<sup>127</sup> Personal interview, January 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Agas, December 2001.

<sup>129</sup> For examples see Titze 1998, p97 and Banks 1992, pages 80 to 81.

extent of the material sacrifice and illustrates the superiority of spiritual wealth over material wealth. Carrithers observes that,

“The wealthier the renouncer, the better his or her worldly prospects might be, then the more heroic and therefore more valued the renunciation.”<sup>130</sup>

Laidlaw comments on Mahavir's renunciation as recorded in the *Kalpa Sutra*

“Great stress is placed on how much has been renounced. The more you have, the more heroic it is to renounce it.”<sup>131</sup>

According to Jain tradition the Tīrthaṅkars all came from wealthy, noble families, had beautiful physiques and were admired by all beings earthly and divine. The cause of their luxurious incarnations is *puṇya*, which is the pleasing results of karma accumulated through previous lives dominated by piety and religion.

Some particularly accomplished mendicants are ‘canonised’, remembered with divine reverence, and may become objects of worship. These saints are ascribed their venerable status by other mendicants and members of the lay community who recognise their valuable qualities.

Throughout this chapter these qualities are referred to as ‘saintly criteria’, a standard model of which has been constructed for discussion in this chapter by reviewing Jain hagiography. The criteria include miraculous powers, strict *ahimsa* and gruelling ascetic practices, great acts of social service, diplomatic genius and debating skills, scholastic excellence, charismatic proselytism, a reforming influence and a secure lineage, preferably traced back to a Tīrthaṅkar.

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<sup>130</sup> Carrithers 1991a, p17.

<sup>131</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p42.

Babb writes about recurring hagiographic themes in terms of conceptualising an “ideal ascetic career”.<sup>132</sup> Snell, whose discussion includes a range of Indian religious traditions, writes in terms of “a system of motif classification”.<sup>133</sup> Such interpretations - ‘standard model’, ‘ideal career’, ‘motif classification’ - give the impression of a set of credentials by which authenticity is recognised. For example, the lives of the Tīrthaṅkars conform to a standard model. Cort points out that their biographies are part of “an ever-repeated story”, which conforms to a format defined by *pañc kalyāṇak* (five beneficent events).<sup>134</sup> Although the details of individual Tīrthaṅkars’ lives may vary, these five auspicious events - conception, birth, initiation, embodied omniscience and death signalling *mokṣa* - are “always precisely the same”.<sup>135</sup> When a new image is installed into a temple *pañc kalyāṇak pūjā* is carried out during which lay Jains re-enact these five auspicious events.<sup>136</sup> These five events are definitive because they establish the Tīrthaṅkar’s identity as a Tīrthaṅkar.<sup>137</sup>

Repetition of a customary model, either that of an ascetic or a Tīrthaṅkar, indicates that the Jain locates an intrinsic sense of security and authority with that model. Ascetics are not Tīrthaṅkars, but they continue the Tīrthaṅkars’ teachings, so criteria of recognition and authentication are important. The Introduction to this thesis suggested that, although it is unfeasible to attempt to define orthodox Jainism, the religion does have common, identifying precepts. The model lives of the Tīrthaṅkar and the ascetic are examples of this. The most radical way in which Srimad deviates from the defined model of saintly criteria is by his lay status, yet many of his qualities

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<sup>132</sup> Babb 1996, p103.

<sup>133</sup> Snell 1994, p12.

<sup>134</sup> Cort 1995a, pages 474 to 475. Also see Laidlaw 1995, pages 38 to 44.

<sup>135</sup> Babb 1996, p27. Also Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p17. The twenty second Jina, Neminath, is incorporated into Kṛṣṇa mythology and is therefore one example in which biographical details have been expanded. (Laidlaw 1995, p39).

<sup>136</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p45.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid p38.

and episodes from his life are typical of the model. So in this respect he has, in the eyes of his followers at least, credentials that authenticate him as a saint.

The established model of saintly criteria is enduring but not inflexible. As the requirements of the Jain community yield to changing social and political environments, so do the qualities its members look for in a saint. When India was a collection of princely territories the success of a religious tradition depended upon royal patronage. When a child *muni* asked his mother, now a mendicant, why their community was so small, she responded,

“At one time the Glorious community of the Śvetāmbar Jains prospered in every city in the realm. But, because for a long time there has been no great monk to further the cause of the Faith, our enemies [Buddhists] have won over King Śilāditya...”<sup>138</sup>

It was the task of the mendicant to court the favour of the king and so ensure the safety of the religious community within the king's territory. The more successful an ascetic was at achieving this the more the lay community revered her or him. For example, the Śvetāmbar Khartar Gacch mendicant Jinaprabhusuri (fourteenth century) used his knowledge, oratory, debating and magical skills to impress the Sultan of Delhi. He increased his favour by collaborating with the protecting deity, Meghanatha, to rid the Sultan's favourite wife of a demon.<sup>139</sup> Jinaprabhusuri's efforts proved effective and so, “the Great Muslim overlord presented the community with a decree that granted safety from harm to all of the Śvetāmbar Jain community”.<sup>140</sup> Further, this decree extended to “the great Jain holy places like Śatrunjaya, Girinar and Phalavaddhi”, and the

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<sup>138</sup> Granoff, 1990, p168. The quote is taken from Prabandhakoia dated 1349, Granoff 1990, p140.

<sup>139</sup> Granoff 1992a, pages 5 to 6; 12 to 17; 23 to 27; and 33 to 37. The summary is taken from sections of Vividhatīrthakalpa (no date) translated by Granoff and which, she says, although written in the third person is largely, but not utterly, autobiographical (p7).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid p5.



Sultan even commissioned the building of new Jain temples.<sup>141</sup> When Jinaprabhasuri was firmly in the Sultan's favour he asked for a special image of Mahavir, that had been stolen from the Jain community some years before, to be returned. The Sultan agreed and the image was reinstated with much ceremony.<sup>142</sup> By winning the favour of the Sultan, Jinaprabhasuri protected the Jain community, defended the cause of Śvetāmbar Jainism, and improved the community's circumstances by negotiating the return of a most coveted image. Jinaprabhasuri was exalted as a saint and hero amongst his community for protecting the Jain faith.

An example from Carrithers's work brings the discussion more up to date. He makes a comparison between two relatively recent Digambar *munis*, Siddhasagar (1828 to 1903) and Santisagar (1872 to 1955).<sup>143</sup> Siddhasagar's biography describes him as having ascetic characteristics akin to medieval mendicants including, "long periods of painful meditation, miraculous encounters with cobras and tigers, and especially miracle cures achieved by chanting the *namokar mantra*".<sup>144</sup> Yet it is Santisagar, not Siddhasagar, that the laity hailed as an ideal mendicant. Santisagar moved away from the mystical activities of his predecessors and succeeded as a leader who addressed the contemporary concerns of his community.

"[Santisagar] encouraged the building of temples, the printing of books, and the founding of educational institutions. He led campaigns against animal sacrifice and the Temple Entry Bill. He is regarded as having revived the institution of *munis* single-handedly from

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid p5

<sup>142</sup> Ibid p6.

<sup>143</sup> Carrithers 1989, p232. Carrithers also refers to Siddhasagar in *Why Humans Have Cultures* (1992, p96) where he is represented as a highly honoured mendicant.

<sup>144</sup> Carrithers 1989, pages 232 to 233.

nearly complete eclipse. He took many ascetic pupils, and most of the *munis* today trace their lines of succession to him”.<sup>145</sup>

These examples show that saintly criteria have been modified throughout history according to changing social or political environments. Jinaprabhasuri and Santisagar were both venerated for the benefits they brought to their Jain communities, but Santisagar's method was different because by the nineteenth century community needs had altered. Siddhasagar, it seems, continued the tradition of *munis* from pre-British India when to influence an individual, namely the king, had a far-reaching effect on the community. Yet by the nineteenth century British colonialism had largely abolished or subjugated the princely territories to the British government, and later to the British monarchy, so mendicant influence was more effectively focused directly towards the laity than towards its immediate overlord. This was Santisagar's approach, he appealed to the laity on a community basis, which was, as Carrithers points out, “historically contingent upon contemporary circumstances”.<sup>146</sup> So, although the particular criterion - which in the case of these examples is benefit to the Jain community - is enduring, it is flexible in its application, which serves to enhance the durability of the model. The model of saintly criteria, whilst retaining its essential characteristics, adjusts to meet the needs of the community.

Like Santisagar, Srimad was in tune with the needs of those who became his followers, although in a spiritual rather than a social or a political context. Srimad's message reintroduced soteriological meaning and proximity to Jainism in response to what he perceived as the rise of perfunctory traditionalism in an environment of religious laxity and misunderstanding. For those

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid p232.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid p232.

who accepted it, his message was refreshing to the extent that they modified the model of saintly criteria by venerating him despite his lay status. Srimad has the endorsement of tradition because he conforms to an enduring model of saintly criteria, but that model is flexible enough to admit him as a layman. For those who did not accept his message, Srimad's lay status was, and continues to be, one criterion that excludes him from sainthood. Although Srimad's saintly status does not exceed the boundaries of his own following, today Gujarati speaking Jains, both lay and mendicant, are increasingly acknowledging his religious teachings even if they do not openly venerate him.

Srimad was a lay guru, an independent religious practitioner without affiliation to an existing religious community and was critical of institutional Jainism. In these respects he was radical and a novel choice for his followers. Religious figures are often seen to challenge existing traditions, and so, perhaps ironically, this is one way in which Srimad is conventional. Babb's description of the *muni* Chagansagar (1839 to 1909, originally Chogmal), gives a comprehensive example of the many virtues characteristic of an ideal Jain saint.<sup>147</sup> His description is taken from a biography written by Chagansagar's disciple, Jinharisagarsuri, in 1948 and describes Chagansagar as,

“scholarly, influential, a protector of Jainism, a teacher, and an able custodian of the virtue and piety of the lay community. He was also a great master of ascetic practices”.<sup>148</sup>

Chagansagar “possessed and exercised great magical power” and, along with his *muni* companion, was “constantly engaged in the *prācar* (promulgation) of religion”, which they

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<sup>147</sup> Babb 1996, pages 103 to 110.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid 110.

accomplished “by means of their discourses and also by the powerful example of their learning and asceticism”.<sup>149</sup> When she was carrying him, Chagansagar’s mother had pregnancy dreams interpreted by her husband’s guru to mean that “a son as lustrous as the sun would be born in his house, one of whose brightness would light up *samsār*”.<sup>150</sup>

Srimad’s conformity with the saintly model begins even before his conception, with the auspicious foretelling of his religious greatness by the visions his mother received. Such incidents, which are resonant of those experienced by Chagansagar’s mother, are commonplace in the lives of great ascetics and, as Babb observes, reminiscent of the fourteen dreams of Mahavir’s mother (as well as those of the other Tīrthaṅkars).<sup>151</sup> Saints also typically show superior intelligence and quick wit, which often emerge as precocity during childhood.

Jinacandrasuri (1140 to 1166, originally Suryakumar, also known as Manidhari) was second of the Dādāgurus. The Dādāgurus are a lineage of four deceased ascetics of the Khartar Gacch who are popular objects of worship amongst Śvetāmbar Jains in Rajasthan.<sup>152</sup> Jinacandrasuri was initiated at six years old and was an *ācārya* at eight years old.<sup>153</sup> Jincandrasuri II (1541 to 1613), the fourth and last Dādāguru, was initiated at six years old and became an *ācārya* at fourteen.<sup>154</sup> Srimad is likewise described as a child prodigy who gained an early reputation for intelligence, religious knowledge and emotional maturity. The Dādāgurus are distinguished, in part, by their ability to recruit followers and inspire lay people to take mendicant initiation.<sup>155</sup> Although Srimad did not inspire followers to take initiation, quite the opposite in fact, he is described as a

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid pages 110 and 106.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid p104. The life of Devacandraji (born 1689) could be cited as another example of model saintly criteria. (Babb 1996, pages 69 to 70).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid p209 note 20.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid pages 111 to 136.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid p120.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid p124

<sup>155</sup> Ibid p111

skilled preacher whose religious discourses attracted substantial audiences as well as a number of close disciples. Just as the Dādāgurus promoted religion by encouraging lay people to become mendicants, Srimad inspired his disciples to follow what he believed to be the correct religious path of self realisation.

Saints have magical powers, but which may only be used for the benefit of Jains or Jainism, not for the glorification of the saint who performs them. Chagansagar used his magical powers to cure many people of supernatural possession. In the case of a Rajput's wife this also required her abstinence from meat and alcohol, hence promoting Jain values.<sup>156</sup> A peculiar exception to this rule is Haribhadra's revenge. Upon hearing that his two nephews, who were also his favourite disciples, had been murdered by Buddhists, Haribhadra conjured a cauldron of boiling oil and magically caused seven hundred Buddhists to fly into the oil to a grisly death.<sup>157</sup> In the context of Haribhadra's biography this act of anger and revenge was an important moment in his personal relationship with Jainism. This example is exceptional and so emphasises the more general rule that miracles should not be used for personal benefit. It also shows that miracles performed by Jain saints are far more powerful than those of others. Jivadevasuri, a 'reformed' Digambar, but now Śvetāmbar *muni*, possessed an, "even more powerful spell, a Jain spell" than a non-Jain ascetic rival, which he used to protect himself from the other ascetic's evil magic.<sup>158</sup> Magical powers are learned by pupils from their teachers, acquired through meditation or ascetic practice, or occur as a by-product of spiritual advancement. When Jivadevasuri was a Digambar

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid p107

<sup>157</sup> Granoff, 1989, p110. Haribhadra was a prolific scholar and Śvetāmbar ascetic of probably either the sixth or eighth century. The exact historical details of his life are obscure. R. Williams in *Jaina Yoga*, and in 'Haribhadra' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1965 p 101-111 suggests that the name may represent more than one person. See Granoff, 1989 note 1.

<sup>158</sup> Granoff 1990, p150 (from Prabandhakośa).

*muni* (called Suvarnakirti) he received two magic spells from his teacher, Srutakirti.’<sup>159</sup>

Chagansagar practised a particular meditation at Mount Abu to obtain specific ‘*siddhis*’ (magical powers).<sup>160</sup> After a period of three fasts, the *muni* Vardhamanasuri gained the power to summon the snake god Dharanendra, who taught him how to use a magical formula previously given to Vardhamanasuri by his teacher.<sup>161</sup>

Srimad’s supernatural abilities, such as telepathy, *avadhāna* and premonition are equivalent to the miraculous and magical powers of saints. Just as miracle stories from hagiography proved the religious authority and saintly status of a particular mendicant, so Srimad’s powers are regarded as evidence of his internal purity and therefore of his religious authority and saintly status. Srimad’s public displays of *avadhāna*, especially before the Diwan and the British council, echo the miracles performed by mendicants at court. In accordance with the saintly code Srimad ceased performances when they threatened to hinder his religious progression even though they could have brought him personal glory. Neither would he employ his supernatural abilities for the worldly benefit of others. For example, he refused to use his ability in fortune telling to help Sobhagbahi make financial investments. He did, however, use his healing, or at least calming, influence to help a number of people find peace during illness and death. There is no indication that Srimad had a religious teacher during his lifetime, the source of his special abilities is attributed only to the power of his own soul. Even though he received the *bīj gnān* through exchange with Sobhagbhai, in either version of the story it is Srimad’s spiritual power

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid p149.

<sup>160</sup> Babb 1996, p107.

<sup>161</sup> Granoff 1990, p173. Taken from Khartarragacchabhrhadgurvāvali, early fourteenth century (Granoff 1990, p141).

that makes the technique effective, in a similar way that Dharanendra taught Vardhamanasuri how to use the magic formula.<sup>162</sup>

Lineage, preferably traced back to a Tīrthaṅkar, is a vital saintly criterion and mark of religious authority. Chagansagar's biography traces him back to Mahavir who is at the origin of all Śvetāmbar lineages.<sup>163</sup> Lineal connections may also originate from past lives. Kanji Svami's (1889 to 1980) principal disciple, Campaben (1914 to 1990), claims to have remembered a previous life during which she and Kanji Svami were present at the *samvasaraṇ* (religious assembly) of the Tīrthaṅkar Simandhara. It was during this assembly that Simandhara is said to have given the teachings that inspired the Digambar ācārya Kundakunda to write *Essence of the Doctrine*.<sup>164</sup> According to his devotees, Kanji Svami's presence at this meeting gives him the authority of a lineage originating with a Tīrthaṅkar.<sup>165</sup> Srimad has no claim to a current lineage, but he does recall being Mahavir's disciple in a previous life. For example, Govardhandas quotes Srimad, "Fortunate is that past time when I was in contact with the all knowing great saint".<sup>166</sup> Also, "I can say that when I was in contact with Lord Mahavir as his last disciple ..."<sup>167</sup>, Srimad laments that through his own momentary lack of attention to Mahavir's preaching he became the, "disciple who was left behind".<sup>168</sup> In his lifetime Srimad did not accept lineage as sufficient qualification of religious authority. According to him religious authority could be

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<sup>162</sup> Chapter Two related the account of the exchange between Srimad and Sobhagbhai with respect of the bīj gnān technique.

<sup>163</sup> Babb 1996, p109.

<sup>164</sup> Dundas 1992, pages 230 and 231. [www.mangalayatan.org./sourcesofinspiration.htm](http://www.mangalayatan.org./sourcesofinspiration.htm).

<sup>165</sup> Dundas 1992, p231.

<sup>166</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p15.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid p150.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid p157.

truly validated only by self realisation. Yet his own claim to have been Mahavir's disciple shows that he could not disengage himself totally from lineal endorsement.<sup>169</sup>

Finally, all saints die with equanimity, which is essential for the good rebirth they can expect. Saints are generally believed to be very close to their final incarnation, but they are not yet liberated (it is important to be clear about this distinction). Chagansagar, aware that his life was drawing to its close, died in meditation.<sup>170</sup> After his death, Jindattsuri (1075 to 1154), the first Dādāguru, is believed to have spent a period of time in *devlok* prior to entering *Mahāvideha*, from where he is expected to attain liberation.<sup>171</sup> Srimad's end and reincarnation follows a similar pattern. His death was described as peaceful and dignified and he is believed by followers to be currently experiencing either his ultimate or penultimate incarnation prior to liberation.

This discussion has shown that Srimad's biography compares favourably to a model of saintly criteria based on the lives of other Jain saints. Rakeshbhai's biography, outlined in Chapter Two, also demonstrates remarkable parallels with the model described here. There is a supernatural tone to Rakeshbhai's birth. His spiritual characteristics were recognised at an early age. He is believed to possess abilities of prophecy and telepathy, as well as knowledge of his previous lives. He is a charismatic speaker who has attracted thousands of followers and he has a lineal connection to Srimad by his claim to be a reincarnation of Lalluji. This is further evidence of the application and durability of the model of saintly criteria. This model is by no means restricted to Jainism. Stories from the life of Sahajanand, the founder of *Swami* Narayan Hinduism, tell

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<sup>169</sup> This point and its impact on the formation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement are discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

<sup>170</sup> Babb 1996, p108.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid p119.



how his parents were earthy manifestations of heavenly beings, about his passion for religion, supernatural powers, advanced intellect and debating skills.<sup>172</sup> Likewise, the account of the life of Vallabhacarya (1479 to 1531), founder of Pustimarg Vaiṣṇivism, describes similar events and qualities.<sup>173</sup> Sahajanand and Vallabhacarya are examples of Hindu saints, but it is likely that this model, reaches beyond Indian traditions and has a degree of pan-religious application, but that investigation is outside the scope of the current study.

Srimad's conformity with a familiar model of saintly criteria is reassurance of his authenticity and hence his religious authority. Snell comments that the credibility of a teacher who is critical of an existing tradition, as Srimad was of sectarian Jainism, depends on their demonstrating a "reassuringly secure connection" with that tradition. As well as Srimad's conformity with the model of saintly criteria, he also had a secure spiritual and intellectual footing in Jainism. Snell continues,

"it is frequently stressed [in hagiography] that the novelty in an espoused teaching is not a deviation from the established beliefs, but rather an extension beyond them".<sup>174</sup>

Throughout this discussion it has been impossible to divorce saintly criteria from religious authority. It almost goes without saying that someone who qualifies for sainthood is assumed to have religious authority, which is usually synonymous with a mendicant's initiation. Srimad's religious authority is derived from his state of self realisation, according to his interpretation of it as a condition of internal purity. The reasons for this are explained in Chapter Four. As any of his followers will confirm, the principal reason why they venerate him is because of their belief

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<sup>172</sup> Williams 1984, pages 9 to p10.

<sup>173</sup> Barz 1992, p21.

<sup>174</sup> Snell 1994, p6.

that he attained a high level of self realisation. Therefore self realisation is the essential saintly criterion within the tradition of the Shrimad Rajcandra movement.

*Srimad as the subject of hagiography.*

Snell describes a tension between “traditional scholarship of the *pandita*” and “critical scholarship of objective research”.<sup>175</sup> The critical researcher seeks “historical actuality”, whereas the “*pandita*” (the devotee) is governed by what they perceive to be a higher authority of their religious heritage and has no reason to find conflict between “historical actuality” and their traditional beliefs. For example, with reference to the famous Śvetāmbar *ācārya* Hemacandra (1089 to 1172) Fynes writes,

“There are several accounts of his life, but, with their stress on the marvellous, they are hagiographical; hence it is not possible to reconstruct Hemacandra’s life story in a way that would satisfy the criteria of scholarly historical biography”.<sup>176</sup>

The critical researcher’s etic perspective of “invention”, particularly with respect to apotheosis, and the *pandita*’s emic perspective of “revelation” are regarded by Snell to be in opposition. Both perspectives are problematic. Historiography asserts the virtual impossibility of establishing historical actuality; even were it possible, how useful would it be in determining the historical development of a community if it does not reflect the beliefs of that community? However, some degree of objectivity is necessary when attempting to construct a representative account. For example, to represent the Srimad Rajcandra movement accurately an impartial attitude towards its composite individual histories is necessary. The study of hagiography

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<sup>175</sup> Snell 1994, pages 1 to 2.

<sup>176</sup> Fynes pages ix to x, in Hemacandra 1998.

bridges the gap between these two perspectives by enabling the critical scholar to make a diachronic analysis from the perspective of the historical beliefs accepted by the religious community in question. With reference to hagiography in the study of Indian religious traditions, Snell writes that contemporary research,

“sees it as addressing and revealing facets of belief and attitude which, though at some remove from historical actuality, lie at the very heart of the traditions that they represent”.<sup>177</sup>

In other words, it affords the phenomenological approach to religious studies favoured by this thesis.

Hagiography, from which the model of saintly criteria discussed in this chapter has been derived, is a prolific and important genre in Jain literature. However it does not have an established format. For example, Granoff writes that Jain hagiographies are, “as varied as surely the people they honour must have been”<sup>178</sup> and that, “all of this literature about monks is as varied in content as it is in style”.<sup>179</sup> Hagiography does have a particular set of functions though, some of which are discussed below.<sup>180</sup> Srimad is worshipped as a saint by his followers. For example, Mehta and Sheth describe him as “the Divine incarnation”, so his biography can be regarded as hagiographic from within the tradition of the Srimad Rajcandra movement.<sup>181</sup> A single, standard biography has not entered the canon of devotees’ literature. This is perhaps because so much of Srimad’s original writing is accessible to them or because veneration of his personality is

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<sup>177</sup> Snell 1994, p1.

<sup>178</sup> Granoff 1990, p140

<sup>179</sup> Granoff 1992a, p2.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid pages 1 to 2. Snell 1994, pages 2 to 3.

<sup>181</sup> Mehta and Sheth 1971, p16.

channelled through his image and writings. Nevertheless, the available accounts of Srimad's life fulfil the role and functions of hagiography.

Hagiography legitimises the saint by describing saintly criteria then proving that the saint fulfils these criteria. As described above, in earlier times ascetics could gain saintly status by winning royal patronage and safe passage for Jain communities within the king's territories.<sup>182</sup>

Performing miracles was an effective way of doing this and so hagiography frequently relies on miracle stories to assert saintly authority. So, hagiography both describes saintly criteria, in this case the winning of royal favour through miracles, and confirms that the saint met these criteria, by describing the miracles performed and the king's reactions. Although Srimad's saintly criteria lay in a very different direction, his biography still fulfils the function of definition and proof. Srimad defined religious authority as the experience of self realisation, which he claimed to have achieved. Biographers use examples from his life to prove the validity of this claim. His remarkable qualities, for example, superior intellect, telepathic ability, memory of previous lives and extraordinary mental agility are given as tangible examples of his advanced spiritual state because of the level of internal purity considered necessary to generate such abilities. Therefore they establish beyond doubt that Srimad achieved self realisation and meets the criterion necessary to be revered as a saint (as defined by him. and reiterated in his biography).

By recording and glorifying saintly achievements hagiography glorifies the Jain religion itself. Babb describes it as the, "portrayal of exemplary lives", which "typically concern ascetics' lives that embody the tradition's central values and highest aspirations".<sup>183</sup> By illustrating that the

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<sup>182</sup> In contemporary times royal patronage has been replaced, to some degree, by support from wealthy business people.

<sup>183</sup> Babb 1996, p103.

highest ideals of Jainism can be realised, hagiography is an inspiration to the reader. In his biographies Srimad is glorified for his ascetic practices, practices to which Jains may aspire, but are unable to achieve. We are told how he would meditate for hours, oblivious to the painful insect bites he suffered; how he would seek solitude for religious practice and contemplation, and about his meagre food requirements, how, in his last few years, he lived as far as he could, a mendicant lifestyle.<sup>184</sup> These examples show devotees that extreme religious austerities are possible and effective, and so encourage their perseverance along the Jain path.

Hagiography consolidates devotees into a following and in some cases attempts to assert the authority of a particular group. It preserves the existing community of devotees and attracts new supporters by advertising the saint's religious qualities.<sup>185</sup> Srimad's life story is part of the universal history to which all his followers ascribe. Displays of this history evoked either by word of mouth, written word, or through pictures, are ways in which potential devotees may become aware of Srimad and so are vehicles for the expansion of his following. As identified in the previous chapter, devotion to Srimad is the defining criterion of inclusion in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. One expression of this devotion is the interest and knowledge followers have about his life and achievements and their recognition of him as "an exemplary paradigm".<sup>186</sup> Much information about his life and teachings is found in his own writings which, as Chapter Five explains, are regarded as scripture by devotees. Biographical knowledge can therefore also amount to scriptural knowledge. This extends into worship as followers venerate him in the hope of eventually achieving a spiritual status equal to his.

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<sup>184</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 149,151 and 156.

<sup>185</sup> Granoff 1992a, p1. Granoff 1994, p145.

<sup>186</sup> Snell 1994, p3.

It is typical for the disciples of a saint to erect physical monuments in commemoration of their spiritual leader. For example, Barz records that the followers of Vallabhacarya celebrated his travels throughout India by installing *baiṭhakas* (monument shrines) “at each place where some important event in his life occurred”.<sup>187</sup> This thesis has already shown that Srimad’s devotees have constructed physical monuments, such as ashrams, temples and shrines at sites associated with important spiritual events his life. Some examples are the oratories at Vavana, where he first experienced *jāti smaraṇa gnān* and at Uttarasanda, where he first experienced self realisation; also the ashram at Idar and the sites of his birth at Vavana and death at Rajkot. All are sites of important incidents in Srimad’s life and religious development and therefore important to the history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Hagiography is also a monument, akin to physical monuments, to the saint that it describes. Srimad’s followers celebrate his life through his biography as well as through the construction of physical monuments. *Jeevan Kala* was commissioned as part of an inaugural ceremony to celebrate the opening of a new temple dedicated to him. *Pinnacle of Spirituality*, a new book about his life, was written to commemorate the centenary of his death. The contents of this book are also presented as a film in which computer generated illustrations have been set to music, with the book’s text providing the narrative. The illustrations form part of a set of ninety that celebrate Srimad’s life in pictures rather than words. There is also a much earlier set of narrative paintings of episodes in Srimad’s life. The events chosen for illustration in this series include important turning points in his life, but also events that have a significant impact on the Srimad Rajcandra movement. They are: his birth place at Vavana, his first experience of *jāti smaraṇa gnān* whilst watching the cremation of his neighbour, his performance of *śatāvadhāna* at the Framji Cawasji Institute in Mumbai, his

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<sup>187</sup> Barz 1992, p27.

meeting with *Gandhi*, the composition of *Atma Siddhi* and his delivering a religious discourse to the seven *munis* at Idar. These, and other pictures of Srimad's life, are frequently reproduced and are an important contribution to the preservation of his biographical record, as are some of the physical structures that have been erected.<sup>188</sup>

Hagiography is a form of *bhakti* because it honours the saint. An early record is important for historical accuracy, preferably written by someone close to the saint, usually a disciple, or disciples, wanting to revere the memory of their guru. When Haribhadra's disciples were killed by Buddhist rivals there was no one to record his life story. One version of his biography tells how the Jain goddess, Amba, appeared to assure him that his memory would be preserved through his own writings. Her appearance indicates that it was generally the disciples' duty to undertake this task. Although Haribhadra's name and works remain, with some debate about their authenticity, Granoff shows that the absence of a historically close account makes it impossible to piece together his biography with any degree of accuracy.<sup>189</sup> Dundas makes the same point with respect to the life of Lonka Shah. No historical information about Lonka can be substantiated because none of his contemporary disciples recorded his biographical details. Lonka is believed to have lived during the fifteenth century, but the first hagiographies, produced by the Lonka Gacch, did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a result of such late biographical attempts, even the date (ranging from 1418 to 1425) and place of his birth remain ambiguous.<sup>190</sup> Where contemporary hagiography has not occurred, saints' lives sometimes become clouded to the extent that it is virtually impossible to separate fact from fiction. Lonka is an example of a figure whose historical accuracy is surrendered to legend

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<sup>188</sup> See plate 8 figure 14.

<sup>189</sup> Granoff 1989, p120.

<sup>190</sup> Dundas 1.992, p212.

because of inefficiency in the historical record. Even when an early and accurate record has been made, over time biographies may be embellished and undergo creative alterations, particularly, Granoff notes, miracle stories.<sup>191</sup> Fynes comments about Hemacandra,

“so striking was his personality and so pervasive was his influence that very soon after his death he became a figure of legend, endowed with super powers”<sup>192</sup>

Portraits of Srimad, oral, written and pictorial, appear to have successfully preserved his identity as a historical figure. This is illustrated by the ease with which devotees are able to recount the significant events of his life. The historical accuracy of Srimad's written biographies is largely secure because they rely on Srimad's own writings - his letters, diary entries and autobiographical notes - as their source material. *Jeevan Kala* was overseen at every stage by Srimad's immediate disciple Lalluji and so includes firsthand information and personal anecdotes.<sup>193</sup> As suggested in the Introduction to this thesis, other biographies borrow strongly from these two sources. This, and the fact that Srimad is a relatively recent historical figure, protects his life story to some degree from religious myth or historical legend, although not necessarily from embellishment. For example, one story tells how, as a child, Srimad overheard a plot against the life of Sri Dharsibhai, the justice of Morbi. Of course Srimad warned Dharsibhai and saved his life.<sup>194</sup> A painting of this scene was on display at an exhibition in Rajkot in January 2002, a caption beneath described Srimad as having “supersensitive hearing”

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<sup>191</sup> Granoff 1992a, pages 1 and 2.

<sup>192</sup> Fynes p.ix, in Hemacandra 1998.

<sup>193</sup> Satiya 1989, p11.

<sup>194</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 18 to 20.



which enabled him to overhear the plot. This amazing faculty is not mentioned in the written accounts of the event.

There are some devotees still living who met Lalluji when they were children, so have 'real' historical memories connected to Srimad. There are many more who knew Brahmacariji. These living memories may be transformed into anecdotes to furnish the historical record for subsequent generations. Anecdote already has a presence in the historical tradition, if not in the historical 'record', of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. During fieldwork I was told a number of stories that have not appeared in the biographical accounts, but which are known to disciples and passed orally amongst friends and family. One tells how a young boy wanted eagerly to meet Srimad, but was told that he was meditating in an upstairs room. The boy crept upstairs to take a quiet glimpse, he saw Srimad sitting cross-legged, deep in meditation. There was also a dog in the room. The dog was pawing and snapping at Srimad, trying to interrupt his mediation, but Srimad remained oblivious to the animal. The boy ran down stairs to report this to his father, but was told there could not be a dog in the house. When Srimad was checked again the dog was gone. It is believed that a god had taken the form of the dog and was testing Srimad by attempting to break his meditation.<sup>195</sup>

### **3. How the influence of Srimad Rajcandra's life has shaped his following.**

This chapter has identified Srimad as the central focus of unification for his followers. The overarching influence of his life is the basis of the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. This universal history, to which all his followers ascribe, is one factor that consolidates their numerous groups into a single movement. The venerable status that Srimad

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<sup>195</sup> Koba, November 1999.

acquired during his life, and which escalated after his death, is fundamental to the formation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement because it has transformed the universal history of Srimad's life story into a universal ideology. Devotees are united as a movement by their unanimous veneration of Srimad as a religious icon. There are two main reasons why devotees believe Srimad to be worthy of veneration; these are the high level of internal purity that they believe he achieved and which gives him religious authority, and their belief in his capacity as a guru to guide them towards a similar state of self realisation. To reiterate the comments of the devotee from Agas cited at the end of the first section of this chapter - Srimad is venerated in gratitude for his gift of guidance towards *mokṣa*.

Srimad challenged institutional Jainism, but it is uncertain whether he actually intended to establish a new religious movement or not. When he was twenty he wrote to his brother-in-law, Chaterbhai, about a strategy to "propagate the right religion" with the co-operation of willing disciples who were awaiting his call.<sup>196</sup> Digish Mehta interprets this as "schemes for the establishment of a new church" with Srimad "in the role of a spiritual leader, even a saviour of a high order", but which were aborted due to his marriage the following year.<sup>197</sup> There is no evidence that any of these schemes came to fruition and, following the hiatus of his marriage, his religious efforts seemed to have focused more towards his own spiritual development. For this reason it is inappropriate to describe Srimad as the founder of a new religious movement within Jainism. This role is better ascribed to his disciples. The fragmentary organisation of the Srimad Rajcandra movement makes it impossible to pinpoint a single founder as each community of followers has its own founding member. However, it should be noted that the proselytising

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<sup>196</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p33.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid pages 33 to 34.

efforts of Lalluji, his foundation of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas and this ashram's subsequent publishing activities play a particularly prominent role in the formation and development of the movement.

Srimad was an independent, anti-sectarian religious practitioner. There is no evidence that he had a personal religious teacher during his life and he was not associated with a particular mendicant lineage. This is one reason why the Srimad Rajcandra movement is dislocated from any currently mapped branches of Jainism, as demonstrated in the Introduction to this thesis. Srimad's religious independence has allowed for considerable freedom in the development of the movement's social organisation because followers are not constrained by an existing organisational structure. Furthermore, Srimad did not formulate an inclusive administrative or organisational code. These are reasons that have influenced Srimad Rajcandra movement's evolution with its particular organisational structure.

Followers have inherited a pronounced anti-sectarian ethic from Srimad's own anti-sectarian beliefs and religious independence. This has influenced the movement's development as a lay organisation. Srimad's followers are essentially prohibited from considering *dīkṣā* because of the consequential affiliation with what they would identify as sectarian Jainism that this would have.

This anti-sectarian ethic, coupled with the lack of a central administration to brand followers as either Śvetāmbar or Digambar or Sthānakvāsī, has opened access to the movement to Jains from all branches of Jainism as well as to non-Jains. It may be recalled from the previous chapter that I had to apply the criterion 'anyone who worships Srimad' as an index of inclusion in the movement. The effect of such a wide and sweeping appeal has been to allow for a variety of Jain

traditions to make their presence felt within the scope of the movement. The traces of a particular branch of Jainism at a particular community of Srimad's followers is usually influenced by the founder of that community. For example, Atmanandji is dedicated to Digambar Jainism and was inspired by the writings of Kundakundacarya, so at Koba ashram there is a Digambar temple and a portrait of Kundakundacarya in the *svādhyāy* hall there. Although these are Atmanandji's influences, it is important that they should not be interpreted as a form of sectarian exclusivity. Atmanandji explained that the ashram is a non-sectarian institution and is open to all regardless of a person's caste, race or religious affiliation. He said that its aim is to dispel dogmatism and to follow and enhance the teachings of Srimad Rajcandra, as far as they can be understood.<sup>198</sup>

Agas ashram is an interesting case. Lalluji belonged originally to the aniconic Sthānakvāsī branch of Jainism, but renounced this particular sectarian affiliation when he became Srimad's disciple. The inclusion of a Digambar and a Śvetāmbar temple at Agas acknowledges these different traditions within Jainism without being exclusive to either of them, or to Sthānakvāsī Jainism. Most of the early members of this ashram were Vaiṣṇava and not Jain at all, so they would not have been partisan towards one particular Jain sect. Perhaps part of Lalluji's motivation for the construction of these temples was a lesson in Jainism for these Vaiṣṇava devotees. Vaiṣṇava influence is apparent at Agas by the emphasis placed on *bhakti* here. It is easy to imagine a devotee transferring their familiar devotional practices from Krishna to Srimad. *Bhakti* is an important religious practice at all the centres connected with Srimad and

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<sup>198</sup> Personal interview, October 1999.

the influence of Srimad's own dual religious upbringing on this is explored further in Chapter Four.

The presence of Digambar and Śvetāmbar temples at the sites of the different communities of Srimad's followers is a reminder that the universalism adopted by this movement embraces a broad scope of Jain history and tradition. For example, whilst at Deolali my companions encouraged me to perform *pūjā* in a Śvetāmbar temple one day and a Digambar temple the following day. This was partly to ensure that I had properly understood and appreciated the meaning of anti-sectarianism; that it does not matter in which temple one worships, but it matters that one does worship. (It also matters that one worships effectively, which is why the aspirant needs the guidance of a self realised guru).

It is unlikely that Srimad intended to establish a community of lay followers, but the circumstances of his life and teachings have led to this. Although Srimad remained a layman all his life, from his personal perspective his lay status is essentially incidental. He did not censure mendicancy in principle and he did not advise his mendicant followers to leave their order (although an element of diplomacy may have been in play here), but he did criticise institutional Jainism for falling short of its own values. During the final decade of his life he reduced his familial and business duties with the intention of taking initiation as a mendicant. This pattern is typical. People often renounce later in life and had Srimad lived longer there is little doubt that he would have done so too. The fact that this opportunity passed him by and that he remained a layman until his early death has had a fundamental effect on the evolution of the Srimad Rajcandra movement as a lay organisation.

There are very many lay Jains who have earned a place in Jain history, but Srimad is remarkable because of the type and degree of veneration he receives. His followers believe him to be divine, they regard his writings as sacred literature and they look to his image as an object of worship. In becoming the central icon of a religious movement Srimad has far transcended the usual accolades bestowed on a lay person. Lay Jains of particular piety, or who have benefited their Jain community by giving generous donations, are sometimes the subject of panegyric literature.<sup>199</sup> The layman Banarsidas (1586 to 1643) is famous as a poet and for his autobiography *Ardhakathanaka* (*Half a Story*) completed in 1641, which documents his own crisis of faith and his recovery from that crisis.<sup>200</sup> Although Jains such as these are honoured, they are not regarded as divinely authenticated preceptors as Srimad is. Closer parallels can be drawn between Srimad, Kanji Svami and Chitrabhanu. Kanji Svami and Chitrabhanu are both lay men who have become central religious icons with a substantial following of disciples. However, there is also an important difference. Both these men had been initiated mendicants who elected to give up their mendicancy and renounced lifestyles prior to establishing their current followings.

Dundas gives an account of a Śvetāmbar layman from Gujarat called Kaduā Śāh (1438 to 1507) with whom Srimad also shares some parallels.<sup>201</sup> Upon finding no one suitable to initiate him, Kaduā adopted the role of a *saṃvarī* a mid point between a mendicant and layperson. Dundas writes,

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<sup>199</sup> The story of Abhada is an example of a lay Jain who is the subject of hagiography. Translated by Granoff 1994, pages 137 to 141.

<sup>200</sup> Dundas 1992, pages 165 to 168. Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, pages 51 to 56. Vanina 1995, pages 211 to 224.

<sup>201</sup> Dundas 1999, pages 19 to 35.

“The life of the *saṃvarī* was like that of the monk in that it involved peripatetic preaching and was structured around *caturmās*, the four- month rain retreat”.<sup>202</sup>

Kaduā kept many ascetic vows such as dietary restrictions and celibacy. He undertook some mendicant duties including engaging other Jain sects in debate and initiating novice *saṃvarīs*. Kaduā also codified one hundred and one rules of behaviour for the *saṃvarī* Dundas interprets this as a challenge to the laxity of contemporary mendicants and as an indication that Kaduā had set out “to make the *saṃvarī* path superior to that of the monk”.<sup>203</sup> He attracted a community of followers, which evidence suggests still existed as late as 1960, although there are currently no extant textual sources to describe the historical development of these Jains.<sup>204</sup>

Religious authority is usually associated with mendicant initiation, for example, Babb observes that for religious authority “the mendicant status is crucial.”<sup>205</sup> So, as a householder, Srimad’s religious authority was not endorsed by traditional Jainism. This may have restricted his community influence, but neither he nor his disciples perceived that his religious authority was diminished by his lack of mendicant initiation. Nevertheless, his disciples were eager for their relationship with him to be legitimised by his initiation, perhaps to facilitate access to him. Today Srimad’s lay status is of little significance to his devotees. In accordance with Srimad’s teaching they believe that religious authority is not an automatic consequence of initiation, but that it is verified only by self realisation. Nevertheless, the religious careers of his followers have been affected by his lay status. For example, when I asked Rakeshbhai if he intended to

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid p21.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid p21.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid note 70.

<sup>205</sup> Babb 1996, p134.

take *dīkṣā* he replied that he would like to, but that a number of obstacles prevented him. One of these is that mendicancy would disbar his venerating Srimad. He commented that,

“The problem is they [initiated mendicants] will not let me worship Srimad Rajcandra because he was not a *sādhū* [*muni*]. A *sādhū* cannot worship a householder. They are not prepared to believe that Srimad was a highly elevated soul. They consider him as a good disciple of Mahavir, but *sādhū* believe themselves to be higher than him, so if you just wear their dress you are higher than Srimad Rajcandra and I am not prepared to believe that. So that [established *dīkṣā*] is not possible for us. A *sādhū* cannot bow to a householder and to them he is only a householder because they only see the external”<sup>206</sup>

I learned of only one devotee who had taken *dīkṣā*. He stays at a dedicated ashram at Dhaman, but I was unable to discover any further information about him.<sup>207</sup> Some mendicants recognise the spiritual authority of Srimad's teachings. Atmanandji suggested that there was a higher incidence of this amongst *sādhvīs* than amongst *munis*.<sup>208</sup> Small groups of *sādhvīs* were present at both Sayla and Koba ashrams during my visits. Mendicants usually direct Srimad's teaching of guru *bhakti* towards their own *ācāryas*, but in a remarkable exception to this pattern Nalinbhai, the guru at Sayla, has three disciples who are Sthānakvāsī *sādhvīs*. They are frequent visitors to the ashram at Sayla and attend Nalinbhai's *svādhyāy*, but they do not attend *bhakti*.<sup>209</sup> A number of mendicants have written commentaries on Srimad's literature, including Sadhvi Tarvatabai Mahasatiji, whose book, *I Am Soul*, is translated into English. One senior disciple at

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<sup>206</sup> Personal interview, January 2000. Rakeshbhai also had other reasons for not taking *dīkṣā*, not least his responsibility as a guru to his large following of disciples.

<sup>207</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

<sup>208</sup> Personal interview, January 2002.

<sup>209</sup> Sayla, December 2001.



Sayla, himself a self realised person, explained to me that Srimad's growing popularity amongst the Jain lay community in Gujarat had compelled the mendicant community to take an interest in his teachings. Once having read his teachings, mendicants found themselves unable to refute them, but instead they recognised their religious value and Srimad's self realised status.<sup>210</sup>

Mendicant attitudes towards Srimad today seem to be far more open-minded than during his and Lalluji's lifetimes. Lalluji's old mendicant order at Khambhat is one of the few in Gujarat that still refuses to acknowledge Srimad as an elevated soul.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Sayla, December 2001.

<sup>211</sup> Atmanandji personal interview, January 2002.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Path of Self Realisation**

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Path of Self Realisation**

Chapter Three demonstrated that Srimad's followers are unified into a movement by the overarching historical and ideological influence of Srimad's life. This chapter considers his teachings about self realisation and guru *bhakti*. The first section of the chapter discusses Srimad's particular interpretation of self realisation as a religious experience. It shows how this has influenced devotees' attitudes towards anti-sectarianism and soteriology. The diversity of attitudes amongst the different communities of Shrimad's followers towards self realisation is also discussed. Srimad's interpretation of self realisation as a religious experience had the effect of redirecting religious authority from mendicants to spiritually qualified lay people. This chapter discusses the impact of this on the Srimad Rajcandra movement's development as a lay organisation with a multifarious organisational structure.

The second section of this chapter discusses Srimad's teachings about guru *bhakti*. This was Srimad's principal religious instruction to the aspirant of liberation and is therefore a universal practice of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Devotees have inevitably directed *bhakti* towards Srimad, who they revere as a guru of the highest calibre. These are factors that unify followers into a movement. However, followers' further interpretation and implementation Srimad's teaching have contributed to the movement's fragmentary organisational structure. This is due in part to a division between those devotees who only follow Srimad and those who also follow a living guru, and also due to the various communities that have gathered around different living gurus in the tradition.

## 1. Self realisation.

In keeping with the phenomenological approach of this thesis, Srimad's teaching about self realisation is not held to philosophical scrutiny in this chapter, but its impact on the formation and development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement is discussed. Self realisation is at the very heart of Srimad's philosophical and soteriological message, and guru *bhakti*, as a means of achieving it, is his principal religious instruction.

Srimad discusses self realisation, his desire for it and his eventual achievement of it, throughout his writings. Followers believe that his philosophy and teachings are summarised perfectly in his most famous text, *Atma Siddhi*. Therefore this is the primary textual source for this chapter.

Unless otherwise referenced, all the quotations from *Atma Siddhi* used in this chapter are taken from D. C. Mehta's English translation (1978). As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, *Atma Siddhi* is one of Srimad's most celebrated poems and one that firmly establishes him as a philosopher and religious teacher in the minds of his devotees. It is widely acknowledged as a religious text throughout the Gujarati speaking Jain community, even where Jains are not devotees of Srimad.<sup>1</sup> The history of its composition is described in Chapter Five. My understanding of how devotees interpret *Atma Siddhi* has been enhanced by numerous discussions with them, as well as by detailed expositions from gurus.

Srimad is believed to have attained self realisation several years prior to the composition of *Atma Siddhi*. Chapter Five explains that Srimad's self-realised status means that *Atma Siddhi*, as well as his other writings, are treated as scripture by his devotees. They accept its religious authority

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<sup>1</sup> Atmanandji personal interview, January 2002. The Kanji Svami Panth also accept *Atma Siddhi* as an authoritative religious text.

because they believe its teaching is informed by the pure knowledge of Srimad's soul. As this chapter will go on to explain, because this knowledge is experiential it represents absolute, therefore universal, truth. For this reason *Atma Siddhi* is believed to be more authoritative than a text based just upon intellectual theorising.

In essence *Atma Siddhi* is a liberation manual that, in one hundred and forty two verses, discusses the nature of the soul and the means for its liberation.<sup>2</sup> Its religious message is considered to be broadly inclusive because it focuses on soteriology rather than on the technical details of religious practice. Devotees are impressed by what they describe as its universal appeal. The text is certainly anti-sectarian in tone.<sup>3</sup> It gives cautionary descriptions of the 'true' and 'false' aspirant and the 'true' and 'false' guru. It defines self realisation as the aspirant's soteriological goal and posits devotion to a true guru as the way of achieving that goal. The first part of the text concludes with a list of the six fundamental truths.<sup>4</sup> These are six short aphorisms that set out to prove the existence and permanence of the soul and its relationship with karma. Srimad states that knowledge of these six truths is essential for liberation.<sup>5</sup> The second part of the text expounds the six fundamental truths via a didactic dialogue between a disciple and guru. The guru leads the disciple, step by step, through each truth in turn, explaining it and resolving all the disciple's doubts. The guru then explains that liberation may be achieved by

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<sup>2</sup> "The path of liberation has mostly disappeared at present. For its deliberation by the aspirant of self realisation, it has been stated here explicitly." *Atma Siddhi* verse 2.

<sup>3</sup> "If the path of liberation stated above is followed, there is no difference in garb or gender. Whoever practices it, attains liberation. There is no exception in it." *Atma Siddhi* verse 107,

<sup>4</sup> The soul exists; it is ever-existent; it is the doer of its Karmas; it is the enjoyer of the fruits of these Karmas; there is liberation; and the means of liberation is true religion." *Atma Siddhi* verse 43. In verse 44 Srimad states that each of the six schools of Indian philosophy are represented by the six fundamental truths.

<sup>5</sup> "You have asked six questions after due deliberation about the six aphorisms. Rest assured that in their knowledge in its entirety, lies the path of liberation." *Atma Siddhi* verse 106.

submission to a true guru.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the discourse the disciple attains self realisation, following which appreciation is duly shown towards the guru.<sup>7</sup> In concluding the text Srimad identifies the soul as having the inherent quality for *mokṣa*, but states that this can only be realised by the application of the instrumental cause, the instruction of a true guru.<sup>8</sup>

The central message of *Atma Siddhi* is that liberation begins with self realisation. Self realisation is achieved when the soul is isolated and experienced independently of the body or the empirical senses. The aspirant who hopes to achieve this state must follow the religious instructions of a guru who has already attained self realisation. Self realisation is at the heart of devotees' religious beliefs and its attainment is the primary motivating factor for their religious practices.

### What is self realisation?

Self realisation (*samyag darśan* or *ātma gnān*) is a conspicuous philosophical theme that is recognised by all branches of Jainism. Srimad's emphasis of it in his teachings cannot therefore be regarded as radical. It is familiar as the fourth *guṇasthān*, which are the fourteen steps of spiritual purity en route to *mokṣa*.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore an essential precursor to the *aṇuvrats* (lay vows) that are taken at the fifth *guṇasthān* and to the *mahāvrat*s (mendicant vows) that are taken at the sixth *guṇasthān*. It is the first of the *ratnatraya* (the three jewels of Jainism), which are

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<sup>6</sup> "One who follows the precept of the true Guru, leaving aside his own wrong view and belief, achieves pure right belief of self, wherein there are neither the differences nor the stand-points (i.e. which is above all the different stand-points)." *Atma Siddhi* verse 110.

<sup>7</sup> "By the true Guru's teaching, the disciple attained knowledge, which he had never before. He experienced his true self in himself and his ignorance passed away." *Atma Siddhi* verse 119. "Aho! Aho! Holy true Guru, unfathomable ocean of Compassion! On this wretched pupil, Oh Lord, you have done, Aho! Aho! The greatest obligation." *Atma Siddhi* verse 124.

<sup>8</sup> "All the souls are like Siddhas (i.e. liberated souls as they have potentiality of being liberated). He who understands it, becomes liberated. Obedience to the precepts of the true Guru and contemplation on the statue of the Jina are auxiliary or associating causes for this." *Atma Siddhi* verse 135.

<sup>9</sup> For a full explanation of the *guṇasthāns* see Jaini 1998, pages 272 to 273 and Dundas 1992, p130.

right faith (*samyag darśan*), right knowledge (*samyag gnān*) and right conduct (*samyak cāritra*).

Umasvati begins his *Tattvartha Sutra* by listing this triad, which Umasvati's translator, Tatia, identifies as the, "three essential components of the spiritual path".<sup>10</sup> *Tattvartha Sutra* is one scripture that all branches of Jainism accept as authoritative, so Umasvati's interpretation of it may be regarded as broadly representative. Tatia translates *samyag darśan* as "enlightened world-view", and Umasvati describes it as

"true understanding, informing an individual's thoughts and actions in solving the ethical and spiritual problems of worldly bondage and of release from that bondage. It avoids dogmas which inhibit free and open thought. ...

Enlightened world view begets enlightened knowledge which, in turn, begets enlightened conduct."<sup>11</sup>

The concept of self realisation is well established, but a precise definition of it within Jainism is less easy to determine. *Samyag darśan* is sometimes translated as 'right faith' and interpreted literally as faith in Jain doctrine. For example, when commenting on the three jewels of Jainism, Cort translates it as "correct faith", which "encompasses the elaborate world of Jain epistemology, ontology and cosmology".<sup>12</sup> This interpretation implies that self realisation means a theoretical understanding of Jainism. Three Sthānakvāsī *sādhvīs* that I interviewed described

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<sup>10</sup> Umasvati 1994. p5. Jaini places Umasvati in the second century (1998, pages 81 to 83). Dundas places him in the fourth or fifth century. He translates *Tattvarthasutra* as, 'Mnemonic Rules on the Meaning of the Reals'. In *Tattvartha Sutra* Umasvati 'systematised' the main themes of Jainism that were distributed throughout Jain scriptures into a single volum. Dundas writes that the text, "achieved such authority that what is often presented as being Jainism by twentieth writers is in fact Umasvati's systematisation of it." Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jainism both claim Umasvati as their own, although his affiliation to either branch cannot be confirmed because of the lack of extant information about his life. Dundas considers that he is more likely to be Śvetāmbar than Digambar, but that it is even more probable that he predates sectarian division altogether. (1992, pages 74 to 75).

<sup>11</sup> Umasvati 1994, p5.

<sup>12</sup> Cort 1991(b), p392.

self realisation as knowledge of Mahavir's teachings on *ahiṃsā*. They explained that the dietary and physical restrictions of their mendicant lifestyle were precautions against committing acts of violence. The rules of mendicancy regulated their external state, which had a beneficial effect on their internal state.<sup>13</sup> Jaini translates *samyak darśana* (Sanskrit form) as "having the correct view".<sup>14</sup> He describes this as the result of a process of transformation that is "second only to that of attaining Jinahood itself".<sup>15</sup> His explanation of this process indicates that the aspirant undergoes a spiritual transformation as particles of karma are suppressed in order to gain a clear view of the soul.<sup>16</sup> These examples demonstrate that in Jainism self realisation is interpreted in various different ways, ranging from a theoretical comprehension of doctrine, to a practical application of doctrine, to an aspirant's spiritual transformation.

Srimad and his followers interpret self realisation as a religious experience. It occurs when one experiences one's own soul as an independent entity. An aspirant that has experienced self realisation is thereafter described as a 'self-realised' person. The first experience may only be momentary, but it immediately places the aspirant into a different ontological category from those who have not experienced self realisation. The experience of self realisation extends the boundaries of knowledge, so the self realised person has an advanced perception of reality compared to the non self realised person. This influences their interaction with worldly life. Experiences may be sporadic at first, but the self realised person can recall the bliss of the experience even when not in an active state of self realisation. Rakeshbhai compared the life of a

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<sup>13</sup> Deolali, January 2000. It should not be assumed that the whole of Stānakvāsī Jainism is represented by the opinions of these sādviṣ.

<sup>14</sup> Jaini 1998, p141.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p144.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pages 118, 119, 141, 142, 144, 336, 339 and 346.



self realised person to a pair of compasses, “one leg is always in the centre, while the other leg attends to worldly duties”<sup>17</sup>

It is precisely because self realisation is a religious experience that it is impossible for a non self realised person to comprehend. It is therefore equally difficult for the self realised person to describe the experience meaningfully in words. Devotees often referred to the sense of taste as a favourite analogy for experiential knowledge. For example, it is impossible for someone to know the flavour of lemon until it is tasted, likewise it is impossible to know the soul until one has experienced it. Self realisation is unconditional happiness, unlike the deluded ‘happiness’ of the non self realised person that is contingent upon transient things such as health and wealth. Such deluded happiness is no more than the temporary cessation of desire. Srimad describes the experience of self realisation as,

“The self is pure, enlightened, consciousness in core, self illuminating, the abode of bliss.” *Atma Siddhi* verse 117.

Atmanandji describes it as follows,

“In his pursuit of advanced meditation, he [the aspirant] is henceforth alert, and with a sharp discriminative understanding concentrates further on his absolute Self. In the process of this deep concentration, the body, the senses, the respirations and the thought-process, all are gradually discarded as non-Self. With utmost absorption in “Pure Knower” / “True I”, everything disappears at the conscious level except pure, ineffable

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<sup>17</sup> Personal interview, Mumbai January 2000.

bliss, and the supra-normal wisdom dawns as the knots of the delusion are destroyed and Self-Realization is accomplished.”<sup>18</sup>

“Self realisation is the institutional knowledge of one’s own true self, therefore may be defined as the direct, immediate, first hand communion of the devotee with the divine, when the conscious connection of the soul is suspended from the activities of the body, the senses, the speech and the mind. This is always associated with an immense suprasensus, supranormal, ineffable, experiential bliss transforming the total personality of the aspirant concerned.”<sup>19</sup>

Rakeshbhai used similarly evocative terminology. For example, he described self realisation as “a thoughtless state” and “being in God consciousness”. He said it is difficult to describe the duration of each experience because during it the aspirant is “out of time and space”.<sup>20</sup> Whilst such descriptions clearly express the tone of self realisation as a religious experience, it is impossible for someone who has not experienced “ineffable bliss” to comprehend what this must actually feel like.

According to Srimad’s interpretation self realisation is the first, vital first step on the *mokṣa mārg* (the path of liberation).<sup>21</sup> Followers generally believe that so long as the aspirant continues to be diligent in their religious practice, then omniscience may be achieved within fifteen life spans from their first experience of self realisation.<sup>22</sup> Jains widely believe that it is not possible to

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<sup>18</sup> Atmanandji, 1993d, p9.

<sup>19</sup> Atmanandji, 1993e

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview, January 2000.

<sup>21</sup> “without knowing the real nature of self, I suffered infinite misery. I bow to the adored holy Guru (Guru: spiritual teacher/master) who disclosed that self to me”. Atma Siddhi verse 1.

<sup>22</sup> Similar claims were made to Babb who was told “if you possess right belief for as little time as a grain of rice can be balanced on the tip of a horn of a cow, you will obtain liberation sooner or later” (1996, p36).

attain omniscience from this cosmic location during the current era, but a soul may be reincarnated in a cosmic region, including *Mahāvideha*, from where it is possible to attain omniscience and *mokṣa*. Hence the non self realised person aspires to their first experience of self realisation, whilst the self realised person aspires to increase the frequency and duration of their soul experiences. The aspirant's ultimate goal is to be in a constant, uninterrupted state of self realisation.

Rakeshbhai explained how the frequency and duration of an aspirant's experience of self realisation corresponds to the *guṇasthāns*.<sup>23</sup>

- Fourth *guṇasthān* is when the period between experiences of self realisation does not exceed six months. If the period does exceed six months, then the aspirant has descended to the first *guṇasthān*.
- Fifth *guṇasthān* is when the period between experiences of self realisation does not exceed fifteen days and may occur up to five times a day.
- Sixth *guṇasthān* is when the period between experiences of self realisation does not exceed forty-eight minutes, even if self realisation lasts for only for a moment.
- Seventh *guṇasthān* is when the period between experiences of self realisation does not exceed forty-eight minutes, but the number of experiences is greater than at the sixth stage, perhaps a thousand times in one hour.

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<sup>23</sup> Personal interview, January 2000. Jaini's list, in contrast to Rakeshbhai's, defines the type and degree of karma eliminated or suppressed to achieve each *guṇasthān* (Jaini 1998, pages 272 to 273).

Stages eight to thirteen occur over a maximum of forty-eight minutes. At the eleventh *guṇasthān* there is a strong risk that the aspirant may experience pride, which will cause them to descend to a lower level.

- Thirteenth *guṇasthān* is a permanent state of self realisation, when the soul is being experienced constantly. This is *kevalgnān*, which means only (*keval*) knowledge (*gnān*). It is the state of omniscience experienced by the *arhat* (also called *kevalin*). Jinas are *arhats*, omniscient beings, who are also preceptors. Upon the death of their physical body the omniscient being attains *mokṣa*.

*The influence of self realisation, as a religious experience, on Srimad's following.*

Srimad's interpretation of self realisation as a religious experience has influenced the Srimad Rajcandra movement in some important ways. His devotees' shared belief that it is an attainable and relatively imminent goal that may soon be followed by the ultimate goal of *mokṣa*, is a distinctive ideology. Commitment to this ideology is a unifying factor of the movement. Srimad's emphasis on self realisation has focused soteriology into a primary position in the religious thinking and practices of his followers. His association of it with religious authority had the effect of redirecting authority from the exclusive domain of the mendicant towards the exclusive domain of the self-realised person - who may or may not be a mendicant. This, combined with an inherent scepticism of anything sectarian, has firmly established the community of Srimad's followers as a lay organisation in which religious authority is held by spiritually qualified lay people. The re-designation of religious authority has dispensed with the necessity for a chain of lineal descent from the guru through the disciple. This is one reason why the movement has evolved with a multifarious social structure.

*i) Anti-sectarianism in the Srimad Rajcandra movement.*

Chapter Two showed that belief in the universal truth of Srimad's teachings is a religious value at the heart of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. The interpretation of self realisation as the experience of one's soul is at the root of this conviction. To express the concept of absolute and therefore universal truth, devotees explained that one non self realised person may have one thousand different opinions, but that one thousand self realised people will all hold the same opinion because it is based on absolute truth. The universal nature of the experience of self realisation endorses its authenticity, but also means that it is not an experience that is exclusive to Jainism. For example, devotees sometimes spoke of Christ and Buddha as self realised people. Linked to the concept of universalism is the anti-sectarian ethic that followers value so highly. *Atma Siddhi* describes the worthy aspirant in universal terms as one whose desire for liberation is overwhelming.<sup>24</sup> Religious uniform and custom are incidental because religion is for the explicit purpose of the soul's emancipation and not for the sake of religious tradition or identity.<sup>25</sup> As a practical expression of their anti-sectarian beliefs followers will worship in Digambar or Śvetāmbar temples, the act of worship being more important than the appearance of the image. Issues of identity were discussed in Chapter Two, where it was suggested that some followers prefer not to be labelled as a particular religious group because this in itself may be perceived as having sectarian connotations. However, many followers would acknowledge themselves as 'non-sectarian' devotees of Srimad Rajcandra and of their *pratyakṣ* guru if they have one, but with an emphasis that this 'religious identity' does not have a sectarian restriction.

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<sup>24</sup> "Where there is subsidence of passion, where the only desire is that of liberation, where there is grief for embodied existence, where there is compassion for all beings, there is the abode of self realisation." *Atma Siddhi* verse 38.

<sup>25</sup> *Atma Siddhi* verse 107, quoted in note 3 above.

*ii) Attitudes towards self realisation in the Srimad Rajcandra movement.*

It is the received view within the Srimad Rajcandra movement that self realisation is a soteriological goal within the scope of the aspirant's reach. However, there is a diversity of opinion between the different communities of Srimad's followers regarding the precise imminence of self realisation. Atmanandji and Rakeshbhai are both accepted as self realised gurus by their own disciples. None of their own disciples claim to have attained self realisation yet, but both of these gurus anticipate that this may occur within their lifetimes.<sup>26</sup> The community at Sayla ashram claim that, in addition to the gurus Nalinbhai and Sadgunaben, a further twelve members have attained self realisation. These three communities therefore accept that it is possible to achieve self realisation in the current age.

The attitude at Agas is quite different. This community states that no one has attained self realisation since Brahmacariji, who was Lalluji's disciple and second in line from Srimad. Further, this community believes that the likelihood of an aspirant attaining self realisation during the current cosmic era is extremely remote. Some devotees here stated decisively that Shrimad was the final true guru of the current era, which is one reason why his legacy is so precious. It goes without saying then, that this community at Agas regard the claims of current 'self realised' people with a degree of scepticism. Yet even at Agas the relative imminence of self realisation is not precluded. By following Srimad's teachings the aspirant is assured of an incarnation from where they may soon attain self realisation and proceed towards *mokṣa*. The

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<sup>26</sup> Personal interviews December 2001 and January 2002.

comments of one devotee from Agas are typical; he said that to devote just one lifetime to Srimad's teachings will result in self realisation within a short period of time.<sup>27</sup>

The belief held by the community at Agas that self realisation is now out of reach, just as *mokṣa* is out of reach, elevates the spiritual status of those who they believe had attained it to what is now beyond the scope of human achievement. This is indicative of the spiritual hierarchy observed at Agas. The belief that Brahmachariji was the last person to attain self realisation aligns him with Mahavir's disciple Jambu, who is thought to have been the last person of this cosmic era to attain *mokṣa*.<sup>28</sup> This points to a parallel between Srimad and Mahavir. If Brahmachariji was the last person to attain self realisation then Srimad, like Mahavir, lived and preached during a phase of cosmic transition in which there was a reduction of spiritual purity. It is also notable that, like Mahavir, Srimad did not have a living guru to guide his spiritual development, although he became a preceptor to others.<sup>29</sup> These, along with the belief at Agas that Srimad had attained *kevalgnān*, are three ways in which Srimad correlates with Mahavir at this ashram. Another is the non-transactional role that Srimad has in worship, which is discussed in Chapter Five.

Within the scope of the Srimad Rajcandra movement the various attitudes towards the attainability or otherwise of self realisation are significant because they reflect the different communities' beliefs about the level of spiritual purity that Srimad is thought to have attained. However, these differences are negligible when the overall ideological outlook of the Srimad

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<sup>27</sup> Agas, December 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Dundas 1992, p76.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p33.

Rajcandra movement is compared with the more general attitude lay Jains have towards liberation.

*iii) The prioritisation of soteriology.*

Ideally, Jains are motivated in their religious beliefs and practices by the ultimate soteriological goal, which is the attainment of *mokṣa*. Yet some recent studies have shown that this is not always at the forefront of Jains' thinking. For example, Babb observes that "the religious lives of most ordinary lay Jains are not liberation orientated", also that "liberation tends to be seen as a very remote goal - not for now, not for any time soon".<sup>30</sup> Banks comments that for the Jains he knew "the here-and-now experience of life is more important than the distant goal of *mokṣa*".<sup>31</sup> Cort reports that *pūjā* is sometimes performed for "worldly ends" and that Jains themselves recognise this, but that they also acknowledge it to be misguided.<sup>32</sup> The attainment of merit leading to worldly contentment and a 'good' rebirth is a reconcilable motivation for those Jains for whom liberation is a religious goal too remote to warrant active consideration.

Cort has discussed how lay Jains negotiate the relationship between their existence in this world and the soteriological objective of their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>33</sup> He identifies two, intertwined realms of value in Jain religious thinking that he describes as liberation and wellbeing. Unlike liberation, wellbeing is not "ideologically defined" in Jain doctrine and so is

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<sup>30</sup> Babb 1996, pages 24 and 25.

<sup>31</sup> Banks 1992, p101.

<sup>32</sup> Cort 1989, p405. Jains worship tutelary deities and other non omniscient divine beings routinely to gain material boons, as discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>33</sup> Cort 1989 and 2001.



less easy to describe in specific terms, but in general terms it is the worldly advantages that are the meritorious results of being a 'good' Jain. Cort summarises wellbeing as,

“the attainment of a state of harmony with and satisfaction in the surrounding phenomenal universe”,<sup>34</sup>

“a mix of health, contentment, peace, and prosperity that has generally been designated by previous scholarship as auspiciousness”.<sup>35</sup>

Babb quotes a Khartar Gacch *sādhvī* called Hemprabhasriji whose comments encapsulate these two realms of value,

“Just as austerity and self-denial eradicate *karma*, in the same way the Lord's pūjā, done with devotion, also destroys *karmas* and provides many worldly benefits (*lābh*) besides”.<sup>36</sup>

The emphasis on self realisation in Srimad's philosophy and religious teachings has refocused liberation into being an attainable goal for his followers, who are (with very few exceptions) lay Jains. Devotees believe heartily that by following Srimad's teachings self realisation is possible for them, if not in this life then shortly thereafter. Self realisation is the aspirant's first glimpse of *mokṣa* and confirmation that liberation will be achieved, perhaps within only fifteen life-spans. For Srimad's followers then, the motivation for their religious beliefs and practices is the soteriological goal of self realisation leading to *mokṣa*. Further, rather than “not for any time

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<sup>34</sup> Cort 1989, p2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p426.

<sup>36</sup> Babb 1992. p92.

soon”, it is for ‘as soon as possible’ and, in the case of self realisation, possibly even during this life.

Like all lay Jains, Srimad’s followers operate within the two realms of value identified by Cort and they are not closed to the inevitable meritorious outcomes of leading a good religious life. Some referenced their own material wealth back to this, but devotees more often related the meritorious results of previous *sādhana* (religious action) to their spiritual good fortune. This good fortune was their devotion to Srimad, and to their *pratyakṣ* guru if they had one. Devotees regarded this as the best and most beneficial form of *puṇya* because it would lead them ultimately to *mokṣa*. Therefore the realm of wellbeing for Srimad’s followers encompasses not only worldly contentment, but also spiritual benefits and it is the latter that they value most highly.

Followers believe that Srimad’s emphasis on self realisation has reasserted the soteriological goal of Jainism in line with its ethical principals. *Ahiṃsā* (nonviolence) is a principal religious value in Jainism and the cause of its many characteristic practices.<sup>37</sup> For example, it is the first of the five vows taken by mendicants at their initiation and the remaining four vows are designed to uphold it to its fullest extent.<sup>38</sup> Accounts of Jain philosophy and practice by scholars and practitioners often dwell on the concept of *ahiṃsā*. For example, Titze entitled his book (1998), *A Pictorial Guide to the Religion of Non-Violence*. The comments of the Sthānakvāsī *sādhvīs* described above are another example. Srimad’s teaching does not deviate from this fundamental Jain ethic, but his followers believe that it reconnects *ahiṃsā* with its soteriological objective. This is illustrated by Srimad’s response to Gandhi’s question, ‘Should someone who is about to

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of non-violence and the significance of intention in Jainism see Dundas 1992, pages 138 to 140.

<sup>38</sup> A list of these vows was given in the Introduction to this thesis.

be bitten by a venomous snake kill the snake?'. Srimad's reply encapsulates the soteriological motivation for the Jain ethic of non-violence, which is that to cause harm to another's soul is to cause harm to one's own soul.

“...how can it be right for you, if you have realised that the body is perishable, to kill, for protecting a body which has no real value to you, a creature which clings to its own life with great attachment? For anyone who desires his spiritual welfare, the best course is to let his body perish in such circumstances. But how should a person who does not desire spiritual welfare behave? My only reply to such a question is, how can I advise such a person that he should pass through hell and similar worlds, that is that he should kill the snake?”<sup>39</sup>

The belief that self realisation, and subsequently *mokṣa*, is attainable by religious practice inspires and motivates devotees in these practices. For example, one devotee, associated with Koba ashram, explained that he came from a very traditional Jain family who were meticulous in their observation of rituals and customs, but that it was not until he began to study Srimad's teachings that he learned anything about self realisation as a means to *mokṣa*. He said that his whole religious outlook had been re-vitalised once he understood from a spiritual view-point why he was performing certain religious practices.<sup>40</sup> The same sentiment was echoed by many devotees who felt that Srimad's teachings had 're-educated' them about Jain soteriology and the relationship between religious practice and liberation. For many followers this has injected a new energy into the tradition for them.

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<sup>39</sup> Jaini 1998, p315.

<sup>40</sup> Koba, January 2002.

The reassertion of soteriology means that efficacy has become the defining factor of religious practice for Srimad's followers. A mental or physical action is considered to be religious only when it assists the aspirant actively and positively towards self realisation. Worthless practices are those that feign religion, but that in fact do nothing to aid the soul towards liberation. These include veneration of non self-realised gurus, renunciation without self realisation, dogmatic sectarianism and mechanical ritual.<sup>41</sup> Srimad's teaching on guru *bhakti* informs the aspirant that efficacy in religious practice is only ensured by the guidance of a true (self-realised) guru. For devotees who are also the disciple of a *pratyakṣ* guru the personal instruction and monitoring that they receive from their guru is a strong and obvious motivator of their religious practice. Yet Srimad's devotees who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru expressed similar feelings of motivation. For example, one devotee at Agas spoke of the "tangible improvement" he had noticed in his spiritual progression since following Srimad.<sup>42</sup> Devotees often made a reference to what they regarded as an acceleration in their spiritual development as proof of the efficacy of Srimad's teachings.

*iv) Religious authority and the Srimad Rajcandra movement as a lay organisation.*

In the context of this discussion 'religious authority' means the spiritual qualification to guide others in their religious thinking and practice. In Jainism religious authority is ordinarily held by mendicants. The mendicant hierarchy of *ācārya*, *upādhyāy* and *sādhu* is reflected by the order they are named in the *Namaskār Mantra*, but all mendicants are regarded as sacred and have

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<sup>41</sup> "Some have become lifeless ritualists, some are in barren knowledge. Knowing that even then they believe themselves to be in the path of liberation, compassion arises (in me)." *Atma Siddhi* verse 3. "Feeling happy in outward rituals, they have no inward discrimination (of soul and non-soul). They denounce the path of knowledge of soul. They are known here as lifeless ritualists." *Atma Siddhi* verse 4, "He believes one who has outward renunciation but no knowledge of soul, as a true Guru; or he has deluded notion of mineness in the Guru of his birth-religion." *Atma Siddhi* verse 24.

<sup>42</sup> Agas, December 2001.

religious authority over the laity.<sup>43</sup> Srimad's interpretation of self realisation as a religious experience, and his association of religious authority with this experience, means that authority is no longer restricted to the mendicant community, but is open to lay Jains who are self realised. This is one reason why the Srimad Rajcandra movement has been able to develop as a lay organisation. All the gurus in the movement are believed by their own disciples to be self realised, to have religious authority and to be religious specialists. All of these gurus have been lay people with the exception of Lalluji and Sahaj Anandji, but both of these *munis* became estranged from their mendicant orders when they devoted themselves to Srimad.

Self realisation is believed to be the essential validation of religious authority because it is experiential knowledge of absolute truth. It has already been discussed that experiential knowledge is universal. It is certain, unambiguous and not open to misinterpretation, and so is far superior to intellectual understanding. With the first experience of self realisation the aspirant's faith in Jain doctrine is transformed from one based on intellectual understanding to one based on experiential knowledge. An aspirant must have effectively subdued or eliminated deluding karma from their soul in order to have experienced self realisation. This is proof of their elevated level of spiritual purity and also proves the efficiency of their own religious practices. It is for these reasons that only a self realised person has the spiritual knowledge and experience, and therefore the religious authority, to guide a non self realised person effectively towards the state of self realisation. One devotee, a disciple of Atmanandji, made an analogy between this state of spiritual elevation and literal elevation. He described the non self realised disciple as someone who is walking along a path and who is unable to see around the next

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<sup>43</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p60. The Namaskār Mantra is the most significant and ubiquitous of all Jain mantras. See Chapter Five for further discussion.

corner. The self realised guru is on the rooftop and so can see clearly the direction the disciple should take to reach their destination swiftly and without obstruction.<sup>44</sup>

As discussed above, self realisation marks the fourth *guṇasthān*. Mendicants take their vows at the sixth *guṇasthān* and should, therefore, have attained self realisation. It has also been discussed that there are various interpretations of self realization in Jainism. It is clear from the distinction that Srimad makes between the ‘false’ non self realised guru and the ‘true’ self realised guru that he did not believe all mendicants to have attained it according to his interpretation of it as a spiritual transformation. Were this the case then there would be no sectarian division. Srimad levied his scepticism against his own disciple Lalluji,

“What have you left or abandoned? In place of one home, how many homes of Shravakas [lay disciples] have you adopted? After leaving two wives, to how many other women do your sights move on? After leaving your only son, towards how many children you keep your affection?”.<sup>45</sup>

Srimad’s devotees are likewise sceptical of mendicants’ self realised status and hence of their religious authority. Devotees do not direct their scepticism at particular mendicants, but at institutional Jainism in general because of its association with sectarianism. Mendicants are shown appropriate respect, but Srimad’s followers do not routinely venerate them. For example, one devotee who accompanied me to interview the three Sthānakvāsī *sādhvīs* mentioned above, bowed upon approaching them, but explained to me that this was an act of courtesy and respect, not an act of reverence. For the sake of balance it should also be mentioned here that a senior,

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<sup>44</sup> Koba, December 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p92.

self realised disciple at Sayla expressed the opinion that there must be self realised people amongst the mendicant communities, even if this cannot be assumed automatically of all mendicants.<sup>46</sup>

This thesis has revealed a number of factors that have combined to influence the Srimad Rajcandra movement's development as a lay organisation. These are Srimad's own lay status as discussed in Chapter Three, his followers distrust of anything sectarian, their belief in the authenticity and universal application of his teachings, and the redirection of religious authority from the (non self realised) mendicant to the (self realised) lay guru.

The interpretation of self realisation as a gauge of internal purity has raised - devotees may say reinstated - the standard of spirituality expected from mendicants. Devotees fear that self realisation has come to be regarded as a state coincidental with *dīkṣā* rather than an essential prerequisite to it. They regard this as a contributory cause of an inevitable decline in knowledge and spirituality among mendicant communities; it also has adverse effects among lay communities. Srimad's followers refuse to devalue the mendicant path by attempting to follow it before they are spiritually prepared. For example, I asked Atmanandji why, as a self realised guru, he had not taken *dīkṣā*. He responded that he believed that he had not yet attained a level of purification high enough to make those "sublime and superhuman efforts". He also said that his physical constitution was not hardy enough to survive the severity of an ascetic's life.<sup>47</sup> This honest response from a man who already lives an extremely austere lifestyle and who has taken lay vows illustrates the high regard with which he, and consequently his disciples, hold mendicancy. I asked another of Srimad's devotees the same question. This young man has

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<sup>46</sup> Sayla, December 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview, January 2002.

dedicated his life to religious practice. He is not the disciple of a *pratyakṣ* guru, but spends approximately eight months of the year in spiritual retreat in remote areas, such as Idar, with a small group of like minded devotees. This devotee expressed satisfaction with his spiritual progression by following Srimad's teachings under the guidance of a senior devotee, who was specifically not described as a self realised guru. He did not see the need for guidance from an initiated mendicant and spoke of the problem of finding an *ācārya* of appropriate spiritual calibre should he be fortunate enough to take initiation in the future.<sup>48</sup>

Srimad's interpretation of self realisation has challenged mendicant monopoly on religious authority and at first glance it may seem that the Srimad Rajcandra movement has dispensed with the need of mendicancy for liberation. This is a misconception. It was discussed in the previous chapter that Srimad wanted to take *dīkṣā*. Followers whom I met, including *pratyakṣ* gurus, conformed with the normative Jain view that only a mendicant can attain *mokṣa*. Even devotees at Agas, who believe Srimad had attained *kevalgnān*, said his incarnation as a mendicant was necessary for his attainment of *mokṣa*. Nevertheless, the movement has dispensed with the need of mendicant supervision for its day to day operation. Some obvious parallels may be drawn between mendicants and lay gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Devotees regard their lay guru, including Srimad, as sacred and look to them as religious specialists who have religious authority. In most cases the guru is supported materially by his following of disciples in a way similar way to that in which mendicants are supported by the laity. There are also some significant differences. Most notably these gurus are not peripatetic, which means they are able to forge close links with their disciples and provide them with a continuity of religious instruction. They are also at liberty to travel outside of India and so meet

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<sup>48</sup> Rajkot, January 2002.



with disciples, and potential disciples, who live abroad. This fulfils an important spiritual need for diaspora Jain communities. Only time will tell if the role of the lay guru in the Shrimad Rajcandra movement will evolve into the role of the formally recognised mendicant.

*v) Religious authority and social organisation.*

In Jainism a secure lineage passed between guru and disciple is traditionally essential for religious authority. For example, Cort writes,

“For the Jain monks...the purity and authenticity of one's lineage is crucial, for it is the only means of authenticating one's mendicant initiation. As part of the initiation (*diksa*) of a mendicant in the Śvetāmbar Tapa Gaccha today, the presiding and initiating monk reads out the lineage from the time of Mahavira through all the various subdivisions to his own guru and himself in order to establish ritually his own bona fides, and therefore to establish the authenticity of the new mendicant's initiation”.<sup>49</sup>

Cort goes on to say that sectarian rivals may attempt to cast doubts over the legitimacy of a mendicant's lineage in order to nullify their mendicant status and so abort their religious authority. Laidlaw notes that most *gacchs* trace their lineage back to Mahavir's disciple Sudharman Svami, and through him to Mahavir himself.<sup>50</sup> The belief held by Srimad's followers that self realisation is the only legitimate source of religious authority has dispensed with the necessity of authentication through guru lineage. It was shown in Chapter Three that devotees do not believe Srimad's religious authority to have been dependent upon external

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<sup>49</sup> Cort1995a, pages 480 to 481. Elsewhere Cort observes that Digambar mendicants do not have a similar need to defend their authority through reference to lineal succession, probably because they do not face the same level of competition from rival sects as Śvetāmbar mendicants (1991a, p656).

<sup>50</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p60.

factors such as mendicancy or guru lineage, but that it was validated by his self realised state, which is endorsed by the example of his life and teachings.

Within the Srimad Rajcandra movement then, the usual vehicle of guru lineage has been replaced with independent spiritual purity for the authentication of religious authority. However, a closer look at the movement's organisational structure reveals that a tradition of guru lineage occurs alongside self realisation. Its presence represents a similar balance of tradition and novelty that was noted in Chapter Three. That chapter showed how Srimad transcended the otherwise essential traditional criterion of mendicancy to qualify for sainthood by conforming to other traditional saintly qualities. The same principle may be applied to the issue of lineal descent. Srimad's devotees accept that his religious authority originates with his self realised state, but in order for him to satisfy the traditional criterion of authenticity outlined above it is important for a lineal connection to be established between Srimad and Mahavir. This is met by Srimad's reference to his being Mahavir's disciple during a previous incarnation.

“Fortunate is that past time when I was in contact with the All knowing great saint; most fortunate are the places where this happened, fortunate those hearings, the author of these hearings and I bow down with the whole body to all these and also to all the devotional souls of those times. I bow with all devotional humility to the devotion to that Self realised saint, to the meditation on him, to his invaluable teaching; to his scriptures to the principles laid for following him by his disciples and to the unprecedentedness of all these.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p15.

“All his [Mahavir's] disciples attained liberation excepting one who was left behind and so he has taken birth in these times and by him many living beings are likely to be spiritually benefited”.<sup>52</sup>

“I can say that when I was in contact with Lord Mahavir as his last disciple, at that time I spent in idleness a few moments as passed in passing urine and for that unmindfulness, I had to go through a series of births”.<sup>53</sup>

Srimad's lineal connection with Mahavir is a further endorsement of his religious authority, which is already secured by his state of self realisation. It establishes a guru lineage of the highest quality and links Srimad with the pure source of a Tirthankar's teaching, and in so doing by-passes the diluting effects of a lineal chain. Chapter Three mentioned the belief held by the Kanji Svami Panth that, during a previous incarnation, Kanji Svanii was present at the teachings of the Tirthakar Simandhara. Both of these modern Jain preceptors are believed by their respective followers to have benefited from the perfect teachings of a Jina, Srimad's association with Mahavir is a further indication to his followers of the 'pure', pre-sectarian form of Jainism that they believe Shrimad preached. Yet devotees do not prioritise Srimad's connection with Mahavir over his self realised state. In fact they very rarely mentioned it to me during the course of our discussions, whereas self realisation was usually high on their agenda. Likewise, much of the iconography generated by Srimad Rajcandra movement represents Srimad's high level of internal purity, but I came across only one picture that recalls his association with Mahavir.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid p157.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid p150.

<sup>54</sup> See plate 6, figure 10.

Religious authority endorsed by guru lineage travels along straight lines of descent. This results in a lineal organisational structure. Cort observes this pattern in lineage texts,

“The Jain lineage texts are built around a simple listing of the *pattadhāras*, the “holders (*dhāra*) of the seat (*paṭṭa*)” of authority. At any given time there can be only one such *paṭṭadhāra*; those times when more than one *paṭṭadhāra* are found are precisely the points in the lineage where the tree branches”.<sup>55</sup>

Chapter Two demonstrated that the Srimad Rajcandra movement does not have one, singular lineage that originates with Srimad and that descends through a successive line of disciples. Each of the gurus in the movement is, or was, believed to be self realised by their own disciples, who regard this as the absolute source of their guru's religious authority. The association of religious authority with self realisation above guru lineage has enabled independent gurus, who have no lineal connection with Srimad, to emerge spontaneously. It has also enabled Srimad to be the point of origin of more than one lineage. This has caused the Srimad Rajcandra movement to evolve with a multifarious, rather than a lineal, organisational structure. This structure has been further encouraged by Srimad's teaching that the aspirant may attain self realisation themselves by venerating a self realised guru. As the movement has no overseeing administrative or regulating body, a guru may be anyone whose claim of self realisation is accepted by aspirants and who form a community of disciples with that guru at its centre.

Three of the communities discussed in Chapter Two have a guru lineage that each traces its origin back to Srimad. Lineal connections to Srimad have depended, in part, on the fate of his immediate followers. It was explained in Chapter Three that four of Srimad's immediate

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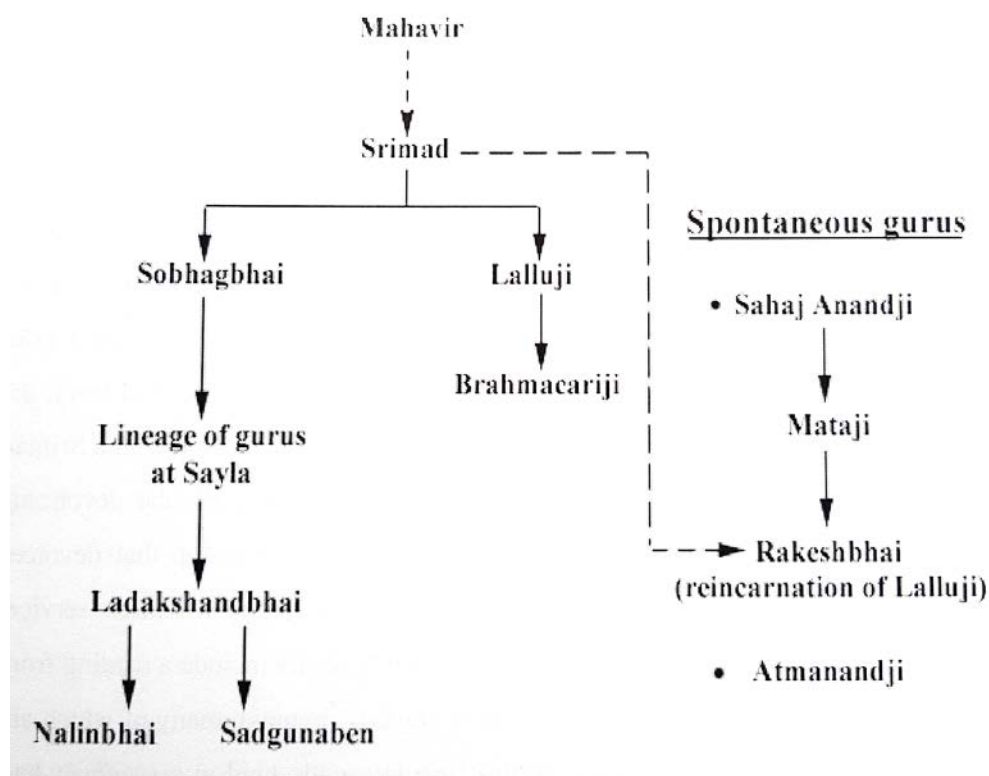
<sup>55</sup> Cort 1995a, p481.

disciples are believed to have attained self realisation, and therefore religious authority, under his guidance. Jutabhai died before Srimad. Ambalalabhai, who was instrumental in arranging for the publication of Srimad's writings as described in Chapter Five, died only three years after Srimad. Neither of these men had the opportunity to function as gurus and gather their own flock of disciples. Sobhagbhai also died before Srimad, but he established the legacy of the *bīj gnān* that is so important to the spiritual heritage of the community at Sayla. Sobhagbhai is therefore the point of contact for one guru lineage in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. As explained in Chapter Two, the community at Sayla is currently the only one to have an active lineage originating with Srimad, and which is secure, at least for the next generation, by Ladakshandbhai's nomination not only of his successors, but of their successors also.

Lalluji is a second point of contact for guru lineage. He was the only self realised disciple who lived long enough to proselytise in Srimad's name and to gather his own following of disciples. He would have been ideally suited to this role. As a *muni* Lalluji was accustomed to the lifestyle of a peripatetic preacher, he had a close personal relationship with Srimad and his mendicant experience would have equipped him with skills in oration and a thorough understanding of Jainism. It is due to circumstance then, that of all Srimad's self realised disciples, only Lalluji had the opportunity to fulfil the role of a religious teacher. Lalluji continued the lineage by nominating his own self realised disciple, Brahmacariji, as his successor. Even though Lalluji was a mendicant he did not initiate Brahmacariji, or any of his other disciples, to establish a new mendicant order in Srimad's name. Brahmacariji did not nominate a successor and so the lineage ends with him. The example of Agas, which continues to be a thriving and growing community of followers, illustrates that a community does not depend on a current guru lineage for its preservation.

The third point of contact for guru lineage is located in Rakeshbhai's claim to be a reincarnation of Lalluji, hence a direct disciple of Srimad. He also has a lineal connection through Mataji to Sahaj Anandji of Hampi ashram. Sahaj Anandji and Atmanandji are both examples of *pratyaks* gurus that have no lineal connection to Srimad and so may be described as spontaneous gurus. The religious authority of these two gurus is endorsed only by their self realised status. Guru lineage overcomes the obvious problem of identifying a true guru, but the essential qualification for a guru is always self realisation. The following schematic maps out the various stands of guru lineage in the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

Guru lineage and spontaneous gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement.



**Key: Broken line** = lineage through previous life association; **solid line** = lineage from guru to disciple; **bullet-point** = spontaneous gurus with no lineal connection.

## 2. Guru *bhakti*.

In *Atma Siddhi* Srimad explains that in the current cosmic era the path to liberation has virtually disappeared, but that self realisation is possible by total devotion to a sat guru (true, meaning self realised, guru).<sup>56</sup> Srimad's followers therefore practice *sat guru bhakti* in the belief that this is the most certain and straightforward way of achieving self realisation. Srimad's teaching about guru *bhakti* has influenced the organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement as well as the religious practices of its membership.

### *Bhakti in Jainism.*

*Bhakti* is a phenomenon common to many Indian religious traditions. In its broadest sense the term means devotion, but it also encompasses practices that express devotion and the feelings of devotion experienced by the practitioner. *Bhakti* may therefore be regarded as devotion, the devotee's attitude of devotion and actions that express devotion.<sup>57</sup>

Srimad's followers similarly define *bhakti*, in its most general sense, as total, unconditional devotion and surrender on behalf of the disciple towards their guru. Almost any act of a pious devotee can be interpreted as an expression of their utter trust in and total emotional commitment to their guru, and so, on a general level, the meaning and application of *bhakti* are far-reaching. Within the context of the Srimad Rajcandra movement the term '*bhakti*' is also used to describe particular devotional practices. One is the structured, congregational sessions of worship that devotees attend. 'Going to *bhakti*' is the rough equivalent of attending a church service.

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<sup>56</sup> *Atma Siddhi* verse 2, quoted in note 2 above. "He who serves the feet of the true Guru giving up his own wrong beliefs, achieves the highest ideal and attains the real nature of self." *Atma Siddhi* verse 9.

<sup>57</sup> Cort 2002, p62. Kelting 2001, p109.

Sessions generally last between one to two hours and typically include a reading from Srimad's writings, mantra chanting and singing *bhajans* (hymns), many of which are composed by Srimad himself. *Bhakti* of this type is usually held in a *svādhyāy* hall before a photograph of Srimad. Centres generally hold two sessions of *bhakti* daily. Morning *bhakti* begins early; five thirty am to seven am at Koba and Sayla, and six am to seven thirty am at Dharampur. Evening *bhakti* at these centres is usually held between seven pm and nine pm. At Agas the programme is more rigorous. Here *bhakti* begins at four am to six am, then again between two pm to four pm and seven pm to eight thirty pm.<sup>58</sup> The term '*bhakti*' also describes the singing of devotional hymns. Evening sessions of the structured *bhakti* described above are sometimes prolonged for an hour or more as devotees come forward to sing hymns individually at the end of the scheduled programme. *Bhakti* in the form of devotional hymn singing may also be performed in solitude as part of a devotee's individual worship. For example, most devotees whom I met sang *Atma Siddhi* daily as part of their individual religious practice. Therefore, within the Srimad Rajcandra movement the term *bhakti* may be used in three ways; to describe the overwhelming devotion the disciple has for their guru, to describe sessions of structured, congregational worship, and to describe congregational or individual hymn signing. Of course, all these uses are connected to the term's most general application, which is devotion to a true guru.

*Bhakti* is by no means an unfamiliar religious practice in Jainism, although Cort and Kelting remark that it is under-researched.<sup>59</sup> Kelting makes reference to a corpus of *bhakti* literature composed by Jain *bhakti* poets during the medieval period, a tradition that continues in modern Jainism. She suggests that these Jain poet-saints, the majority of whom were male mendicants,

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<sup>58</sup> Centres also include other events in their daily programme, such as p4/a to the *Jinas*, *svādhyāy* and religious discourse.

<sup>59</sup> Cort 2002, pages 59 to 86. Kelting 2001, P87.



emerged from within the Jain tradition in parallel with their Hindu counterparts.<sup>60</sup> Kelting notices that whereas Hindu *bhaktas* praised their gods at play, Jain *bhaktas* focused on the Jinas' qualities. She interprets this difference in tone between the *bhakti* literature of Jains and Hindus as reflecting Jain liberation theory, "where it is the soul that is purified more than the god who is pleased".<sup>61</sup> Throughout this thesis Srimad is discussed from the perspective of a religious figurehead for the community of his followers, however from the lone perspective of his writing and poetry, he may be regarded as belonging to this genre of poet-saints.

Cort suggests that scholarship in general has long considered *bhakti*, in terms of devotional practices, incongruous to Jain religious tradition because it is seen as incompatible with asceticism, Jainism's major motif, and because no divine being is present to respond to the devotion offered.<sup>62</sup> Laidlaw comments that *bhakti* directed towards mendicants is sometimes interpreted as paradoxical because devotion to a living guru implies attachment, which is contrary to the mendicant ideal.<sup>63</sup> Mendicants' commitment to non-attachment through their renunciation makes them all, theoretically at least, equally worthy of veneration from the laity. For the laity to single-out one mendicant for preferential devotion would challenge this ideal. From the opposite perspective, as renunciators, mendicants may not engage in any type of relationship with a devotee. As this discussion will demonstrate, although *bhakti* is devotional, its soteriological effects are reflexive and so response from a divine being is unnecessary. Also the guru, having attained a level of spiritual purity, is free from attachment to the disciple. The attachment in a guru-disciple relationship goes one way, from the disciple to the guru.

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<sup>60</sup> Kelting 2001, pages 87 to 88.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid p88.

<sup>62</sup> Cort 2002, p66.

<sup>63</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 63 to 64.

It is not a matter of dispute that *bhakti*, devotion to a guru and practises expressing such devotion, is practised in Jainism. Humphrey and Laidlaw note that some of the more “puritan” Jains that they met disapproved of enthusiastic displays of *bhakti* as being in tension with austerity, which they felt to be a more appropriate expression of their faith.<sup>64</sup> The fact of these Jains’ disapproval is an indicator that some Jains practice *bhakti*, and Cort shows that “Jains have performed and discussed *bhakti* for over two thousand years.”<sup>65</sup> To prove his point Cort makes reference to Jainism’s history of image worship and to the inclusion in the *āvaśyakas* (the six daily observances of the mendicant) of *caturviṃśatistava*, hymn of praise to the Jinas, and *vandan*, veneration to mendicant gurus.<sup>66</sup> Laidlaw gives an account of the Sthānakvāsī mendicant, Acarya Hastimal-ji Maharaj Sahab (died 1991), who was a guru to many lay and mendicant Jains, not all of whom were themselves Sthānakvasi.<sup>67</sup> This is just one of many examples showing that, in fact, particular mendicants do sometimes become the object of extreme devotion. Chapter Three showed that, in some cases, saints continue to be venerated long after their death.

*Bhakti* is major religious practice of Srimad’s following, but the form it takes is in some ways different to the forms observed by the scholars mentioned above. In their discussions the objects of *bhakti* are the Jinas, or deceased or living mendicants.<sup>68</sup> In the Srimad Rajcandra movement the object of *bhakti* continues to be the ‘true guru’, but as this thesis has shown, gurus in the movement have been, with few exceptions, not mendicants, but lay people. This is unusual in

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<sup>64</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p228.

<sup>65</sup> Cort2002, p60.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid p71.

<sup>67</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 62 to 63.

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter Five for reference to a controversy that emerged amongst the Tappa Gacch in 1989 when a group of mendicants proposed to perform *draya pūjā* to their living *ācārya*. (Cort1989, pages 331 to 332).

Jainism. The reasons why gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement are lay people have already been indicated in this thesis as an inherent scepticism of sectarianism, a wariness of 'false' mendicants and the association of religious authority with self realisation. Gurus within the Srimad Rajcandra movement are not externally renounced, in the sense of having taken *dīkṣā* although some are at various stages of renunciation, but they are believed by their devotees to be internally renounced.

Chapter Three explained that Srimad's father and grandfather were Vaiṣṇava and that Srimad was strongly influenced by this tradition during his formative years. It was not possible to determine the exact branch of Vaiṣṇava Hinduism practised by Srimad's community. A senior devotee at Agas, where many followers have Vaiṣṇava origins, said they were neither followers of Svami Narayan nor members of the Puṣṭimārga, but simply devotees of Krishna. This indicates that a tradition of *bhakti-sants* may have been the prominent Hindu influence within Srimad's community.<sup>69</sup> This is further substantiated by the fact that Srimad makes reference to saints in this tradition, for example Kabir, Mirabai and Narsi Mehta, but does not refer to the teachings of Svami Narayan or Vallabhacarya (founder of the Puṣṭimārga). This is a likely influence for the prominence of guru *bhakti* in Srimad's teachings, however its function is securely within the discourse of Jain soteriology. Srimad's followers practice *bhakti* for the benefit of their own soul purification, not for the benefit of Srimad or of a living guru. This is in keeping with the distinction Kelting observed between the devotional hymns of Jain and Hindu *bhaktas*, as noted above. Shah and Pungaliya recognise the influence of non-Jain religious

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<sup>69</sup> For a detailed discussion of this tradition see Gold 1987. A comparison between the tradition of *bhakti-sants* and the Srimad Rajcandra tradition is not within the scope of this thesis. However it is likely that a future study of this nature will reveal some interesting findings about a dialogue between Jain and Hindu traditions with reference to *bhakti*.

literature on Srimad's teachings about guru *bhakti*.<sup>70</sup> They interpret his teachings as an attempt to reconcile Jain and Vedanta philosophies through a merger of the *bhakti mārg* and *gnān mārg*, in a blend of Vaiṣṇava style devotionism and Jain style knowledge worship.<sup>71</sup>

### *Bhakti and liberation in the Srimad Rajcandra movement.*

To understand how *bhakti* aids liberation the aspirant first has to understand the mechanism of bondage.<sup>72</sup> The soul is trapped in *saṃsār* (the perpetual cycle of death and re-birth) because its true nature is obscured by karma. Liberation occurs when the soul is freed from karma and the soul exists in its natural state of omniscience, in which it comprehends its own unadulterated nature and the nature of all things. While still embodied an omniscient soul is called *arhat* or *kevalin*. The Jinas were *arhats* who were also preceptors. Upon the death of the physical body the *arhat* attains *mokṣa* and becomes a *siddha*. In Jainism karma is believed to be invisible matter, in the form of minute particles, that pervade the entire cosmos. It is categorised into different types according to the particular effect it produces.<sup>73</sup> A non-enlightened soul generates *kṣaya* (passion) motivated by *rāg* (attachment by attraction to a person or thing) and *dveṣ* (attachment by aversion to a person or thing). *Kṣaya* is the stimulus of any mental, physical or verbal activity and the agent that attracts karma to the soul, where it 'sticks' causing its deluding effects. Eventually, attached karma 'ripens' and gives of its 'fruit'. This may be mental, physical or verbal action that usually has a relation to the activity which attracted it in the first place. The soul responds to the events produced by karma with *rāg* or *dveṣ*, and the *kṣaya* that

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<sup>70</sup> Shah and Pungaliya 2001, p2.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid pages 15 to 19.

<sup>72</sup> This account of the relationship between religious practice and the mechanism of bondage is a summary of numerous accounts given by devotees at different sites. There was notable accord amongst devotees' responses to my questions, 'why do you perform *bhakti*?' and 'how does *bhakti* work?'. For a detailed explanation of bondage and karma in Jainism see Jaini 1998, chapter 5 'The Mechanism of Bondage', pages 107 to 133.

<sup>73</sup> Jaini 1998, pages 131 to 133. Dundas 1992, pages 83 to 85.

this generates attracts more karma to the soul, and so the cycle continues. To attain liberation the aspirant needs to become detached from *rāg*, *dveṣ* and *kṣaya* and to acquire the passionless state of *vītrāg* (without *rāg*). This passionless state is that of an *arhat* and is equivalent to *kevalgnān*.

One of the most difficult attachments to overcome is attachment to the body. This is because the soul has been embodied for eternity and so the aspirant is under the deluded belief that their soul and body are interdependent. In reality body and soul are different and independent substances. Jain doctrine divides the cosmos into two categories, these are *jīva* and *ajīva*. *Jīva* is soul, the defining characteristic of which is consciousness. Consciousness is unique to the soul. The defining characteristic of *ajīva* is that it is not *jīva*, which means that it does not have the capacity for consciousness. Among other things, the category of *ajīva* includes *pudgal* (atoms) that collect together to form *jad* (physical matter). The body is *jad*, which means that it is incapable of consciousness.<sup>74</sup> Therefore the soul (*jīva*) is consciousness and the body (*ajīva*) is matter. As proof of the soul's existence, Srimad states in *Atma Siddhi* that one permanent quality of the soul is *abadhya*, which is a sense of self-awareness or of self-existence.<sup>75</sup> If consciousness exists, in the form of self-awareness, then the soul must exist because only the soul has the capacity for consciousness. Throughout *Atma Siddhi* the soul is referred to as the 'knower' in order to distinguish it from the body that does not have the capacity for knowledge. *Jīva* and *ajīva* are not able to combine with each other and one cannot adopt the qualities of the other.<sup>76</sup> Soul and body are therefore different and separate things. The importance of experiential

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<sup>74</sup> Although the body can be celestial, human, animal or plant or lower life forms, in the context of Jain philosophy the human body is kept in mind because it is only from this incarnation that liberation can be achieved.

<sup>75</sup> "That which sees the eyes and knows all (the minute and the large) forms and that experience which cannot be subtracted ultimately is the soul itself." *Atma Siddhi* v.5 1. "(The ever-existing soul) is always separate from all states or conditions. Manifest consciousness is its permanent characteristic." *Atma Siddhi* v.54.

<sup>76</sup> "Entirely different and obvious are the nature of lifeless substances and that of conscious substances. They never become one and they remain as two different substances, in all the three ages." *Atma Siddhi* verse 57.

knowledge over intellectual understanding is clearly demonstrated here. It is one thing to have faith that body and soul are separate, but quite a different matter to have indisputable knowledge of this based on the experience of self realisation.

Srimad's followers are in the main lay people and householders. Their religious practices focus on psychological non-attachment to *rāg* (attraction) and *dveṣ* (aversion) to reduce the soul's output of *kṣaya* (passion) and in turn reduce the amount of karma attracted to it. Psychological non-attachment is a means of renouncing, whilst continuing to live in the world as a householder. *Rag* and *dveṣ* are reduced and avoided through cultivating a sense of detachment from life's events by understanding them to be no more than the cause and effect of karma. One of Rakeshbhai's disciples explained this in terms of an actor trying to convince an audience of the reality of the character portrayed. No matter how convincing the performance, the actor never forgets her own identity. The actor represents the soul that should always remain aware of its own nature despite having to work through the scenes that karma lays before it.<sup>77</sup> However, this does not relinquish personal responsibility. The individual is responsible for the salvation of their own soul and, as the discussion on *ahimsā* above has shown, this includes an ethical responsibility towards others.

Srimad's followers generally had a sophisticated understanding of how guru *bhakti* benefits the aspirant of liberation in overcoming the mechanism of bondage. Laidlaw makes a distinction in meaning between 'disciple' and 'devotee'. He defines 'disciple' as 'pupil', and remarks that the laity in general are mendicants' pupils, but suggests that for the devotee "a guru is not so much a teacher, still less a bureaucratic superior, as a direct and unmediated manifestation of the

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<sup>77</sup> Mumbai, January 2000.

divine”.<sup>78</sup> Although Laidlaw's distinction is pertinent, in this thesis the terms ‘disciple’ and ‘devotee’ are used synonymously because gurus within the Srimad Rajcandra movement are religious teachers who are also believed to be manifestations of divinity. The guru has attained a high level of spiritual purity, and for this reason is regarded as a divine manifestation. It is due to this spiritual superiority that the guru has authority to give religious instruction. These two, intertwined, qualities are vital characteristics that render the guru ‘true’. They are vital because emulation of the guru, and obedience to the guru's religious instruction, are expressions of *bhakti* for the devotee.

The guru's religious instructions are vital to the aspirant because they are endorsed by the guru's superior spiritual knowledge. *Svacchand*, which Mehta translates as “deluded self-notion”, is an aspirant's egoistic belief that they know intuitively how to attain liberation.<sup>79</sup> Shah and Pungaliya identify *svacchand* as “the most serious blemish inhibiting an individual from seeking self realisation.”<sup>80</sup> Its danger lay with the fact that non self realised aspirants are deluded by false beliefs and are therefore unable to guide their own religious practice effectively. In *Atma Siddhi* Srimad makes a distinction between worthy aspirants who surrender their ego to the higher knowledge of a true guru, and unworthy aspirants who are trapped by false beliefs.<sup>81</sup>

By obedience to the guru's instruction, disciples by-pass the pitfalls of their own ignorance. To gain the full benefits from the guru, a disciple's devotion must be absolute. Wholehearted

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<sup>78</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p60.

<sup>79</sup> “By the contact of the living true Guru, deluded self-notion is restrained. It, mostly, becomes twofold by adopting other means.” *Atma Siddhi* verse 16.

<sup>80</sup> Shah and Pungaliya 2001, p18.

<sup>81</sup> “One who has no renunciation and non-attachment in contemplation, cannot have knowledge of the soul. If he rests satisfied in renunciation and non-attachment, he misses knowledge of self.” *Atma Siddhi* verse 7. “He who knows wherever and whatever (out of renunciation, non-attachment and knowledge of self) is adaptable and practices accordingly, is the aspirant for self realisation.” *Atma Siddhi* verse 8.

surrender to the guru engenders the desired state of non-attachment because the disciple's worldly attachments are transformed into devotion for their guru. Having relinquished 'ownership' of their life to their guru, the disciple learns to stop thinking in terms of 'I' and 'mine'. This 'renunciation' of one's life to one's guru is an imitation of the guru's own renounced state. Babb notices a similar pattern of imitation during the *pūjā* ritual in which the 'offerings' are given-up, abandoned, by the worshipper. He observes that by this act of renunciation, "the worship of an ascetic becomes - in the end - an ascetic act".<sup>82</sup> The disciple emulates the guru in a similar way to which the worshipper performing a *pūjā* ritual emulates the Jina, so the guru must have qualities worthy of emulation. For the aspirant of self realisation the essential quality of a guru is self realisation. As an embodiment of internal purity, the guru represents the spiritual ideal that the disciples are striving to achieve and is therefore a constant source of inspiration to them. For example, one of Rakeshbhai's disciples explained how she was inspired by Rakeshbhai's spiritual success because she believed that, "if he can do it then I can do it too, because he was once a lowly soul like me."<sup>83</sup>

Disciples learn as much from the example of their guru's conduct as from the guru's religious instruction and teaching, which means that a disciple benefits from being in close proximity with the guru. A disciple may also imbibe some of the guru's qualities. For example, Kelting records the comments of one *sādhvī* who explained that the guru, in this case her mendicant leader, was like a magnet and the disciple was like a piece of iron. If the iron is placed near the magnet, it too will gradually become magnetic.<sup>84</sup> Atmanandji made a similar analogy, but extended it to include pilgrimage sites where, he said, the "vibrations" of spiritually advanced souls may be

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<sup>82</sup> Babb 1998, p150.

<sup>83</sup> Dharampur December 2001

<sup>84</sup> Kelting 2001, p113.



imbibed.<sup>85</sup> The relationship between disciple and guru therefore transcends to a metaphysical level.

The guru is the object of a disciple's devotion, a source of inspiration and religious instruction, a filter for worldly attachments, and someone who exudes spiritual vibrations, yet, for all this, the disciple is ultimately responsible for their own liberation. The mechanism of bondage outlined above has shown that to attain liberation the soul has to calm its own passions to avoid attracting karma. An aspirant's religious practice is reflexive, any results of worship are generated by the devotee and effected upon the devotee. This means that that worship is always individual, regardless of whether or not it takes places in a congregational setting.<sup>86</sup>

The active agent during worship is *bhāv* (sentiment), which is the worshipper's attitude during devotion and the cause of the purifying effects of worship. The Jain laywomen who Kelting spoke with defined as "one's emotions, attitude, or intention in performing worship", and that "the intention [*bhāv*] of one's *pūjā* had a direct relation to the efficacy of the worship".<sup>87</sup> The Jains who Humphrey and Laidlaw met told them that, "the aim of performing *puja* is to make *bhav* rise in us".<sup>88</sup> Not only does *bhāv* make an act of worship efficacious, but in so doing it also validates it. 'Worship' performed with a sentiment of worldliness or non piety is a transgression that will generate demeritorious karma (*pāp*).<sup>89</sup> *Bhakti*, in the form of devotional feelings for one's guru, or expressions of this devotion through hymn singing, has the effect of generating correct *bhāv*. The objective of performing *bhakti* first thing in the morning and last thing in the

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<sup>85</sup> Personal interview, October 1999

<sup>86</sup> Dundas 1992, pages 175 and 180.

<sup>87</sup> Kelting 2001, p109. For a discussion about *bhāv* in Jain ritual see Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, Chapter Nine, 'Meaning to Mean It'.

<sup>88</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p162.

<sup>89</sup> Kelting 2001, p1 13, and pages 129 to 130.

evening is for devotees to fill their hearts and minds with devotion at the beginning and end of the day, in the hope that it will be sustained throughout the day. *Bhāṇ* falls into two categories; *aśhubh*, which are non spiritual or inauspicious feelings, and *śhubh*, which are spiritual or auspicious feelings.<sup>90</sup> To finally attain liberation the aspirant has to reach a state that is devoid of *bhāṇ*. This is an emotionless state of *śuddh*, which is equivalent to the passionless state of *vītrāg*. Aspirants cannot contemplate *śuddh* until their *bhāṇ* is only *śhubh*, their attachments are only for spiritual things and their only desire is for liberation. Expressions of *bhakti* fill the aspirant with feelings of devotion which are *śhubh* and which push out any non-spiritual *aśhubh* feelings. Eventually, even devotion to the guru and desire for liberation must subside for the aspirant to finally enter a state of *vītrāg*.<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, *bhakti* aids the aspirant of liberation in two broad, but combined, ways. The guru, who is the object of devotion, gives religious instruction, spiritual empowerment and is a model for the disciple to emulate. Plus, the devotion disciples have for their guru, and the ways in which they express such devotion, effects a spiritual transformation within themselves. Further, the heightened state of *śhubh* brought about by expressions of *bhakti* make a disciple more receptive to the guru's teachings and example.

#### The influence of guru bhakti on Srimad's following.

Devotion to a true guru is the first point to be stressed in *Atma Siddhi*, where in the opening verse obeisance is paid to the guru for leading the disciple to self realisation.<sup>92</sup> Guru *bhakti* was

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<sup>90</sup> See Babb 1996, p78.

<sup>91</sup> In the entry referenced 680 in *Shrimad Rajcandra Srimad* writes that "even the [his] desire for *mokṣa* has become dormant". See Appendix Two.

<sup>92</sup> *Atma Siddhi* verse 1, quoted in note 21 above.

Srimad's principal religious instruction to the aspirant seeking self realisation, consequently it is a universal practice of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Srimad is recognised as a supreme guru by his followers. It is inevitable that they have directed their *bhakti* towards him, and so he has become the object of his own religious instruction. The most obvious factor that unites Srimad's followers into a movement, and the most distinctive feature of that movement, is his followers' universal veneration of him.

Srimad's teaching about guru *bhakti*, and his position as the primary object of veneration, have served to unify his following, but his devotees' further interpretation and application of his teaching have resulted in the fragmentary organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. A major cause of this is the belief by one section of his following that guru *bhakti* should be directed towards a living guru, and the staunch refusal by another section of his following to accept this position. Srimad's association of religious authority with self realisation combined with some of his followers directing *bhakti* towards living gurus, have created an environment in which a number of autonomous living gurus are able to operate independently, as described in Chapter Two. This is one of the most significant factors that has led to the fragmentary organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement and the diversity in the religious beliefs and practices of its membership. Were Srimad himself to be removed from the equation then there would be no recourse to consider these gurus and their disciples collectively, but Shrimad, of course, is the fundamental element in the equation, and the very link by which they are connected.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Laidlaw refers to Peter Van der Veer's account of Ramanandi ascetics at Ayodhya (*Gods on Earth*, 1988), which demonstrates that "a whole religious movement can be structured around guru-bhakt relationships" (1995, p61). For another example of how guru-devotee relationships can influence the structure of a tradition with no central administration see Gold's account of the *sant* tradition in North India (1987).

*i) Srimad as a true guru.*

Within the ideology of the Srimad Rajcandra movement it is, of course, beyond question that Srimad was a true guru. The ways in which he qualified for this role correspond with his conformity to the criteria of religious authority discussed in the first section of this chapter, and his fulfilment of saintly criteria discussed in Chapter Three. His self realised state is proven to devotees through the examples of his life and teachings. However, not all self realised people are gurus, just as not all *kevalins* are Jinas, and Srimad is shown to have the additional qualities necessary, which are accessibility to devotees and skills in communication. He was available to his immediate disciples and he continues to be accessible to followers through the posthumous preservation of his writings and his image. Many instances from his life show that his immediate disciples looked to him as their guru even though, as a layman, institutional Jainism could not endorse him in this role. Members of the lay and mendicant communities sought spiritual guidance from him and he instructed followers in their scriptural study, daily observances and ritual practices. Mendicant followers sought his advice about their own obligation to instruct the laity in spiritual matters.<sup>94</sup> Devotees kept and studied his letters during his lifetime, Chapter Five describes how his writings have become a canon of scripture for his current following. Srimad's competency as a guru is proven to current devotees by their own spiritual progression, as well as by the spiritual success and calibre of his immediate disciples. One devotee at Agas listed three criteria by which he was convinced of Srimad's spiritual purity and efficiency as a guru. These were the message in Srimad's writings, Lalluji's endorsement of him and this devotee's recognition of his own religious progression through following Srimad's teachings. It is

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<sup>94</sup> Mehta 1999, p114.

interesting to note that Srimad's lineal connection with Mahavir was not mentioned during this interview.<sup>95</sup>

Srimad seems to have been reluctant to accept his role as a guru. Mehta observes that he felt too constrained by his obligations as a householder and businessman to adopt the role formally.<sup>96</sup> Srimad was able to devote more time to his disciples after his renunciation, but by now he also sought solitude for his own religious practices. Also, he did not want to exacerbate tensions between his mendicant disciples and their order. Reticence in accepting the role seems to be a usual characteristic of a guru, and one that is generally attributed to extreme humility. It may be recalled from Chapter Two that Ladakshandbhai of Sayla was discreet about his own self realised status for many years, that at first Rakeshbhai asked people not to call him guru, and that Lalluji tried to deflect his disciples' veneration of him back to Srimad. Despite his reluctance, Srimad was placed securely in the role of a guru by those who followed him and he recognised the responsibility he had for his disciples. Mehta observes from Srimad's writing,

“At the same time, as he wrote in one of his letters, if ever the spiritual seekers were to attain the level at which they now fully deserved their initiation into the true path, if ever that stage was to be reached, they would not have to turn elsewhere for guidance; he, Raichand, would be ready and willing and able to guide them.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Agas. December 2001.

<sup>96</sup> Mehta 1999, pages 86 to 87.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid p87.

ii) *The pratyakṣ /parokṣ divide.*

Srimad is universally acknowledged by his following as a guru of the highest calibre, but a source of diversity amongst followers lay with the question of who else, if anyone, qualifies as a guru. Srimad describes the qualities by which an aspirant may recognise a true guru in *Atma Siddhi*.<sup>98</sup> As explained above, the essential quality of a true guru is self realisation. He also states that a *pratyakṣ* (directly perceptible) guru is of greater benefit to an aspirant's spiritual progression than a *parokṣ* (indirect) guru, an example of which is the Jinas.<sup>99</sup> Devotees interpretation of this has resulted in the most significant structural division in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. It occurs between those of his following who accept a *pratyakṣ* guru and those who do not, but who follow Srimad only. Distinguishing between these two groups by referring to them as 'followers of a *parokṣ* guru' and 'followers of a *pratyakṣ* guru' implies that disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru are not also devotees of Srimad. This is not the case, so to avoid this implication the two groups are identified here as 'those who do follow a *pratyakṣ* guru' and 'those who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru'.

The term '*pratyakṣ*' means 'perceptible', translated literally as 'someone or something that can be seen'. In common usage it describes someone or something that can be perceived by the senses. Srimad uses the term '*pratyakṣ*' to describe a guru who is present rather than absent. Some devotees interpret *pratyakṣ* to mean a living guru who is actually present. Others interpret it as a guru who is met with internal perception, namely Srimad.

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<sup>98</sup> "Knowledge of self, equanimity, worldly living due to the operations of past karmas, unique speech, knowledge of true scriptures - these are the qualities worthy of the true Guru." *Atma Siddhi* verse 10.

<sup>99</sup> "The obligation of the present true Guru [*pratyakṣ sad guru*] is greater than that of the non-present Jina. Unless one becomes aware of this, self-contemplation does not start." *Atma Siddhi* verse 11.

The three current *pratyakṣ* gurus in the Srimad Racandra movement and their communities of disciples were identified in Chapter Two as Atmanandji at Koba, Nalinbhai at Sayla, and Rakeshbhai at Dharmapur. Disciples of these *pratyakṣ* gurus regard Srimad and the Jinas as *parokṣ* gurus. The case of devotees who do not follow a current living guru is not so straightforward. Like the Jinas, Srimad is technically *parokṣ* because he is no longer living, but some devotees continued to speak of him in terms of a *pratyakṣ* guru. The intensity of their devotion is such that their relationship with him feels ‘personal’ to them. As one devotee explained, Srimad’s presence is felt through the dissemination of his teachings, in the form of his writings, and through his image. This devotee felt that he could open *Shrimad Rajcandra* randomly and the teachings at the place where the book fell open would be pertinent to his particular spiritual need. He continued that Srimad’s physical form and meditation postures are accessible through his image. This devotee confirmed that ‘*pratyakṣ*’ means to see with the senses, but he interpreted it as “the soul’s inner senses”, through which he felt that Srimad was an active presence in his life.<sup>100</sup> Spiritual communion with Srimad through intense devotion is not the same as reciprocal exchange in worship. Chapter Five explains that, like the Tīrthaṅkars, Srimad is an absent, non-transactional God. Whilst acknowledging devotees’ relationship with Srimad, for the sake of clarity he is described as *parokṣ* in this chapter.

A devotee’s decision of whether or not to follow a *pratyakṣ* guru may be influenced by a number of factors, including familial or other connections with a particular ashram, community or guru, or by an informed decision based on a study of Srimad’s teachings. Devotees in either category have a similar understanding of Srimad’s teachings of self realisation, they all hope to attain liberation from their devotion to him and by following his religious instruction of guru *bhakti*, so

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<sup>100</sup> Deolali, January 2000.

there is little ideological disunity between the two groups. The difference between the two categories of follower described here rests with each group's particular interpretation of Srimad's teachings that warn aspirants against following a false guru, whilst at the same time instructing them that self realisation is impossible without the guidance of a true guru. Those devotees who choose not to follow a *pratyakṣ* guru emphasise the risk of following a 'false' guru, whereas those who are disciples a *pratyakṣ* guru emphasise the risk that self-guided religious practice may be ineffective or detrimental. In both cases devotees' concerns rest predominantly with their own non self realised states, which they believe deludes their judgement. For example, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the community at Agas believe self realisation to be no longer possible in the current age. For these devotees, and those of the same opinion, this is an obvious reason why they do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru.

However, this was not the reason most often cited. These devotees more often expressed a doubt in the non self realised aspirant's ability to discern a 'true' guru from a 'false' guru, due to the aspirant's deluded state. Srimad warns against the disastrous effects of following a non self realised preceptor as strongly as he advocates devotion to a self realised guru.<sup>101</sup> The thoughts of one devotee at Agas were that a disciple of a true *pratyakṣ* guru may reach *mokṣa* sooner than one who is devoted only to Srimad, but that the latter devotee would soon follow the former to liberation. However, if the *pratyakṣ* guru turned out to be false the disciple would be dragged deeper into bondage. So, which is the more dangerous situation, no *pratyakṣ* guru and certainty of attaining *mokṣa* or the risk of greater bondage by following a false guru? As Srimad, Lalluji and Brahmachariji are known to be self realised, there is no need to risk the guidance of a

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<sup>101</sup> "If the untrue Guru takes any disadvantage of such reverence, he sinks into the ocean of embodied existence by being bound with the intense deluding Karmas." *Atma Siddhi* verse 21.



potentially false *pratyakṣ* guru.<sup>102</sup> The comments of this devotee do not deny the necessity of devotion to a guru, or even the added benefits of following a *pratyakṣ* guru, but they stress the massive danger of following a false guru. The advantages of a guru lineage to the aspirant's selection of a guru are made obvious by this example. Devotees at Agas, and others who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru, are confident that their spiritual needs are met perfectly by the legacy of Srimad's teachings.

The counter arguer made by devotees who are disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru also rests with the deluded state of the non self realised aspirant, but these devotees stress the risk of *svacchāṇḍ*. Their belief is that guidance from a self realised *pratyakṣ* guru is essential to the non self realised aspirant's spiritual progression. This is because non self realised aspirants are considered unable to guide their own religious practice effectively, to interpret scripture accurately or to recognise the destructive force of ego within themselves.

Another concern of devotees who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru was that a disciple's veneration of Srimad may be distracted by devotion to a *pratyakṣ* guru. Disciples of *pratyakṣ* gurus expressed the opposite opinion. One devotee from Sayla felt that his devotion to Srimad had intensified following Nalinbhai's explanations of his teachings.<sup>103</sup> Another devotee explained that her father had followed Srimad and so she had also worshipped him, but with little understanding or conviction. She said that since becoming a disciple of Rakeshbhai her veneration of Srimad had become genuine because she had a better understanding of his teachings.<sup>104</sup> One of Rakeshbhai's longstanding disciples explained that she had recognised his

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<sup>102</sup> Agas, November 1999

<sup>103</sup> Sayla, December 2001.

<sup>104</sup> Mumbai, October 1999.

spiritual powers and been devoted to him since he was a small child, but that she had more difficulty in venerating Srimad because she had not heard of him before. Rakeshbhai insisted that she should accept Srimad and finally refused to speak to her until she had. “Emotional blackmail!”, she laughed. They did not speak for two years until she gave in. She venerated Shrimad initially as an act of obedience to her guru’s instruction, but said that she soon became genuinely convinced of his worthiness and went on to describe the spiritual experiences that had proved this to her.

Srimad’s statement that the aspirant has a greater obligation to the present guru than to the Jinas is not so surprising within the context of Jain theology and religious practice as it may first appear to be.<sup>105</sup> It is indisputable that the Tīrthaṅkars have attained the highest possible level of spiritual purity. In their corporeal states they instruct their disciples on liberation, but become inaccessible to worldly aspirants the moment they attain *mokṣa*. So, although the Jinas’ religious knowledge is absolute they cannot be interactive preceptors. This is acknowledged by the *NamaskārMantra* in which the omniscient, but embodied, *arhat* is venerated before the liberated *siddha*. No further Jinas will be born in this region of the cosmos until the third phase of the next ascending cosmic cycle. Therefore, during the current period, only a non liberated guru can direct the aspirant towards liberation. For example, Rakeshbhai commented,

“When the sun is there you do not need a lamp. When the Tīrthaṅkar is not there the guru becomes the highest authority, so he is like *bhagavān* [God] ... because he’s the highest authority now”.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Atma Siddhi* verse 11, quoted in note 99 above.

<sup>106</sup> Personal interview, January 2000

The non-liberated guru who is present and who can interact with the aspirant is of greater benefit to the aspirant's spiritual progression than the absent guru who has attained *mokṣa*. This is why the aspirant has the greater obligation to the present guru. Many different aphorisms are used to illustrate this point. A popular one tells of a thirsty man who is given the option to quench his thirst immediately with a glass of water, or to travel many miles to a vast, pure lake. The man drinks the glass of water, symbolic of the guru, which gives him the strength to reach the lake, which is symbolic of *mokṣa*.

As discussed above, the spiritual benefit that a disciple gains from their guru's teaching, instruction and personal example intensifies with proximity. The close proximity of the present guru is therefore of greater benefit to the aspirant than the higher level of spiritual purity attained by the Jina, who is now absent. However, a non self realised guru will devastate a disciple's spiritual progression, so security that a guru is self realised takes precedence over the guru's proximity to the disciple. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are several degrees of self realisation. The present guru's level of purity and knowledge is inferior to that of the Tīrthaṅkar, but is greater than that of the non self realised aspirant. So, close proximity to a self realised guru is of greater benefit to a non self-realised aspirant than the actual level of purity the guru has attained, but it is also vital that the guru has attained self realisation.

It is this ratio of knowledge and proximity that Srimad's devotees negotiate with respect to Srimad himself. Srimad's self realised state and the high level of his spiritual knowledge is guaranteed, but he is a remote guru compared with the *pratyakṣ* gurus in the tradition. *Pratyakṣ* gurus can communicate with their disciples on a personal level, discuss problems, give advice and monitor religious progress. Their disciples feel the benefits of this personal guidance.

Devotees who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru feel secure that they are following Shrimad's teachings in their pure form, without them being distorted by another teacher of whose self realised status they cannot be certain. Within the context of the Srimad Rajcandra movement aspirants have to judge for themselves between the secure knowledge that Srimad is a self realised guru, but who is more remote than a *pratyakṣ* guru, and the additional benefits of a *pratyakṣ* guru, with whom they can be in close proximity, but whose self realised status they have to discern for themselves. Whether devotees follow Srimad only, or a *pratyakṣ* guru alongside Srimad, they agree that a true guru is a rare and precious soul in the current era.

There are various attitudes towards *pratyakṣ* gurus amongst devotees who choose not to follow one. Some devotees acknowledged *pratyakṣ* gurus with respect as gifted teachers, but said they could not personally accept one as a guru. Other devotees were more sceptical of these gurus' religious authority. They foresaw a problem in that although the theory of self realisation is straightforward, its attainment is very difficult to achieve and so people sometimes believe themselves self realised when in fact they have fallen short of it. For this reason only Srimad's status as a true guru is guaranteed. This group of devotees hold that Srimad's teachings are sufficient and certain, whereas the teaching of others are not only superfluous, but may also be inaccurate. A general concern was expressed that Srimad's teachings were at risk of being diluted by too many gurus and too much diversity. Rakeshbhai explained that Lalluji's reticence to acknowledge the title 'guru' for himself was based on the belief that Srimad's message may lose its impact if many gurus began to preach in his name, so only Srimad should be called

guru.<sup>107</sup> This was a general concern of the religious situation in India. As one devotee at Agas remarked with a shake of his head,

“Throw a pebble into a crowd these days and you’ll surely bruise a guru!”<sup>108</sup>

Those devotees who are disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru must be secure in their belief that their guru is self realised. Sometimes an aspirant’s attraction and commitment to a guru is instantaneous. Lalluji’s meeting with Srimad, described in Chapter Three, is one example of this. Lalluji expressed a belief that he and Srimad had known each other in previous lives. Several devotees with whom I spoke also believed they had forged a relationship with their *pratyakṣ* guru during previous incarnations. Sometimes these beliefs were endorsed by the guru in question. More often disciples engaged in a cautious period of assessing the guru before making a full commitment. To describe this process one of Atmanandji’s disciples used the analogy of the lost traveller who asks for directions. At first the traveller may be sceptical of the directions, but their doubt lessens when the first direction proves correct, their doubt lessens further when the second direction is also correct. By the time the fifth and sixth direction are shown to be true the traveller’s doubt is diminished and a total faith in the director is established. Such accurate and detailed guidance can only come from someone to whom the route is already well-known.<sup>109</sup> Guru lineage is another way in which a guru’s authenticity may be ensured, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter. A devotee associated with Sayla ashram had been a disciple of Ladakchandbhai, who had initiated him into the *bīj gnān* technique. When I asked this devotee how he had felt when he had to submit to Ladakchandbhai’s successor, Nalinbhai, he responded

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<sup>107</sup> Personal interview, January 2000.

<sup>108</sup> Agas, December 2001.

<sup>109</sup> Koba, November 1999. The counter arguer to this is that if the guru tells the disciple what their next religious experience will be, the disciple will inevitable have that experience.

that he accepted this wholeheartedly because it was Ladalchandbhai's instruction to him.<sup>110</sup>

Nalinbhai's self realised status and his religious authority are assured by his lineal connection to Ladalchandbhai.

The fact that gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement have been lay people, with the exception of Lalluji and Sahaj Anandji, has affected the nature of guru-disciple relationships. Unlike mendicants, who are peripatetic, lay gurus are always accessible to their disciples and at liberty to mix with them freely. They travel abroad regularly for the benefit of disciples living outside India. Mendicants are allowed to travel only by foot, so cannot leave India. The guru's accessibility means disciples can develop close relationships with them, indeed disciples are usually encouraged to have as much contact with their guru as possible. The spiritual intimacy observed in these relationships is removed from that described by Laidlaw above, in which lay Jains are supposed to regard themselves as disciples of all mendicants. It is implicit in the absolute nature of the devotion required that Srimad's devotees may devote to only one *pratyakṣ* guru. Disciples are inevitably partisan towards their guru, but are also respectful toward other gurus in the tradition.

Despite these differences, the role of the guru in the Srimad Rajcandra movement is in some ways parallel with the lay-mendicant relationship of broader Jainism. Gurus are regarded by their disciples as religious specialist and preceptors who have religious authority. They are perceived as a paradigm of religious achievement and spiritual purity, which is the traditional lay perception of the mendicant. In some cases *pratyakṣ* gurus are supported by their community of disciples, which frees them from business life allowing them to concentrate on their disciples'

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<sup>110</sup> London, September 2001.

spiritual needs as well as their own spiritual development. This bares a similarity of lay support of the mendicant community. Another interesting parallel was observed at Koba, where disciples are invited to offer food to Atmanandji. A core of Atmanandji's disciples are trained in the necessary requirements to prepare his food appropriately. The meal is then served to him, in his private room, by invited disciples or worthy visitors to the ashram. An invitation to partake in this ritual is considered a great privilege. The example of serving food to a guru is reminiscent of giving alms to a mendicant. One disciple explained that this ritual is of particular importance to women. Atmanandji's vow of chastity disallows women to either touch him or stand close to him, serving his food is therefore one way in which they can feel close to him.<sup>111</sup>

This discussion has demonstrated that the emphasis on guru *bhakti* in Srimad's teachings has had significant repercussions on the organisational structure of his following. Devotees are compelled to accept a guru by his message that not to do so can only result in the continuation of bondage. For many devotees Srimad himself is the only guru they require, others also turn to a living guru. Such gurus are legitimised by their disciples' acceptance of their claims to self realisation. The presence of numerous guru-centred communities has led to the diversity of practice and belief observed within the Srimad Rajcandra movement. The circumstances that have enabled the movement to encompass these various communities are Srimad's interpretation of self realisation, by which a guru's religious authority is secured, and his religious instruction of guru *bhakti*, which encourages a follower in their devotion to a guru.

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<sup>111</sup> Koba, January 2001. I did not observe a ritual of this type at other ashrams. At Sayla Nalinbhai ate in the communal dining hall, at Dharampur Rakeshbhai ate separately, but I am not aware that different disciples served his meals.

*iii) Religious practice.*

A structured programme of *bhakti*, in the form of hymn singing and mantra chanting, is an important aspect of religious practice for all the communities of Srimad's followers regardless of whether they are centred around a living guru or not. As stated in Chapter Two, the original programme of *bhakti* was arranged by Lalluji at Agas and has remained unaltered since the ashram's foundation over eighty years ago. Devotees here regard it as a perfect formulation and describe themselves as followers of the *bhakti mārḡ* recommended by Srimad. They believe *mokṣa* to be guaranteed to the aspirant who follows this *bhakti* formula along with the vows identified by Srimad and that Brahmachariji arranged to have carved in marble.<sup>112</sup> All centres in the Srimad Rajcandra movement offer a structured programme of *bhakti*. Programmes vary slightly in their order and content between centres, but they are otherwise similar and all draw from the programme at Agas.

Programmes of religious practice vary slightly between centres, but the community at Sayla is particularly distinctive because of the emphasis it places on *dhyān* (meditation). The *bīj gnān*, the meditation technique practised by this community, is unique to Sayla, most probably because it is contained within the guru lineage there.<sup>113</sup> Devotees at Sayla believe the combination of *bhakti* and *dhyān* they practise to be the quickest and most reliable way of attaining self realisation, in the same way that devotees at Agas regard the *bhakti mārḡ*.

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<sup>112</sup> See Appendix One.

<sup>113</sup> Although Sayla is the only community of Srimad's devotees to incorporate this technique into their religious practice, I was told that the technique itself is age old and has assisted many people, across many religious traditions, towards self realisation.



The origin of the difference in religious practice at Agas and Sayla, as related by devotees at Sayla, lay with Srimad's interaction with his two disciples Lalluji and Sobhagbhai.<sup>114</sup> The version given by Sayla is that Srimad gave Sobhagbhai permission to pass the *bīj gnān* meditation technique to those who he thought would benefit from it spiritually. Srimad did not give Lalluji permission to pass the technique on, although Lalluji had himself achieved self realisation by this method. Instead, he gave Lalluji four hymns and three mantras with permission to pass these to aspirants of self realisation. This was the foundation of the *bhakti mārṅ* practised at Agas. Therefore, the *two* paths of *bhakti* and *dhyān* diverged with two of Srimad's principal disciples and under his own instruction. Another way of looking at this is that Srimad instigated these two paths to self realisation to cater for the different spiritual needs of different types of followers. Chapter Two stated that the Srimad Rajcandra movement never existed as a single unified body that later split into factions, but that it developed with a fragmentary social organisation from its origin. This legacy of two different paths of religious practice given by Srimad to two separate disciples is an early factor that has contributed to this.

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<sup>114</sup> Sayla, December 2001

## **Chapter Five**

### **Legacies of a Saint**

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Throughout this thesis the Srimad Rajcandra movement has been shown to consist of a collection of autonomous communities that display a variety of beliefs and practices, but which are ultimately united by a common history and ideology centred in Srimad Rajcandra and his teachings. This chapter considers how the preservation and propagation of Srimad's teachings and likeness, through the publication of his writings and photographs, have influenced the Srimad Rajcandra movement. A published anthology of Srimad's writings has disseminated his teachings and provided followers with a canon of sacred literature. His photographs, and the statues modelled on them, have provided followers with an image before which to worship. They are two factors that unify Srimad's following into a movement because regardless of how they are socially organised, or which guru they follow, all devotees worship before exactly the same image of Srimad and refer to the same canon of philosophy and religious instruction. In becoming incorporated into devotees' religious practices, Srimad's image and writings have become tools in their quest for liberation. They are also two tangible factors that distinguish these Jains from others. In the absence of other external characteristics, such as a specific uniform, the presence of Srimad's image and writings are two features that an outsider entering a Srimad Rajcandra *mandir* would notice as distinctive. Srimad's writings and photographs have helped to promote him as a religious icon and to preserve him as a historical and divine personality. A disparity between devotees approaching Srimad now, as a religious icon, and those disciples who enjoyed a personal relationship with him must be assumed. Followers today cannot have direct contact with Srimad, but associate with him instead through his image and written teachings.

## 1. Scripture.

Chapter Three described Srimad as a prolific writer. Much of his work, which includes religious poetry, didactic texts, diary entries and letters, was not intended for a public audience. Towards the end of his life however, Srimad gave his disciple Ambalalbai consent to collate his public and private writings into a single volume. The anthology, titled *Srimad Rajcandra*, was first published in 1905 by 'Parama Struta Prabhavaka Mandala', the publishing company founded by Srimad for the promotion of religious texts. *Srimad Rajcandra* is also often referred to as *Vachan Amrut* ('Sayings of Nectar') by his devotees. Ambalalbai died, aged thirty-five, just before the anthology's publication. Research for a second edition of *Srimad Rajcandra*, which contains more material than the first, was led by Srimad's younger brother, Mansukhabhai. This text has since undergone a number of reprints, but continues to be published by the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas.<sup>1</sup> The Deolali ashram near Mumbai has compiled and published a concordance to accompany the anthology. Some of Srimad's most popular works have also been published independently of *Srimad Rajcandra* and some have been translated into Hindi and other Indian languages, as well as into English. It is unlikely that this was Srimad's intention, but rather that these translations are a consequence of the continued expansion in his following. To my knowledge Srimad's writings are not subject to copyright and neither their publication nor translation is monitored by a single organisation. Srimad's grandson, Manubhai B. Modi, who is the president of the 'Srimad Rajcandra Ashram' at Agas, holds most of the extant originals of Srimad's letters and other writings. Srimad's published writings are a remnant of his personality. They are also a fixed source of his religious teachings, as well as a means of their transmission, which without Ambalalbai's intervention may never have reached the public domain. Their

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<sup>1</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p185.

general availability has broadened the scope of Srimad's following by offering devotees, and potential devotees, unlimited access to his teaching and philosophy.

The publication of *Srimad Rajcandra* provided followers with a canon of sacred literature. This had a vital impact on the formation and development of the Srimad Rajcandra movement and is one factor that unifies Srimad's following into a distinct movement within Jainism. No devotee is without a volume of *Srimad Rajcandra* and the book, as an object, is treated with great respect. Devout Jains are respectful towards all religious literature, even all writing. For example, I was queried about the 'British habit' of taking a newspaper into the toilet and about words such as 'Welcome' written on doormats. Jains in India acquainted me with certain handling conditions that applied to religious and academic texts on Jainism. I was not to touch them whilst eating, drinking or during my period and was never to place them on the floor, even if they were in a bag. Devotees always prevented the books they used during their devotional practices from touching the floor by resting them on wooden bookstands. Although all writing receives a general level of reverence, sacred literature remains distinct from other types of religious or secular literature. In this chapter Srimad's literature is described as sacred. This definition applies to all his writings, but for convenience they are often written about here in terms of the anthology *Srimad Rajcandra*, which includes all of his published works. It is this chapter's concern to explain why and how *Srimad Rajcandra* is treated as sacred by his followers.

#### *Srimad Rajcandra as sacred literature.*

The various scholastic attempts at defining sacred literature have encountered hurdles from within and without a particular text's cultural origin. Textual studies in search of a definition have tended to result in restrictive lists of exclusive criteria that do not withstand a culturally

universal application and that ultimately exclude more religious traditions than they represent. Levering, for example, shows how each criterion in a typical general list fails in a culturally universal context.<sup>2</sup> She writes, “Once one introduces all the necessary qualifications the generalisations become almost meaningless”.<sup>3</sup> Levering’s preferred attitude to identifying scripture is summarised by Timm as a “generic concept” rather than a list of “universal characteristics”, but Timm argues that even this is too restrictive.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that a sacred text may only be usefully identified and analysed within its specific cultural context and that cross cultural comparisons reveal no more than “harmonic resonances”, not restrictive lists of qualities or even a generic identity.<sup>5</sup>

The problem of defining sacred texts through textual analysis has been exacerbated by the influence of nineteenth century western Protestant scholarship discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. It was assumed that the Christian Bible, as it was understood in the nineteenth century, provided the normative model of a sacred text against which other texts were compared. It was also thought that sacred literature gave a comprehensive insight into the religion of its origin.<sup>6</sup> These assumptions are untrue of Jainism, as well as of other religious traditions.<sup>7</sup> Folkert, for example, argues extensively that the notion of a fixed canon in Jainism is flawed.<sup>8</sup> He traces the origin of the list of forty-five texts that, until Folkert’s re-evaluation, have been accepted as the sacred canon of Śvetāmbar Jainism to the nineteenth century German scholar

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<sup>2</sup> Levering 1987, pages 8 to 11. The list Levering refers to is, “based very loosely on Ninian Smart and Richard D. Hecht’s ‘Introduction’ to their *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. Xii-xv”. (Levering p15 note 1).

<sup>3</sup> Levering 1987, pll.

<sup>4</sup> Timm 1992, p3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p1

<sup>6</sup> Levering 1987, p3.

<sup>7</sup> See Oberoi 1997, pages 1 to 19.

<sup>8</sup> See ‘Scripture and Continuity in the Jain Tradition’ and ‘The ‘Canons’ of ‘Scripture’: Text, Ritual and Symbol’, both in Folkert 1993.

George Bühler.<sup>9</sup> Folkert suggests that not only is the list inaccurate - it was obtained from, “a single oral source in the Jain tradition” - but also that the concept of a closed canon is unknown in Jainism. He writes that “there does not appear to be a wholly accepted body of scripture that is of equal value to the entire community.”<sup>10</sup> Folkert also questions the received academic view that the Digambar tradition denies the authority of Śvetāmbar scriptures outright.<sup>11</sup> Other recent, ethnographic-based studies show that analysis of literature, sacred or otherwise, can only provide a narrow insight into Jainism. For example, Kelting observes that whilst texts are an important general resource, they do not represent the majority of practising Jains who are lay people and women mendicants.<sup>12</sup>

The results of increasing research into non-western cultures and non-Christian religions have broadened definitions of ‘sacred texts’ beyond classification to the point where, as Timm remarked, attempts at representative generic definitions are impossible. Attempts to define sacred literature from within a specific cultural environment, such as Jainism, are also problematic. A single text may be considered at once sacred, religiously informative, or even religiously empty. Dundas’s discussion of scriptural commentary illustrates some different attitudes to scripture within Jainism.<sup>13</sup> For example, Loka Shah (mentioned in Chapter Three) did not accept commentary as authoritative, but saw it as a distraction from the pure message of the Tīrthaṅkars. The renowned sixteenth century Gujarati poet, Anandghanji, took the opposite view point. He regarded commentary and interpretation to be as equally vital as the original

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid pages 44 to 49 and 70 to 72.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p71. Also Dundas 1992, p54.

<sup>11</sup> Folkert 1993, pages 49 to 52. Also Dundas 1992, p70. See Dundas 1992, pages 69 to 70 for a discussion of Digambar attitudes towards scripture.

<sup>12</sup> Kelting 2001, p30.

<sup>13</sup> Dundas 1996, pages 73 to 74.

scripture. Dundas cites a third, somewhat equivocal, case in the influential Terapanthi *ācārya* Jayacarya (1803 to 1881). Jayacarya seems to have taken a similar “literal approach” to scripture as Lonka Shah, but nevertheless included extracts of eleventh century commentary in his translation into Rajasthani of the *Bhagavtī Sūtra*. These examples demonstrate that in Jainism there is no standard opinion concerning scripture. This is also reflected by *Shrimad Rajcandra*. According to Srimad’s devotees *Shrimad Rajcandra* is a sacred text, yet the majority of Jains do not accept it as scripture because they do not accept Srimad’s religious authority, particularly because he was a layman. Some who read it may regard it as informative religious literature, yet others may find little religious value in the text at all.

The phenomenological approach taken by this thesis appropriates the meaning, or status, of a text to the religious practitioner - the person using the text - rather than exclusively with the text itself, and so bypasses these problems of defining sacred texts. The term ‘practitioner’ instead of ‘reader’ is applied here because, as Timm comments, religious texts can be used in a variety of different ways.

“The centrality of oral tradition, of recitation in its performance, liturgical, ritual, and aesthetic dimensions, cannot be over emphasised in the context of South Asian religion”.<sup>14</sup>

This approach, that appropriates the meaning of a text to the practitioner, is culturally uninhibited. It is accepting of the variety of functions and qualities associated with different texts that are regarded as sacred within their specific cultural contexts. It also avoids rigid assumptions about either the text or the practitioner. According to this approach *Srimad*

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<sup>14</sup> Timm 1992, p4. Also Dundas 1992, p53.



*Rajcandra* is a sacred text within the context of the Srimad Rajcandra movement because that is how it is regarded by devotees. The problem of a text having various meanings within a specific cultural context is also overcome because the change in its status corresponds to the practitioner's changing attitude towards it. For example, someone may initially regard *Srimad Rajcandra* as religious literature, but may change their attitude towards the text from religious literature to sacred literature if they later come to accept Srimad's divine authority.

This approach corresponds to Dundas's qualification of scripture, which he describes as, "any text of reasonable or indeterminate age which is located within the tradition and supports the view of the person citing it."<sup>15</sup> Although Dundas's comment that the practitioner must agree with the text is consonant with the phenomenological approach of this thesis, his insistence on the antiquity of text is more difficult to support. Cort's observation that the status of a text is influenced more by the frequency of its use than by its antiquity is more appropriate.<sup>16</sup> It is not remarkable in Jainism that Srimad's devotees consult a relatively recent, vernacular, lay text as their primary textual source on theology and religious practice, or that they regard this text as scripture. Few lay Jains are able to study classical scriptures in the ancient languages. Not only are *āgam* texts (ancient scripture, usually written in Sanskrit or Prakrit) inaccessible linguistically, but the laity have historically been prohibited from studying them.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this, texts written by and for the lay community are an important representative of that community, to which, it should be remembered, the majority of Jains belong. Kelting has shown that lay Jains glean much of their theological understanding from vernacular sources (textual and

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<sup>15</sup> Dundas 1992, p55.

<sup>16</sup> Cort 1992, p184.

<sup>17</sup> Dundas 1992, p54. Kelting 2001, p62.

oral) that have their origin in the lay community.<sup>18</sup> She has further shown that lay texts sometimes become objects of veneration akin to the classical scriptures.<sup>19</sup> Her observations support the belief that in Jainism scripture is not restricted to the forty-five *āgam* texts identified by nineteenth century western scholars. To quote Kelting at length;

“Scripture includes Āgam texts, other mendicant texts, vernacular prescriptive texts, lessons of the mendicants, devotional literature, and often any text which addresses Jain concerns. However, the Āgam texts are not seen as acceptable for study by lay Jains, nor are they linguistically accessible to the laypeople; though it is good for the laity to venerate these texts, the laypeople’s religious knowledge comes from other “scriptures.” The varieties of religious veneration directed toward texts other than Āgam texts illustrates the lay perception of scripture, religious knowledge, and the centrality of these other texts”.<sup>20</sup>

Appropriating the meaning of a text to the practitioner reduces the definition of sacredness to: ‘a text is regarded as sacred when it is believed to be sacred by someone’. It is an approach that Detweiler regards as, “both largely true and far too simple”.<sup>21</sup> Yet it is not without further defining criteria because the practitioner accepts a text is sacred only when they believe it to possess special qualities, qualities not found in other religious or secular literature. These qualities are divine authority and transformative capabilities, which may therefore be regarded as the defining criteria of sacred texts.<sup>22</sup> The term ‘divine authority’ can have a range of

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<sup>18</sup> Kelting 2001, pages 42 and 140.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p66

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p62.

<sup>21</sup> Detweiler 1985, p215.

<sup>22</sup> Detweiler 1985, p215 and pages 220 to 221. Detweiler interprets sacred texts from the perspective of a community, whereas my interpretation rest with the individual and therefore alters his emphases of these criteria.

interpretations depending on the specific culture of the text's origin, but generally refers to a high level of religious knowledge. In Jainism this is ultimately the omniscience of the Tīrthaṅkars.

For example in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* Umasvati writes,

“Scriptural knowledge is authentic because it derives from the pure and perfect knowledge of the Jina (omniscient teacher) who revealed it”.<sup>23</sup>

Atmanadji described scripture as the presentation of divine experience, “the sayings and teachings of Tīrthaṅkars and *ācāryas* coming from true, not academic, knowledge and experience”.<sup>24</sup> Chapter Four explained that this is the unequivocal experience of self realisation which is the source of religious authority. When a text has divine authority its true meaning is not open to interpretation, it can only mean what the divine, or divinely inspired, author intended. As this meaning is likely to be of soteriological importance it is essential that aspirants understand it properly. This means they may require religious specialists, what Detweiller refers to as “privileged interpreters”, to expound the text's true meaning.<sup>25</sup> The term ‘transformative’ means the ability to bring about an effect, often (although not always) salvation. Babb observes that the qualities of divine authority and transformative capabilities are apparent in the teachings of the Tīrthaṅkars.

“From the tradition's standpoint, Jain teachings do not stand or fall on rational arguments; rather, the sole and sufficient guarantee of their validity is the Tīrthaṅkar's omniscience. These teachings are not only regarded as unconditionally true; they are also

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<sup>23</sup> Umasvati (translated by Tatia, 1994) 1.12, p13.

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview, October 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Detweiler 1985, p214.

enunciated for one specific purpose and for no other reason. That purpose is the attainment of liberation from the world's bondage.”<sup>26</sup>

*Srimad Rajcandra* also fulfils the criteria of divine authority and transformative capabilities.

Devotees are in no doubt of Srimad's divine authority, which is confirmed by his self realised state; Srimad and *pratyakṣ* gurus fulfil the role of “privileged interpreters”; and the fact that devotees use his texts in their religious practice demonstrates their belief in its transformative capabilities.

Srimad is believed to have attained self realisation when he was twenty-four. It is the remarkably high level of internal purity that his devotees believe he attained that substantiates his religious authority and divine status. Devotees comment that from the moment of Srimad's first experience of self realisation his writings show no further development of opinion because they reflect the knowledge and inspiration of the ultimate experience of his soul. Srimad composed *Atma Siddhi* about five years after his first experience of self realisation. It was stated in Chapter Four that followers believe its teaching are indisputable because they arise not just from intellectual theorising, but from the divine knowledge of Srimad's soul. Almost every devotee that I met during my research knew *Atma Siddhi* by heart. Devotees sing this poem routinely during their congregational *bhakti* and as part of their individual religious practice. On special occasions *Atma Siddhi* itself becomes the object of veneration and at Agas *Atma Siddhi Pūjā* is performed daily in the form of singing praises to the text. Substances are not used in this *pūjā*. The sacred status of *Atma Siddhi* and Srimad's other post self realisation writings are authenticated by Srimad's experience of self realisation. Yet devotees make no distinction

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<sup>26</sup> Babb 1996, p7.

between the religious authority of these texts and those composed prior to Srimad's first experience of self realisation. For example, Srimad wrote *Mokṣa Mala* when he was sixteen and sections of this text are used by devotees in their religious practice as frequently as *Atma Siddhi*. An example of this is lesson fifty-six, '*kṣmāpanā*'. This short prayer in which the aspirant laments their sinful ways and seeks forgiveness for them is included in the routine morning *bhakti* sessions at Agas, Dharampur, Koba and Sayla ashrams. It is clear that Srimad's religious authority spans all his writings. The consent he gave Ambalalbai for their compilation perhaps endorses this, but of greater impact is the overarching influence Srimad's divine status.

Srimad's divine status qualifies him in the role of a "privileged interpreter" or religious specialist. According to devotees his writings succeed in expressing the essence of the Jinās' religious message with depth and simple clarity. Rakeshbhai writes that, "every word of His [Srimad's] has the ability of absorbing and explaining endless 'āgamas'."<sup>27</sup> He compares Srimad's writing to essential oil - one drop contains the essence of a thousand flowers. Srimad's writings are considered accessible in comparison to ancient scripture, but they too are believed to contain many levels of meaning and so also require exposition by a religious specialist. For example, *Atma Siddhi* has numerous commentaries, one written by Srimad himself.<sup>28</sup> The most recent commentary is Rakeshbhai's doctoral thesis published in April 2001 called, '*Srimad Rajcandra's Atma Siddhi*'. This exposition of *Atma Siddhi* in four volumes is an example of decoding by a religious specialist. One of Rakeshbhai's disciples told me that his thesis explains and simplifies Srimad's teaching just as Srimad's writing explains and simplifies the ancient scriptures. She went on to say that she had a far deeper understanding of *Atma Siddhi* since

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<sup>27</sup> Unpublished transcript of a discourse given at Rajkot 13.4.01.

<sup>28</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p87.

studying Rakeshbhai's thesis and that she felt this had increased the spiritual potency of *Atma Siddhi* when she recited it.<sup>29</sup> This devotee's comments suggest that the decoding of scripture by a religious specialist affects the practitioner's attitude towards that scripture.

As religious authority is synonymous with self realisation in the Srimad Rajcandra movement, disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru look to their guru as a religious specialist with the authority to explain the true meaning of Srimad's teaching. During *svādhyāy* (scriptural study) sessions the *pratyakṣ* gurus Atmanandji, Nalinbhai and Rakeshbhai offer commentary on Srimad's teachings. Jaysingbhai at Deolali does not offer any commentary during *svādhyāy*, even though he leads the sessions, because, as he said, he is not self realised. A similar comparison can be made between meetings held in London by devotees associated with Sayla and Koba ashrams. The 'Sayla' meetings were led by a disciple whose own self realised status gave her the authority to offer exposition on the texts read, even though she is not a guru. The 'Koba' meetings were led by a senior disciple, but who was not self realised. This group discussed the meaning of the texts they read and their personal responses to them, but accepted that no one present had the authority to provide a definitive explanation.

The third criterion of a sacred text is its transformative capability. As discussed in the previous chapter, the transformative effect that Srimad's followers desire is soul purification leading to the experience of self realisation. When asked why they followed Srimad the most frequent response of devotees was 'because his teachings work'. Practitioners often interpreted changes in their own beliefs and behaviour as spiritual progression, which proved to them the efficacy, hence religious authority, of Srimad's teachings. His writings are transformative in two ways:

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<sup>29</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

they instruct the devotee on how to attain self realisation, and they are actually incorporated into the devotee's religious practice in various ways. When used in religious practice Srimad's writings become an agent of transformation for the aspirant.

One example of Srimad's writings being incorporated into religious practice is *svādhyāy*. From a review of Srimad's literature, Shah and Pungaliya comment that,

“In his [Srimad's] view, *upadeśa bodha*, that is the acquisition of scriptural knowledge through religious instruction, is preparatory to the acquisition of *siddhānta bodha*, or spiritual understanding.”<sup>30</sup>

Srimad writes about the importance of scriptural study in *Atma Siddhi*,

“The scriptures establishing the existence of the soul etc., are the sustainer of the deserving soul where there is absence of living true Guru.” *Atma Siddhi* verse 13.<sup>31</sup>

“Or the scriptures suggested by the true Guru for study should always be pondered upon, giving up dogmatism.” *Atma Siddhi* verse 14.<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to notice that Mehta has opted to omit a warning in his translation of *Atma Siddhi* that is included in other translations. For example, in Govardhandas's edition the commentary to verse thirteen warns that scriptural study “cannot compete favourably with the capacity of an enlightened living Guru for removing the seeker's delusions.” The commentary to verse

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<sup>30</sup> Shah and Pungaliya 2001, p19.

<sup>31</sup> Translation by D.C. Mehta 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Translation by D.C. Mehta 1978.

fourteen states, “Some scriptures are likely to be misunderstood by and dangerous to one, who attempts to study them independently of a living Guru.”<sup>33</sup>

Srimad intended that his own letters be kept and studied by his disciples. Sometimes he gave an instruction for certain letters to be copied and distributed amongst designated disciples. One prominent example of this is the letter of ‘Six Fundamental Truths’ (described below).

Govardhandas recalls how Juthabhai and his friends would study copies of Srimad’s letters rather than paying attention to mendicant teachers in the *upāśray* at Kambhat.<sup>34</sup> Today *svādhyāy* is a key aspect of devotees’ religious practice and incorporated into the daily programme at most centres. Srimad’s writings are studied in order for devotees to gain a thorough intellectual understanding of his teachings in the belief that intellectual knowledge is one necessary precursor to the experiential knowledge of self realisation. In response to Srimad’s criticisms of empty theorising and ritual performance, devotees believe that religious practice needs to be understood in order to be effective. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that devotees felt they had a more dynamic and committed attitude to their religious practice once they understood its meaning.

*Svādhyāy* often takes the form of a chronological reading of *Srimad Rajcandra*. This was the case during the weekly meetings of London groups associated with Sayla and Koba. A complete reading of the text in a congregational setting takes approximately two years. *Srimad Rajcandra* is arranged chronologically and devotees sometimes commented that they could relate their own spiritual progression with Srimad’s as they read through the text. In addition to the usual

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<sup>33</sup> Translation of *Atma Siddhi* by Brahmācariji Govardhandas. English commentary by Dinubhai Muljibhai under the guidance of Brahmācariji Govardhandas (1985).

<sup>34</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p88.



meetings for *svādhyāy*, *bhakti* and *dhyān* (meditation), the London-based community associated with Sayla ashram hold regular 'beginners' *svādhyāy* sessions. In September 2001 *Moksa Mala* was being studied in English and in Gujarati. The same self realised disciple mentioned above also led a series of classes on *Atma Siddhi*, which were attended by about one hundred people, not all of whom were devotees of Srimad. Devotees associated with Sayla ashram are required to read and understand a prescribed selection of Srimad's writings before they can be initiated into the *bīj gnān* mediation technique. These texts include *Atma Siddhi*, *Moksa Mala* and one hundred of Srimad's letters, selected by Sri Ladakshandbhai, that emphasise the importance of the disciple's submission to their guru.<sup>35</sup> Each winter at Sayla ashram there is an opportunity for disciples to have their readiness to receive the *bīj gnān* assessed by other, senior disciples who have already attained self realisation. This takes the form of an interview during which disciples are 'examined' on their understanding of these and other texts. It was explained to me that success at this interview did not only depend upon the aspirant giving the 'correct' answers, but that they had also begun to actually absorb the meaning and impact of Srimad's teachings.

The community of Rakeshbhai's disciples provide another example of intellectual study as religious practice. Disciples are expected to keep up to date with a reading schedule prescribed by Rakeshbhai. Discussion groups that are led by a senior disciple meet every fortnight and aspirants may be temporarily suspended from their group if they repeatedly fall behind with their reading. The current focus of disciples' study at these meetings is Rakeshbhai's doctoral thesis. Every two weeks disciples are asked to revise between thirty to forty pages, which discuss between two to three verses of *Atma Siddhi*, on which they are examined. Rakeshbhai makes the

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<sup>35</sup> In Chapter Two Ladakshandbhai was identified as the eighth guru in Sayla's spiritual heritage and founder of the ashram community there.

selection and sets the questions, but the tests are conducted and marked by the discussion group leaders. The marks, out of twenty-five, are sent to Rakeshbhai who monitors each disciple's progress.

The reading prescribed to disciples associated with Sayla ashram, the treatment of Rakeshbhai's thesis, and the chronological reading of *Shrimad Rajcandra* that many devotees undertake, all illustrate that within the Srimad Rajcandra movement scriptural study to develop an intellectual understanding of Srimad's teaching is an important religious practice. In the first two instances disciples are not only told what to read, but are also tested to ensure their understanding is correct. As a result of this emphasis on intellectual study devotees generally have a highly sophisticated understanding of their philosophy, their religious practice, and the relationship between the two. Of course this is not the end goal, but it is seen to be an important part of the liberation process. For these Jains intellectual learning is part of their purification process, which indicates their belief in the transformative qualities of Srimad's writing.

Disciples of a *pratyakṣ* guru have access to a broader range of texts to study than those who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru. For example, at Agas only texts written by Srimad and Brahmachariji are studied because this community accepts that only these two were self realised and therefore had the religious authority to either write or decode scripture.<sup>36</sup> (Lalluji did not produce any original literature). In contrast to the attitude at Agas, Rakeshbhai has devised an eclectic reading list for his disciples. As Rakeshbhai's disciples accept his self realised status, they also accept that he has the religious authority to select texts that will benefit their own religious progression. Devotees at Agas and Rakeshbhai's disciples all refer to the universal truth of self

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<sup>36</sup> Brahmachariji wrote some commentaries on Srimad's work which are published in a volume titled *Bodh Amrut* (Sermons of Nectar).

realisation as their source of religious authority, but whereas Rakeshbhai's disciples are able to embrace a wide spectrum of literature because they feel secure in the guidance of their guru, whom they believe to be self realised, devotees at Agas remain within the narrow spectrum of texts written by their own self realised gurus to avoid the risk of misinformation from a false guru.

The stress on scriptural study in the Srimad Rajcandra movement is in stark contrast to the time when such activities were prohibited amongst lay Jains. Even today the intellectualising of religious beliefs and practices found in the Srimad Rajcandra movement is a form of modernism that, although seeming to gather momentum, is by no means universal in Jainism. During their research into Jain *pūjā* rituals Humphrey and Laidlaw observed that very few lay Jains understood the meaning of the Sanskrit or Prakrit prayers that they were reciting, but that this neither bothered them nor was thought to diminish the efficacy of the ritual.<sup>37</sup> Jain religious practice includes “knowledge worship”, a common expression of which is the veneration of sacred texts.<sup>38</sup> Most Jains cannot read classical scriptures, but, as the interaction is not intended to be anything other than veneration, this does not deter them from worshipping these texts. Probably the most documented display of textual veneration in Jainism occurs on the fourth day of *Paryuṣan* (an important annual festival) when the *Kalpa Sūtra* is recited as part of a public event over the course of four days. Cort's description of the festival shows that its emphasis is upon venerating the text rather than understanding its contents.<sup>39</sup> Dundas's account of the *Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama* (‘Scripture of Six Parts’) manuscripts at Mudbidri in Karnataka (South India) is

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<sup>37</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p194.

<sup>38</sup> Kelting 2001, pages 62 to 66. In this context ‘knowledge’ is defined as, “knowledge of Jain religious belief, text and practices,” (p64).

<sup>39</sup> Cort 1992, pages 175 to 178.

another example where veneration has superseded teaching as the purpose of sacred texts.<sup>40</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century two laymen tried to arrange for these ancient palm leaf manuscripts to be copied in order to preserve their contents before they grew too decayed to decipher. They were obstructed by the clerical authorities who advised them that these manuscripts served, “solely as objects of worship.”<sup>41</sup> This reiterated the sentiment expressed by the Digambar pandit, Todarmal, a century earlier. He stated that because the current age was corrupt no one could understand these manuscripts, so they should be regarded as objects of veneration only.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the two laymen were eventually successful in having the manuscripts transcribed and published.

The Srimad Rajcandra movement also has a tradition of textual veneration as an expression of knowledge worship. This is most frequently directed towards *Atma Siddhi*. During her fieldwork Kelting noticed that miniature texts served as proxy texts for the purpose of knowledge worship.<sup>43</sup> Miniature copies of *Atma Siddhi* are often incorporated into the domestic shrines of Srimad's devotees.<sup>44</sup> It has already been mentioned that *Atma Siddhi Pūjā* is performed daily at Agas. To commemorate the anniversary of Srimad's birth in November 1999 *Atma Siddhi* was the object of *bhakti* held at Uttarasanda. It involved the congregation standing to sing the poem, but prostrating themselves after each of the one hundred and forty-two verses (the last verse was repeated). At Koba ashram whenever Atmanandji entered the *svādhyāy* hall he always bowed before the sacred books there, as well as before the portraits of Srimad, Lalluji and Kundakunka. Srimad's followers therefore venerate sacred texts as religious objects in just the same way that

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<sup>40</sup> Dundas 1992, pages 55 to 57.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid p56.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p56.

<sup>43</sup> Kelting 2001, pages 62 to 63.

<sup>44</sup> See plate 11, figure 22.

other Jains do, but unlike the previous examples they also believe that it is important to gain access to the knowledge within religious texts by studying them.

The discussion so far has shown that *Srimad Rajcandra* is studied by devotees as a sacred text, Srimad's writings have also been incorporated more specifically into devotees' religious practices. As already mentioned, *Atma Siddhi* is recited daily by most devotees as part of their individual religious practice. This devotional poem is also incorporated into the daily *bhakti* programme at most centres along with others composed by Srimad. *Bhakti*, in the form of congregational or personal devotional worship, particularly through hymn singing, is another example of Srimad's writings becoming incorporated into religious practice. The aspirant performs the religious practice of *bhakti* in the hope that it will have a transformative effect on their soul. As Chapter Four explained, Srimad taught that self realisation may be achieved by devotional worship of a true guru. So, when Srimad's hymns that expound this religious teaching are sung during *bhakti* they become the actual tools by which the teaching is carried out. One example of this is '*Kaivalyabīj Śum*' ('What is the Seed of Omniscience?'), which is a hymn of sixteen lines written by Srimad whilst at Ralaj in 1890. It explains that without the guidance of a true guru all of the aspirant's religious practices have been fruitless. Only a true guru can instruct the aspirant on effective religious practice and only the aspirant who submits at the feet of the true guru is worthy of attaining self realisation. This hymn is the eleventh item of the morning *bhakti* at Agas, fourth at Dharasnpur and Koba, and eighth at Sayla.

Verse 5.

1. I feel compassion towards you, that matter is of understanding the true preceptor.

2. The mystery [of the soul] will reveal itself in your face when your true love is firmly established at the feet of the true preceptor.

Verse 6.

1. With body, mind, wealth and all else the preceptor's command resides in the Self [soul].
2. Then your efforts will be successful and you will receive the nectar of eternal life in the form of intimate love.<sup>45</sup>

The chanting of mantras is another religious practice in which Srimad's teachings become the agent of transformation. As described in Chapter Four, Srimad left three mantras that have become incorporated into devotees' daily religious practice.

*1. Sahaj ātma svarup param guru.*

One who experiences Soul continuously and naturally is the Supreme Guru. ('Naturally' means without conscious effort).

*2. Ātam bhāvanā bhāvatām jīva lahe kevalgnān re*

Soul that maintains continuous awareness of the inner self will achieve the state of pure knowledge.

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<sup>45</sup> Translation by Harshad N Sanghrajka, 2002, See Appendix Three for complete translation.

### 3. *Param guru nirgranth sarvagna dev.*

The Supreme Guru having released the bondage of karmas has pure knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

Srimad gave these three mantras to Lalluji, at separate times, as tools for quietening his mind during meditation. Lalluji received the first mantra of the set whilst he was staying at Khambhat in 1895. Srimad was staying at a nearby village called Ralaj during the same period, but because it was the monsoon season Lalluji was prohibited from travelling there to meet him. This distressed Lalluji greatly. Within a few days Srimad sent Ambalalbhai, Sobhagbhai, and another man, Doongarshee Gosalia, to meet Lalluji in Khambhat with a message that Srimad would soon visit him. It was then that under Srimad's instruction Sobhagbhai passed the first mantra to Lalluji with the direction that he should chant it daily for five turns of a rosary (one rosary has one hundred and eight beads).<sup>47</sup> Srimad gave Lalluji the second mantra of the set three years earlier whilst in Mumbai during 1892. He wrote it on the first page of a scripture - *Samadhi Shataka* - that they had been studying, with the comment that this mantra summarised the essence of the scripture's teaching.<sup>48</sup> The origin of the third mantra in the set remains mysterious. Lalluji formulated these three mantras into a set.<sup>49</sup> They were established as part of the tradition of religious practice for Srimad's devotees approximately twenty-five years after Srimad's death (presumably with the foundation of Agas).<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note that the historical origin of each mantra was not particularly well known amongst followers, although most devotees had a good understanding of their philosophical meanings.

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<sup>46</sup> Translation by Jayshuk Mehta, 2002

<sup>47</sup> Govardhandas 1991, pages 108 to 109.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid pages 102 to 103. Also Atmanandji personal interview, November 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Rakeshbhai personal interview, December 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Atmanandji, personal interview, November 1999.

These three mantras are now an established part of routine *bhakti* programmes at each centre. They are the third item of the morning *bhakti* at Agas, sixth at Dharampur, seventh at Koba and fourth at Sayla. Each mantra is said fifty-four times by a leader (this will often be a different person each day) and repeated by the rest of the congregation, which makes a total of one hundred and eight repetitions. Mantras are sung to a number of different melodies, sometimes the melody will change during one set of repetitions. The variation is a trick to stop the mind from wandering during the chanting.<sup>51</sup> The final mantra is often sung slowly and with great emotion. Rakeshbhai's disciples use drums and other musical instruments during their *bhakti* sessions. Their Mantra chanting usually lasted between ten to fifteen minutes and often grew loud, fast and vigorous. In addition to routine *bhakti* sessions, these three mantras are chanted at every opportunity. For example, this was a favourite activity amongst followers associated with Koba on coach journeys during pilgrimage trips. They are also chanted as part of devotees' individual religious practice and followers are often seen carrying a click counter to count their mantrajap (recitation). Devotees at Agas take a vow (to themselves) to recite '*Sahaj ātma svarup param guru*' daily for either one, three or five repetitions of a rosary.<sup>52</sup> Ideally the mantra should be recited constantly and the devotee should be absorbed in it whatever their daily activity. Mantras are not only chanted, but also written out repeatedly in notebooks. Kelting observed a similar practice amongst Jain laywomen who believed that they gained merit from copying out *stavans* (devotional hymns).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

<sup>52</sup> This is done during a short ceremony before Srimad's photograph in Brahmajariji's old room. It is overseen by one of the ashram's trustees. Agas, December 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Kelting p67, 2001.



One of Rakeshbhai's disciples explained that these three mantras summarise the aspirant's spiritual endeavour.<sup>54</sup> Mantras in Jainism, as in other religious traditions, usually involve repeating the names of divine beings. The *Namaskār Mantra* described below is an example of this. The triad of mantras Srimad gave to Lalluji differ from this format because they focus on the liberation of the soul and so are a continuous reminder to the aspirant of their soteriological goal. The first mantra is the aspirant's goal. It describes the highest (*param*) guru as one who experiences their soul continuously and effortlessly. Devotees regard it as a short form of the *Namaskār Mantra*, which is the most famous and widely used of all Jain mantras. Like all Jains, Srimad's followers also recite this mantra during their religious practice. It pays homage to the *panc paramēṣṭhin*, who are the five supreme, or holy, beings recognised by Jainism. In the order they are mentioned in the *Namaskār Mantra* these are; the Tīrthaṅkars, *siddhas*, *ācāryas*, *upādhyāys* and all Jain *sādhus*.<sup>55</sup> Dundas comments that all Jain mantras are usually regarded as a variation of the *Namaskār Mantra*.<sup>56</sup> In the case of 'Sahaj ātma svarup param guru' the five supreme beings named in the *Namaskār Mantra* are incorporated into the '*param guru*' named in this mantra. The second mantra in the set is the method. It describes how aspirants may themselves attain the state of *param guru* through knowledge of their own soul, through self realisation. The third mantra is the result, which is *kevalgnān* - the pure knowledge experienced by the *param guru*. Devotees therefore believe that the words of each mantra reflect their spiritual aspirations.

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<sup>54</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

<sup>55</sup> For more information on the *Namaskār Mantra* see Chapter Two footnote 71.

<sup>56</sup> Dundas 1992, p71 and Dundas 2000, p232.

*The influence of Srimad Rajcandra, as sacred literature, on the Srimad Rajcandra movement.*

*Srimad Rajcandra* conforms to the definition of a sacred text proposed by this chapter. Srimad's devotees believe his teachings to be sacred because they recognise in them the divine authority of Srimad's authorship. They accept that they require decoding by a religious specialist. They also believe them to have transformative capabilities when incorporated into religious practice, examples of this are *svādhyāy*, *bhakti*, and the recitation of mantras. The early appearance of a canon of sacred literature had some important formative effects on the Srimad Rajcandra movement. *Shrimad Rajcandra* is a closed canon. There is no ambiguity about its origin or authorship, hence no debate regarding the authenticity of its contents. The speed with which the canon was closed following Srimad's death avoided textual interpolations, which has helped to preserve its religious and historical authenticity. By charting the chronological development of Srimad's life and spirituality *Srimad Rajcandra* has contributed to the preservation of the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

Episodes in Srimad's life that led to the composition of some of his texts have become important chapters in the movement's universal history. The best example of this is *Atma Siddhi*. The account of its composition is well known to Srimad's followers and is often represented in pictures and displays; for example, there is a large plaster model of the scene in one Rajkot temple.<sup>57</sup> The account tells how, during a stay at Surat in 1895, Lalluji fell ill. Fearing for his life he requested Srimad's counsel to assist him towards *samādhi maran* (death in meditation), which Jains believe to be essential for a 'good' rebirth. In response to Lalluji's request Srimad wrote '*Chha Padano Patra*' (Letter of Six Fundamental Truths). Lalluji made a full recovery

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<sup>57</sup> See plate 7, figure 12.

and Srimad gave an instruction for the letter to be distributed amongst certain of his disciples, including Sobhagbhai, whom he told to memorise it. Sobhagbhai complained that his old age made this task too difficult and asked Srimad to compose a version in verse to aid his memory. This was the inspiration for *Atma Siddhi*. Srimad wrote *Atma Siddhi* in August 1895.<sup>58</sup> He worked at night, in a small, cell like, ground floor room in Nadiad, whilst Ambalalbhai stood alongside holding a lantern. The account tells how he wrote continuously, without making a single error, and completed the poem within two hours. Once complete, Srimad instructed Ambalalbhai to make four copies of *Atma Siddhi*, one each for Sobhagbhai, Lalluji, and Zaveri Maneklal Ghelabhai, and one for Ambalalbhai himself.<sup>59</sup> *Atma Siddhi* is highly valued by Srimad's followers, which is one reason why its composition is of such historical importance. They admire its philosophic and didactic content and the speed and accuracy with which Srimad is said to have composed it. The room where Srimad wrote *Atma Siddhi* now houses a simple photographic shrine, but otherwise remains almost as it was when the poem was composed just over a century ago.<sup>60</sup> It is tucked behind a Siva temple just off the main road and the rear entrance leads out to the Sabamati river. A handwritten text of *Atma Siddhi*, bound in green velvet, is on display in the library that Srimad established at Khambhat. Even after persistent questioning on my part the curator continued to assure me that it was one of the four original copies. Although there is no way for me to verify this, it was clearly considered to be a great privilege for me to handle it. The account of *Atma Siddhi*'s composition contributes to the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Devotees are also united ideologically by their commitment to the doctrinal message of *Atma Siddhi* and Srimad's other philosophical

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<sup>58</sup> Digish Mehta 1999, p95; Govardhandas 1991, p118; Mehta and Sheth 1971, p53.

<sup>59</sup> For accounts of *Atma Siddhi*'s composition see Govardhandas 1985, pages LI to LII; Govardhandas 1991, pages 117 to 119; Digish Mehta 1999, pages 95 to 96.

<sup>60</sup> I visited in October and November 1999.

literature. Their unification is consolidated further by the distinctive religious behaviour and philosophical beliefs that emerge from their ideological conformity and which distinguish Srimad's followers from other groups of Jains. This thesis has already shown these beliefs and practices to be veneration of Srimad Rajcandra, belief in the relative imminence of self realisation and the practice of guru *bhakti*.

As well as contributing to the historic and ideological unity of the Srimad Rajcandra movement, *Srimad Rajcandra* has also helped to define Srimad as a religious icon. Srimad's writings preserve and reveal his religious knowledge, so through their publication he is remembered principally as a religious philosopher and practitioner, rather than for his famed performances of astonishing memory feats. During his life Srimad's disciples could assess his spiritual purity by their personal relationship with him, but since his death devotees have had to depend on his writings to assess this quality. *Shrimad Rajcandra* both endorses, and is endorsed by, Srimad's divine authority. Its philosophical content, and the speed and accuracy with which sections of it were written, are proof to devotees of Srimad's spiritual purity. If readers of *Srimad Rajcandra* accept the divine authority of its author, then they must also accept the sacred nature of his writings. *Shrimad Rajcandra* therefore has a dual function of promoting the divine status of its author and, having convinced the reader of this, of existing as a sacred object in its own right.

The publication of Srimad's writings has disseminated his teachings across a wider readership than if they had remained private, particularly because Srimad wrote primarily in Gujarati. His choice of language is not surprising as much of his literature is personal correspondence between himself and his disciples. It is also common sense that texts intended for a public readership should be written in the common language. *Shrimad Rajcandra* also includes some of his

discourses, which he would have given in Gujarati. Some of these discourses were written down by Ambalalbhai who was famed for his ability to remember them word for word. It is not in the least uncommon for disciples to transcribe their guru's discourses, for example, Kanji Svami did not write anything down, but his discourses were recorded and transcribed by his followers.<sup>61</sup> At Sayla, Ladakshandbhai did not write down his lectures, but they were recorded and transcribed by his disciples, and published in a single volume titled *Shiks Amrut* ('Nectar Teachings'). Use of the vernacular language obviously appeals to those who are literate in Gujarati. It has rendered Srimad's work more accessible than Sanskrit or Prakrit texts, which few devotees are able to read. It has also had the effect of reacquainting some diaspora Jains with the language of their ethnic origin. Some devotees born outside of India invest considerable time and effort into learning Gujarati so that they can study *Shrimad Rajcandra*. This is also true of followers living in Mumbai who attended English medium schools.

Srimad was literate in Sanskrit, so his choice to write in Gujarati is sometimes seen as a reflection of his attitude towards religious understanding and practice. According to Jain history Tīrthaṅkars give their first sermons as Jinās at a public assembly, called a *samavasaraṇ*, and which is attended by gods, humans and animals. Digambar tradition holds that the Tīrthaṅkar does not speak at this assembly, but that he emits a "miraculous sound" called *divyadhvani* that his *gaṇadharas* (disciples) are able to translate.<sup>62</sup> Śvetāmbar tradition refers to a divine language that the audience is miraculously able to understand. In Śvetāmbar scriptures this is written as a Prakrit form called Ardhamagadhi, which Dundas concludes is probably a mutation of Magadhi, Mahavir's vernacular dialect.<sup>63</sup> Rakeshbhai explained that Mahavir preached in "the language of

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<sup>61</sup> Dundas 1992, p228.

<sup>62</sup> Jaini 1998, p4.

<sup>63</sup> Dundas 1992, p61. Also see Fynes pxxii, in Hemacandra 1998.

the people to reach the heart of the people”, rather than in Sanskrit which was “the language of the scholars”. On this point he made a comparison between Srimad and Mahavir. Rakeshbhai continued,

“[Srimad Rajcandra] said Prakrit is no longer the language of the people it is the language of the scholars. So he wrote in Gujarati. He too was criticised for doing something different. They [sectarian Jains] want to do everything in Prakrit and they don’t understand anything, but still they want to hold on to it. Srimad said you should do your practice in a language you can understand. You should know what you are doing. Gujarati is the language of the mass now, so he preached in Gujarati. His writings and poems are in Gujarati, and so we sing that. They [sectarian Jains] think we’re doing something different [to them]”.<sup>64</sup>

Rakeshbhai’s comments imply that Srimad’s use of the vernacular language, Gujarati, reflects his philosophical belief that the efficacy of religious practice depends on the practitioner’s understanding of their actions. As well as simplifying the religious message of the Jinas, Srimad also expressed it in a language his followers could understand. Devotees believe that this effectively ‘rescued’ the true meaning of Jain philosophy and practice, at least for them. In this respect Srimad’s teachings echo the labours of the Tirthankars themselves, who reintroduced the message of Jainism when it had faltered in society.

This discussion has shown that the publication of *Srimad Rajcandra* helped to consolidate Srimad’s devotees into a movement through the provision of a canon of sacred literature to which they all refer. This canon’s historical and religious authority is accepted unanimously

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<sup>64</sup> Personal interview, January 2000.

amongst Srimad's following, so it contributes to the historical and ideological unification of the movement. Ideological conformity has led to specific beliefs and practices. Srimad's followers can be identified by their belief that Srimad's literature is sacred, by their use of it in their religious practices, and by their application of the beliefs and teachings that it propounds. This chapter has also shown that an emphasis on intellectual understanding of religious philosophy is a feature of the Srimad Rajcandra movement, in the belief that it is necessary for the efficacy of religious practice. The fact that many centres in the movement are involved in publishing activities, as described in Chapter Two, illustrates an inclination towards intellectualism. Chapter Four explained that Srimad's redesignation of religious authority as belonging exclusively to the self realised person challenged the mendicant's automatic claim to religious authority. This challenge is reified in his devotees' attitudes to his writings. The accessibility of *Srimad Rajcandra*, his followers' eagerness to study it, their belief in its divine authority and their veneration of it, all bring the mendicant's monopoly on religious authority into dispute.

## 2. Images

Some branches of Jainism are aniconic (see table in Chapter One), but many Jains perform their devotional and ritual practices in the presence of one or more Jina images.<sup>65</sup> When Srimad first accepted Jainism he was opposed to image worship, most probably a sign of the aniconic Sthānakvāsī influence of his home town at Vavana, and it was not until later that he became an advocate of the practice.<sup>66</sup> In 1887 he wrote,

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<sup>65</sup> For a concise account of *pūjā* (worship) toward Jina images see Dundas 1992, pages 173 to 181. For descriptions of some different types of *pūjā* see Cort 1989, pages 347 to 391. Also Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, pages 21 to 31.

<sup>66</sup> Govardhandas 1991, p7.

“The protagonists of the non-belief in idol worship would hardly tolerate and be sorry for a man i.e., myself who once opposed idol worship and now I am thoroughly convinced of the correct need of idol worship in religious development”.<sup>67</sup>

Srimad's followers use images in their veneration of the Jinas. It was described in Chapter Two that several ashrams have a Jain temple, two in the case of Agas, on site. Some devotees that I met who were originally Sthānakvāsī Jains, had begun to venerate images following Srimad's example.

Chapter Three made reference to narrative paintings and other commemorative iconography, but there are other images of Srimad that serve a quite different function. Followers use images of Srimad, in the form of photographs and statues, in their devotional practices. Similar to the use of his writings as scripture, these images of Srimad, and his followers' treatment of them, are a distinctive and defining feature of this community of Jains. No other Jain would worship before an image of Srimad or acknowledge such worship as legitimate.

Terms such as 'image', 'idol' and 'icon' are problematic because, in addition to their literal meanings, they have historically inferred derogatory meanings that have arisen from the influence of Christian Protestantism. Cort prefers to use the original '*mūrti*' (Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati) out of sensitivity towards such inferred meanings, but also because he finds the actual meaning of '*mūrti*' so difficult to convey in English translation. He comments that

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<sup>67</sup> Govardhandas 1991, P52. There are a number of notable accounts throughout Jain history of people swapping their allegiance from aniconic to iconic Jainism, and vice versa. For example, Loka Shah (fifteenth century) famously denied the validity of image worship in Jainism (Dundas 1992, p211). Acarya Vijayanandsuri (Atmaramji) (1837 to 1896) was one of a number of Sthānakvāsī mendicants who took a second initiation into Śvetambar Jainism following his conviction in the validity of image worship (Cort 1989, 99 to 100, 344 to 345)



“The English word “image” has epistemological connotations, whereas the Indian word *mūrti* has more ontological connotations”.<sup>68</sup>

Humphrey and Laidlaw take the opposite position. They prefer to reassert the literal meaning of the word ‘idol’ than to bow to “Protestant prejudices”. They found that although many Jains were aware of the negative connotations this term has in western thought, such connotations had not filtered into Jains’ own perception of the term and that “no one [Jain] disputes that ‘idol’ is a valid translation of *murti*”.<sup>69</sup> This thesis takes a mid-point by using the term ‘image’. Within the Srimad Rajcandra movement photographs and statues of Srimad are used with similar frequency and the term ‘image’ accurately describes both of these forms. In this chapter the term ‘statue’ is often used to distinguish an idol of Srimad from his photograph because this is the term followers used freely themselves. Of course they were aware of the stark difference between a commemorative statue of, for example, a politician and a spiritually empowering statue of Srimad that is used routinely in devotional practices. Followers were also happy to use the term ‘image’ to describe Srimad’s statue, but some were less comfortable with the term ‘idol’ than the Jains that Humphrey and Laidlaw encountered seem to have been.

‘Idol-worship’ and ‘image-worship’ are also awkward terms. When Jains venerate the image of a Jina they are neither worshipping the image itself nor any existent part of the Jina, who, being removed from the mundane world, cannot reside within it. As this chapter will explain, Jains sometimes venerate images in anticipation of a response, but these are never images of Tīrthaṅkars. Jina images are iconographic representations of the Jinās’ ascetic and spiritual

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<sup>68</sup> Cort1989, p341, note 1.

<sup>69</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p 57, note 1.

qualities, and it is these qualities that are the object of veneration.<sup>70</sup> The veneration of ascetics is a particular feature of Jainism. Babb observes that,

“Jains worship ascetics, and this is the most important single fact about Jain ritual culture.”<sup>71</sup>

Laidlaw writes that,

“It is renouncers, both living and dead, who are the central objects of veneration”.<sup>72</sup>

Ascetics are worshipped because they epitomise Jain religious values and ideals. Ascetics fall into two categories. In one category are the Jinas, who have attained *mokṣa*. In another category are saints who are highly revered, but who have yet to attain *mokṣa*. Ascetics of both types are the subject of iconography and image-worship in Jainism. Srimad falls into the second category and although it is not unusual for non-omniscient ascetics to be the object of image-worship in Jainism, Srimad's case is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, to my knowledge he is the only Jain layman whose image is venerated. Secondly, because the composition of his image, and the expectation devotees have from their veneration of it, have more in common with veneration of the liberated Jina's image than with that of the unliberated ascetic.

#### Historical origin of Srimad's images.

It was shown in Chapter Two that Srimad finally consented to pose for two studio portraits to appease his disciples' persistent requests.<sup>73</sup> In these two photographs Srimad appears in a highly

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<sup>70</sup> Cort 1989, p397

<sup>71</sup> Babb 1996, p23.

<sup>72</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p3.

<sup>73</sup> See plate 1 figure 1, and plate 2 figure 2.

emaciated condition because they were taken within a few weeks of his death. In each photograph Srimad has adopted one of two meditative positions, one seated (called *padmāsan*) and one standing. Both postures represent *kāyotsarg*, which means bodily abandonment and is a practice during which the practitioner attempts mental detachment from the body. *Kāyotsarg* is one of the six “Obligatory Actions” (*āvaśyaka*) that mendicants vow to keep (fifth for Śvetāmbar Jains and sixth for Digambars).<sup>74</sup> For lay Jains *kāyotsarg* is incorporated into other rites during which the practitioner recites a formula, often the *Namaskār Mantra*.<sup>75</sup> When devotees view images of Srimad in *kāyotsarg* they are observing him in what they interpret as a state of self realisation.

The ‘Srimad Rajcandra Ashram’ at Agas distributes copies of both photographs in formats ranging from small laminated wallet-size copies to large portraits. Most households have a shrine containing at least one of these photographs and either one or both of them are displayed in *svādhyāy* halls dedicated to Srimad.<sup>76</sup> The only exception to this rule of which I am aware is at Deolali where there is a painting of Srimad in the standing meditation posture rather than the customary photograph. Photographs usually show an aura glowing in a halo around Srimad’s head and some have been modified by the addition of colour and background scenery. In one extreme case Srimad was depicted with spiritual ectoplasm emitting from his facial orifices. Only the more sober versions of Srimad’s photograph appear in *svādhyāy* halls.

As a general rule, Srimad’s photograph is installed in *svādhyāy* halls and his statue is installed in guru *mandirs* and at separate shrines. Devotees express their devotion in different ways at these

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<sup>74</sup> Dundas 1992, p148.

<sup>75</sup> See Cort1989, pages 251 to 252.

<sup>76</sup> For examples of domestic shrines see plate 11 figure 22 and plate 12 figures 23 and 24. For examples of *svādhyāy* halls see plates 4 figure 6, plate 5 figures 7 and 8.

two different types of sacred space. *Svādhyāy* halls are large enough to accommodate devotees for congregational *bhakti*, *satsaṅg* and *svādhyāy*, whereas guru *mandirs* are more intimate settings for individual meditation and *darśan* (to gaze upon with devotion). One temple at Rajkot is an exception to this general rule. Here a statue of Srimad rests at the front of a large hall where it faces the congregation.

Srimad's image made the transition from photograph to statue early in the history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Lalluji commissioned the crafting of two statues of Srimad during the construction of the ashram at Agas, which he consecrated along with the Jina images that are installed in the Jain temples at this site.<sup>77</sup> Both statues of Srimad are modelled on the studio photographs of him described above and Lalluji supervised the workmanship to ensure a perfect representation.<sup>78</sup> One is a marble image of Srimad sitting in the *padmāsan* posture and the other is a metal image of him in the standing meditation posture.<sup>79</sup> Most sites in the movement display at least one statue of Srimad, fashioned in either marble or metal, that conforms with the standard model seen at Agas. Of all the images that I saw only two differed significantly from this model. One was a small, featureless marble statue in a shrine at a private house at Kavithha. It is said to have been crafted by a disciple during Srimad's lifetime and with his approval. The second image is at Idar. It is a small, crude marble bust in which Srimad is depicted wearing a turban. This indicates a stage of Srimad's life prior to his renunciation that is represented by the more usual meditative postures. It did not appear that either of these images were the object of routine ritual practice.

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<sup>77</sup> Agas December 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Agas, October 1999.

<sup>79</sup> See plate 9 figures 15 and 16. Figure 16 is Srimad's image at Sayla ashram, but all the statues of him are virtually identical.

The ashrams at Dharampur and Koba did not have statues of Srimad. As explained in Chapter Two, the ashram at Dharampur is still in an early phase of its construction and a guru *mandir* has not yet been built. There is no statue at Koba because Atmanadji believes that only Jinas should be represented by idols.<sup>80</sup> Atmanandji's beliefs also influence the treatment of Srimad's photograph at Koba in comparison with the treatment of Srimad's image (photograph and statue) at some other sites. For example, whilst visiting a *mandir* at Bandhani the group of Atmanandji's disciples with whom I was travelling did not attend the evening *ārti* or morning *pūjā* rituals (these rituals are discussed later in the chapter) that were performed before Srimad's photograph there. When I queried this the disciples voiced their belief that *pūjā* and *ārti* should only be performed before the image of a Jina and not before the image of any ascetic who is yet to obtain omniscience. The different attitudes towards what is believed to be the appropriate treatment of Srimad's image is another example of diversity in the Srimad Rajcandra movement. Attitudes are influenced by the particular tradition of each site, and particularly by a community's beliefs about the level of spiritual purity that Srimad attained, a point to which this discussion will return.

### *The appearance and composition of Srimad's image.*

Statements about Jain theology and soteriology can be read from Jain iconography. There is a stylistic distinction between Digambar images, which are naked, and Śvetāmbar images, which are bejewelled and often adorned with a crown. In both traditions the image of the twenty third Jina, Parshvanath, is immediately recognised by a canopy of cobra-hoods that looms over Parshvanath's head. Rsabha (also called Adinath), the first Tīrthaṅkar, is sometimes shown with

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<sup>80</sup> Personal interview, January 2002.

shoulder length hair. Apart from these exceptions, all Jina images are identical and always depict the Tīrthaṅkars in either the *padmāsan* or the standing meditation postures.<sup>81</sup> This uniformity confers the images with a sense of anonymity that scholars sometimes interpret as an iconographic representation of the Jina's state of omniscience. Omniscience is impossible to represent in any naturalistic way, so it is symbolised by reducing a Jina's corporeality to its simplest form.<sup>82</sup> The Jinās achieved ontological perfection by total physical and psychological renunciation, including, importantly, renunciation of ego. The omniscient Jina is detached from the variables of personality and engrossed only in the permanent and universal qualities of their soul. Differentials associated with personality are products of the non-enlightened, mundane world that the enlightened Jina has transcended. For example, when Kelting asked why the image of Mallinath, who is female in the Śvetāmbar tradition, looked the same as the other (male) images, she was told that “A Jina is not really a man or a woman, a Jina is beyond the specifics of its ... birth.”<sup>83</sup> This sense of the omniscient Jinās' anonymity is also represented by the homogeneity of their hagiographies. For example, it was suggested in Chapter Three that the five auspicious events which occurred in the lives of all the Tīrthaṅkars provided a secure means of authenticating them. It also contributes to the Jinās' anonymity through depersonalisation, as Cort observes, “the identities of the Jinās elide into a composite identity as the Jina”.<sup>84</sup>

Upon the attainment of *mokṣa*, the Jina's soul is believed to retain the sitting or standing meditative posture of the body during its final living moments. Therefore the meditative position

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<sup>81</sup> Jaini 1998, p192. Laidlaw 1995, pages 43 and 249. Cort 1994, p4. Bruhn 1998, p106.

<sup>82</sup> Cort 1995a, p475.

<sup>83</sup> Kelting 2001, p43. Humphrey and Laidlaw describe an opposite response in which their Jain informant said he could clearly recognise a difference between the image of Mallinath and the image of Shantinath beside it, although Humphrey and Laidlaw describe the two images as identical. (1994, pages 229 to 230).

<sup>84</sup> Cort 1995, pages 474 and 475. As have the Dādāgurus (Babb 1996, p126).

of the Tīrthaṅkars' images is representative of *mokṣa* as well as of omniscience. Having attained *mokṣa* the Jina is absent and removed completely from all worldly interaction. The Jina's absence is represented by various forms of iconography, including footprint shrines and 'cut out' images favoured by Digambar Jainism, in which the outline of a *siddha* is cut from a sheet of metal. According to this interpretation of Jain iconography the themes of omniscience and *mokṣa* are communicated in terms of anonymity and absence. The religion's theological and soteriological objectives are therefore represented overtly by Jina images throughout India.

The Introduction to this thesis stated that there is very little academic discussion about Srimad or his devotees. One issue that is the subject of scholastic interest is Srimad's physical appearance. This is perhaps because his photograph is circulated so widely amongst Gujarati speaking Jains that it is difficult for the field-researcher to avoid. It is also perhaps because his statue is provocative, being naturalistic and that of a layman. Banks and Laidlaw have applied similar methods of interpretation to Srimad's image as those discussed above in relation to the Jinās' images. Whilst this is perfectly reasonable in itself, this thesis challenges some of the conclusions they have reached. Banks and Laidlaw both refer to Srimad's image in discussions about the relationship between the physical body and religious practice in Jainism.<sup>85</sup> Banks describes the physical body of a saint who is the object of veneration as an external index of her or his internal spirituality that can be perceived by the worshipper.<sup>86</sup> Laidlaw describes a situation where the soul has taken precedence over the body and in which the body is either destroyed wilfully by ascetic practices or neglected and allowed to wither away.<sup>87</sup> Both scholars

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<sup>85</sup> Banks 1999, pages 311 to 323; and 1997 pages 216 to 239. Laidlaw 1995, pages 230 to 242.

<sup>86</sup> Banks 1999, pages 318 and 320.

<sup>87</sup> Laidlaw 1995. p233.

support their arguements by reference to Srimad's emaciated physique which they assume he cultivated purposefully.<sup>88</sup>

Laidlaw refers to a pious Jain layman from Jaipur in Rajasthan called Shriman Amarchand-ji Nahar who, as an old man, fasted to death (died 1976).<sup>89</sup> His family was associated with the Khartar Gacch, but he was a devotee of Srimad and disassociated himself from any particular order of Jainism.<sup>90</sup> Amarchand-ji was, and continues to be, a renowned and highly respected figure in his community for embodying Jain religious values and practices. Laidlaw records that Jains would receive fast-breaking meals from him and make dietary vows in his presence, but he does not imply that Amarchand-ji was a guru with disciples in the Srimad Rajcandra tradition. Amarchand-ji's philosophical outlook, as Laidlaw describes it, is the same as Srimad's as described in Chapter Four of this thesis. Laidlaw suggests that for Amarchand-ji, and for Srimad after whom he modelled himself, "the body is not an instrument of religious progress, but an obstacle, and the main target of the attack."<sup>91</sup> Laidlaw reasons that this is because both men believed they had attained self realisation, which led each to regard their physical bodies as prisons of their otherwise liberated souls. Their ascetic practices were not channelled towards further purification of the soul, but instead towards destruction of the body in order to release the soul from its imprisonment.<sup>92</sup> This physical destruction is evident by the emaciated bodies of these two men.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid p233. Banks 1999, pages 318 to 319.

<sup>89</sup> Laidlaw 1995, pages 203 to 239.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid p238.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid p230.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid p238.



Banks's argument differs from Laidlaw's. He discusses three categories of Jain iconography. These are what he describes as "effaced bodies", negative images of the absent *siddha*, "idolised bodies" of the Jinas' images, and "living bodies", which are naturalistic images of more recent ascetics.<sup>93</sup> He uses Srimad's image as a paradigm for the last category. Banks suggests that an ascetic's body, or a naturalistic image of that body, can be read as an index of their spirituality because the austerities performed to attain internal purity have a perceptible effect on the ascetic's body.<sup>94</sup> The abstract concept of spirituality is therefore represented iconographically by naturalistic images of the ascetics who perform austerities.<sup>95</sup> Banks reads Srimad's physical form as being representative of his internal purity gained through asceticism, most specifically fasting.

There are problems with Laidlaw's and Banks's arguments, not least that they rely on the misguided assumption that Srimad emaciated himself wilfully as a deliberate statement of his internal spirituality. This thesis has already shown that this is a misconception. Srimad's physical condition was the result of a chronic illness that ultimately killed him, but that was perhaps accentuated through fasting. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is no evidence that Srimad engaged in self starvation to the point of death, but on the contrary that he had wanted to take *dīkṣā* and live as a mendicant. Laidlaw points out that *sallekhanā* (ritual death by fasting) can only be properly performed as a religious practice when the ascetic is already facing death by old-age or terminal illness and is under the guidance of an established mendicant.<sup>96</sup> In these circumstances it is regarded as a great ascetic event. Had Srimad undertaken this practice in the

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<sup>93</sup> Banks 1999, pages 311 to 322.

<sup>94</sup> Banks 1999, p318.

<sup>95</sup> Banks 1997, p234 and 1999, p318.

<sup>96</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p239.

proper conditions it would no doubt be glorified by the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement and recorded in his biographies. The fact that it is not, is further evidence that it did not occur.

Laidlaw's suggestion that Srimad and Amarchandji fasted for the express purpose of bodily destruction presents an ontological paradox. According to Jain philosophy a soul has to be embodied until it attains *mokṣa*. With the physical death of one body, the soul migrates instantaneously into its next incarnation until it attains liberation. The most advantageous incarnation with regard to spiritual improvement is a human one because it is only as a human-being that an aspirant can act, or restrain from action, to directly affect the consequences of karma on the soul.<sup>97</sup> *Mokṣa* can only be attained from a human incarnation as a mendicant, which is a state that neither Amarchandji nor Srimad could claim. It is difficult to comprehend, therefore, why "the body ceased to be an instrument of religious action" for Srimad and Amarchandji, unless both these men were expecting to attain *mokṣa* upon their physical demise.<sup>98</sup> Laidlaw does not make this statement about Amarchandji and considering how remarkable such a statement would be it is unlikely that Laidlaw would have overlooked it. The ambiguity surrounding the actual level of Srimad's internal purity was discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. However, none of the devotees with whom I spoke expressed the opinion that Srimad was in his final incarnation. Even devotees at Agas, who believe Srimad to have attained *kevalgnān*, anticipated his incarnation as a mendicant prior to his attainment of *mokṣa*.

Banks recalls that some of the Jains he met advised him to contemplate Srimad's photograph to observe "how the true Jain disdains his or her body, its desires and cravings, in favour of the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid p242.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid p239.

liberation of the soul.”<sup>99</sup> There is a clear connection between Srimad’s teachings about self realisation through bodily non-attachment and disdain for the body. However, from here Banks jumps to a conclusion that Srimad’s disdain for his body is equal to the purposeful cultivation of an emaciated body image. This association was not voiced by any of the devotees with whom I spoke and no one made a direct connection between Srimad’s internal purity and his emaciated physique. Devotees understand from Srimad’s writings that he was psychologically detached from his body. His image communicates his high level of internal purity to devotees because they regarded him as having attained that spiritual status, but they assessed his spirituality by the example of his life and teachings not by his physical appearance.

A brief survey of Jain iconography makes it difficult to support Banks’s arguerent that an emaciated physique resulting from ascetic practices is regarded as an index of internal purity. Lalluji and Brahmacariji are believed by their devotees to have attained high levels of internal purity and they kept an ascetic regime comparable with Srimad’s. Photographs of these two men show them to be full-figured and to have a physically healthy appearance.<sup>100</sup> Ascetics are not represented as frail in Jain iconography, but as physically strong to withstand the austerities they undertake. A prime example is the huge monolith of Bahubali at Shravanabelgola in South India.<sup>101</sup> This statue shows Bahubali to be as solid as a rock - literally. Each of the Tīrthaṅkars was a supreme ascetic before their attainment of *mokṣa*. They are represented iconographically as adamant, superhuman beings with broad shoulders and curvaceous bellies, not at all emaciated. The Tīrthaṅkars were wealthy, influential nobles of the *kṣatriya* (warrior) caste.

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<sup>99</sup> Banks 1999, p320.

<sup>100</sup> See plate 3 figures 3 and 4.

<sup>101</sup> Bahubali was a son of Rishabha, the first Tīrthaṅkar. He famously renounced during a territorial dispute with his brother, stood in meditation for a year, following which he attained liberation (Dundas 1992, page 103).

Their images depict them in the prime of their life to emphasis the magnitude of the great sacrifice they made when they renounced. Banks's theory could be most successfully applied to images of ascetics in the final stages of *sallekhanā*. However, such ascetics are more usually commemorated by footprint shrines that, as Banks comments, represent their departure from the world, than by anthropomorphic images.<sup>102</sup>

The analyses that Laidlaw and Banks make are based on the appearance of Srimad's physique, which is something over which he had little control. Of more significance however, is the composition of the photographs and the images that are modelled on them because it may be assumed that this is something over which Srimad had some influence.

The first thing to notice is that Srimad has adopted the same sitting and standing meditation postures in which the Jinas are always depicted in Jain iconography. This is notable because a distinction is usually made between images of the Jinas and images of other ascetics. Laidlaw analyses this distinction in a comparison between images of Mahavir and those of Mahavir's two principal *gaṇadhara*s (disciples), Sudharman Svami and Gautam Svami. The two disciples each carry a *muh patti* and an *ogha* (renouncer's broom), both are items that Mahavir does not carry. Laidlaw suggests that these are "emblems of the renouncer tradition and identify these saints as transmitting rather than founding the religion."<sup>103</sup> Therefore, by the absence or presence of the *muh patti* and *ogha* an immediate distinction can be made between Mahavir as the founder of Jainism and Sudharman Svami and Gautam Svami as its ideal followers. Laidlaw makes a further comparison between the images of Sudharman Svami and Gautam Svami and those of the Dādāgurus. This lineage of deceased Khartar Gacch ascetics who are popular objects of worship

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<sup>102</sup> Banks 1999, p312.

<sup>103</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p259.

amongst Śvetāmbar Jains in Rajasthan was introduced in Chapter Three. In addition to the *muh patti* and *ogha*, the Dādāgurus are depicted holding a sacred text in their left hand.<sup>104</sup> Laidlaw concludes that Sudharman Svami and Gautam Svarni are not depicted holding a sacred text because they received Mahavir's teachings orally, directly from him, whereas the Dādāgurus were dependent upon a textual transmission of his teachings.<sup>105</sup>

It is immediately apparent that Srimad's image has more in common with the Jina images than with those of the other ascetics. Assuming that this was an active decision on Srimad's behalf, it seems that he intend to communicate a particular message to his disciples through the composition of the photographs. Srimad is depicted as empty-handed in his image, he is without text, *muh patti* or *ogha*. As discussed in Chapter Four, Srimad claimed to have been a disciple of Mahavir during a previous incarnation, so Laidlaw's comments about the *gaṇadharas*' lack of a text could also apply to him. However, it was also noted in that chapter that far more emphasis is given to Srimad's self realised status than to his association with Mahavir. Srimad's devotees believe that his knowledge is based not just on theoretical understanding, but on an experiential knowledge of his pure soul. Srimad's decision to adopt meditative postures, without the presence of a religious text, may be interpreted in terms of his emphasis on experiential knowledge, through the experience of self realisation, over theoretical knowledge.

Laidlaw suggested that the *muh patti* is symbolic of the renouncer Jain. Chapter Three described how Srimad told the *munis* to discard their *muh patti* for the duration of their stay at Idar because for him they had come to symbolise 'false' mendicants and sectarian division, Srimad's unfurnished image cannot be associated with any particular Jain sect, or even with Jainism itself.

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<sup>104</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p172. Laidlaw 1995, plate XIII.

<sup>105</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p261.

Its lack of attributes characterises the anti-sectarianism and universalism of which Srimad was an advocate and with which his followers associate their religious beliefs. In this way his image represents his attempt to re-establish the pure form of Jainism as taught by Mahavir. It was shown in the previous section of this chapter that followers identify the same reforming characteristic in Srimad's writings.

Banks commented that bodily iconography is "almost always representations of the soul within".<sup>106</sup> The meditation postures that Srimad adopted for his photographs corroborate this statement because they show him actively engaged in the experience of self realisation. By observing Srimad in a state of self realisation devotees are reminded continually of their own soteriological goal, and further that this goal is attainable. Srimad's image communicates to his followers the outcome of effective religious practice, that is, the outcome of following his teachings.

To his followers Srimad was a self realised ascetic and preceptor, and, as their guru, the source of their spiritual inspiration. His image represents a combination of all these aspects, as well as being a reminder of his historical person. In Chapter Three it was discussed that devoted disciples sometimes wrote hagiographic accounts of their spiritual master as an expression of *bhakti*. In a similar way Lalluji commissioned the first statues of Srimad as an expression of his devotion. His fastidiousness over the exactness of Srimad's features illustrates the importance devotees place on having an accurate representation of their guru.<sup>107</sup> This is why the images are naturalistic, not because his external features are believed to reflect his internal purity. The

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<sup>106</sup> Banks 1999, p312.

<sup>107</sup> Laidlaw suggests that the current trend in Jainism for naturalistic images may be borrowed from Hinduism (1995, p266).

naturalistic nature of Srimad's images has contributed to his preservation as a historical figure in a similar way to which his spiritual development is preserved historically through his writings. The progression of Srimad's image from photographs to 'golden' statues demonstrates the increasing status of the person and ideals that the image represents.

*Further iconography in the Shrimad Rajcandra movement.*

In the Srimad Rajcandra movement iconography is not restricted to representations of Srimad. Current *pratyakṣ* gurus make their photographs available to their disciples as a source of spiritual inspiration to them. Photographs of living gurus are only seen in domestic shrines though, and not in *svādhyāy* halls. For example, at Sayla pictures of all the gurus in this community's heritage are on display in the *svādhyāy* hall with the exception of the two current *pratyakṣ* gurus, Nalinbhai and Sadgunaben. Photographs of these two are incorporated into their disciples' domestic shrines.<sup>108</sup> Statues of Lalluji are found at Deolali, Morvi, his birth place at Vataman and at Brahmajariji's birth place at Bandhani.<sup>109</sup> There are also statues of Brahmajariji at Bandhani, alongside those of Srimad and Lalluji. There are no statues of Lalluji or Brahmajariji at Agas, but there is a footprint shrine dedicated to Lalluji and a cremation memorial dedicated to Brahmajariji, as well as numerous portraits of both men. Recently deceased *pratyakṣ* gurus are commemorated with memorial shrines. For example, at Sayla there is a footprint shrine and cremation memorial dedicated to Ladakshandbhai. There are no statues of current or recently deceased gurus.

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<sup>108</sup> See plate 11 figures 21 and 22.

<sup>109</sup> The complex at Bandhani was completed in 1989.

Srimad's photograph hangs in a central position in dedicated *svādhyāy* halls, where it faces the congregation. At most sites it is flanked by a portrait of Lalluji. Two exceptions to this are the ashrams at Dharampur and Deolali, although at Deolali there is a statue of Lalluji in the lower chamber of the temple. The frequency with which Lalluji's portrait is displayed alongside Srimad's indicates his significance within the Srimad Rajcandra movement. This thesis has already shown that he was instrumental in perpetuating Srimad's teachings because he was the only immediate disciple to establish a community of devotees. (The community at Sayla did not gather during Sobhagbhai's lifetime). It may also be recalled from Chapter Two that he is often described as the 'perfect disciple'. The inclusive use of Srimad and Lalluji's portraits represent the place these two men have in the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

Cort observed that at Shankheshvar Mahavir's image is placed between images of his two principal disciples, Gautama Svami and Sudharma Svami, and notes that it was these two disciples who perpetuated Mahavir's teachings following his transcendence to *mokṣa*.<sup>110</sup> The Srimad Rajcandra movement displays the same pattern of iconography. In the *svādhyāy* hall at Agas Srimad's photograph hangs between portraits of Lalluji and Brahmajariji. This marks the significance of these men in the spiritual heritage of that community. At Sayla Srimad's photograph hangs between portraits of Lalluji and Sobhagbhai, which reflects Sobhagbhai's importance at this site comparable to Brahmajariji's significance at Agas.<sup>111</sup> As mentioned, all of the gurus in Sayla's heritage are represented by portraits in the *svādhyāy* hall there, but Sobhagbhai's takes primary position next to Srimad's photograph. Lalluji and Sobhagbhai both perpetuated Srimad's teachings in the same way that Gautama Svami and Sudharma Svami

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<sup>110</sup> Cort 1992, p184.

<sup>111</sup> See plate 4 figure 6.



perpetuated Mahavir's teachings. Lalluji founded the community at Agas with its set formula for *bhakti*, and Sobhagbhai was the source of the *bij gnān* meditation technique practised by the community at Sayla. The portrait of Sobhagbhai at Sayla, and those of Brahmajariji and Lalluji at Agas, are visual signifiers of the local histories of these two communities. This is in contrast with the widespread display of Srimad and Lalluji's portraits which are visual signifiers of the universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

In the *svādhyāy* hall at Koba Srimad's photograph is flanked by portraits of Lalluji and Kundakundacarya.<sup>112</sup> Again this is a statement about the particular influence at that site. Kundakundacarya's literature was an early source of inspiration for Atmanandji and has continued to influence him throughout his spiritual career. When asked about the portraits, Atmanandji commented that Srimad's photograph is placed centrally because the ashram at Koba is in the tradition of Srimad Rajcandra, but that this does not indicate spiritual superiority. He believes Kundakundacarya to be Srimad's spiritual superior and that Srimad Rajcandra acknowledged this. Atmanandji admitted to having little knowledge of Lalluji beyond what is generally available, his photograph is present because Srimad accepted him as an excellent *muni* and because he was the only one of Srimad's disciples to be fully renounced. Atmanandji concluded,

“On the position of *ācārya* Kundakunda *svami* and Srimad Rajcandra, if the name of the institution is altered, it may be that the positioning of the photographs may be altered, or maybe that some other format of the framing or the set should be arranged - Mahavir

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<sup>112</sup> See plate 5 figure 7.

would be at the top [tracing vertically] then *ācārya* Kundakunda, then Srimad Rajcandra.

That's what absolute truth is.”<sup>113</sup>

Atmanandji's comments on the positioning of the portraits in the *svādhyāy* hall are interesting because they imply that a concession to the tradition of the Srimad Rajcandra movement has been made at Koba. Their positioning does not reflect the relationship the saints depicted have to each other, but instead reflects the relationship they have with the ashram as an institution. Srimad is a more accessible figure than Kundakundacarya, which is a likely reason why Atmanandji chose him to be the central figurehead of the ashram at Koba. The reasons why Srimad is more accessible are because of his historical proximity, the fact that he was local to Gujarat, the availability of his image, and the accessibility of his writings which, as explained in the previous section, are written in the vernacular.<sup>114</sup> These factors have had an accumulative effect because the very fact that ashrams and *mandirs* are dedicated to him contributes to his recognition and in turn to his accessibility.

### *The treatment of Srimad's image.*

The fact that Srimad made his image available to his disciples in the form of photographs suggests that he gave his consent for it to be used as an object of worship. Some devotees today are very uncomfortable with this idea. For example, Atmanandji corrected one of his disciples when she suggested that the photographs may have been taken without Srimad's knowledge or consent.<sup>115</sup> Another devotee, associated with Agas, suggested that Srimad consented to leave his

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<sup>113</sup> Personal interview, November 1999.

<sup>114</sup> That said, the Kanji Svami Panth make wide use of Kundakundacarya's writings many of which have been translated into Gujarati.

<sup>115</sup> Koba, November 1999.

photograph with his closest disciples as an act of compassion towards them, but that this should not be interpreted as consent for it to be the focus of image worship.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, it is an observable fact that Srimad's image is incorporated widely by followers into their devotional practices.

This was most evident at Rajkot in January 2002 during the opening celebrations of the *Samadhi Mandir*, a new temple dedicated to Srimad. The celebrations spanned three days and were organised by the community of Srimad's followers at Rajkot in close association with those at Agas and Vavania. These are three communities that do not accept the authority of current *pratyakṣ* gurus. However, Atmanandji, Nalinbhai and Rakeshbhai were invited and they attended along with many of their disciples, so the event at Rajkot was a significant 'coming together' for the different communities of Srimad's followers. A large marquee was erected to accommodate between two to three thousand people who gathered for two days of *bhakti* and speeches.<sup>117</sup> Large portraits of Srimad and Lalluji had been hung at the front of the marquee and a copy of *Atma Siddhi* was placed on a pedestal before them. At the end of the second day an auction was held. The highest bidders won a role in the *pūjā* ritual to install Srimad's photograph in the new temple the following day. Auctions such as this are customary in Jainism. The following day those present formed a long procession through the streets of Rajkot. Models depicting some of the scenes from Srimad's life described in Chapter Three were carried along with the procession, but more attention was paid to a metal statue of Srimad that was also conveyed by the procession.<sup>118</sup> This image had been borrowed from the existing temple in

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<sup>116</sup> Private communication, October 2001

<sup>117</sup> Numbers nearer five thousand were expected to attend, but, I was told, were reduced because another important Jain event was being held on the same dates.

<sup>118</sup> See plate 9 figure 17.

Rajkot to where it was returned after the celebrations. The images in the new temple were in the form of photographs, before which *ār̥ti* was performed as part of their installation ceremony.<sup>119</sup>

It is clear that the presence of a physical representation of Srimad, whether photograph or statue, is of great importance to the devotional practices of his followers. I came across no incidence of congregational or individual worship in which his image was absent, Srimad's image brings him, in a discernible way, into his devotees' domestic and collective places of worship. Srimad's photograph has an obvious place of dominance during congregational *bhakti* because it faces the congregation. Many devotees have a domestic shrine in their homes that provides a focus for their individual devotional practices. Domestic shrines may consist simply of a photograph of Srimad, or may also contain other components such as an image of a Tīrthaṅkar and photographs of the disciple's *pratyakṣ* guru.<sup>120</sup> They are often kept in a cupboard, or even a separate room if space allows, and kept closed when not in use. With the exception of *dravya pūjā* at Agas, described below, and the occasional use of garlands at other sites, Srimad's image is not adorned and devotees do not touch it routinely as part of their worship. Śvetāmbar Jains usually have physical contact with images of Jinas and other ascetics during *pūjā*, whereas Digambar Jains refrain from touching images.

The inclusive use of Srimad's image by his devotees is one factor that unifies them and that distinguishes them from other groups of Jains. However, there is a diversity of opinion amongst followers about the appropriate treatment of his image, specifically whether it should be consecrated and whether it should receive ritual attention. The refusal of Atmanandji's disciples to attend *ār̥ti* and *pūjā* at Bandhani, as described above, is one example of such difference of

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<sup>119</sup> See plate 10 figures 18 and 19.

<sup>120</sup> For examples of domestic shrines see plate 10 figure 20, plate 11 figures 21 and 22, plate 12 figures 23 and 24.

opinion. The source of this diversity seems to rest with each community's belief about the level of spiritual purity that Srimad attained. Two communities in which Srimad's image is consecrated and in receipt of ritual attention are Agas and Dharampur. It may be recalled from Chapter Three that both of these communities believe Srimad now to be in his final incarnation prior to *mokṣa*. The community at Agas believe Srimad to have attained *kevalgnān* and that he is almost Mahavir's, or any of the other Jinas', spiritual equal. In consonance with this belief, at Agas his image is consecrated and receives elaborate ritual attention in the form of daily *dravya pūjā* and *ārṭi* rituals. At Koba Atmanandji took a contrasting view, he suggested that Srimad may have attained the sixth *guṇasthān* and believes him now to be in *devlok* experiencing his penultimate incarnation. Atmanandji's comments about the positioning of the portraits in the *svādhyāy* hall at Koba explain his beliefs about Srimad's rank, relative to the Jinas, in the spiritual hierarchy. This clarifies why, at Koba, Srimad's photograph is not consecrated and receives no specific ritual attention.

*i) Consecration.*

Jina images are consecrated by a process called *anjan śālakā*. This ceremony, which can only be performed by a mendicant, involves the application of powder (*anjan*) to the image's eyes with a stick (*śālaka*).<sup>121</sup> A consecrated image is holy and auspicious and must receive daily ritual attention. In a quiet temple, if this is not performed by lay Jains then it will be performed by the *pūjāri* (the temple attendant, usually non-Jain). One Śvetāmbar temple that I visited in Sayla had become a temporary home to a number of images that had been rescued from temples destroyed

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<sup>121</sup> See Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p230.

in the earthquake of November 2000. They had been brought to Sayla where they could continue to receive appropriate ritual attention whilst their original temples were being rebuilt.

Consecration of the Jina idol and the ritual attention that the idol requires following consecration appear to be in tension with Jain concepts of theology. It has already been explained that the Jina is absent and does not engage with the mundane world. Therefore, no part of the Jina can reside within the image and the worshipper cannot engage in any transaction with the Jina. A candid response came from one mendicant whom Cort quizzed on the subject. He suggested that consecration rites were not strictly necessary and that *pūjā* could be fruitful even when an image was not consecrated. This is because the active agent during worship is the worshipper's *bhāṇ* (sentiment), which is the intensity of their devotional emotions. However, consecration is important because the worshipper is more likely to "believe in" a consecrated image which will enhance their *bhāṇ* and therefore the efficacy of the worship.<sup>122</sup> Consecration, and hence image-worship, is therefore validated by the role the consecrated image plays in worship. Worship before a consecrated image is of spiritual benefit to the worshipper because it heightens their feelings of reverence and humility. Consecration renders an image, or any other article, holy and special, and sets it apart from other mundane articles. It is an essential element in defining the nature and function of the image, but is performed for the benefit of the worshipper and not the worshipped. It is difficult to understand why *pūjā* must be performed to a consecrated image even in the absence of a worshipper, but perhaps the preservation of its holiness has some part in this.

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<sup>122</sup> Cort 1989, pages 418 to 419.

Lalluji consecrated Srimad's statues at Agas, as well as the Jina images at the site, using the *anjan śālakā* method described above and for which his mendicancy authorised him.<sup>123</sup> It is at Agas that Srimad's image receives the most elaborate ritual attention. Rakeshbhai has also consecrated images, in this case photographs, of Srimad during which he douses the image with quantities of *vāskep* powder.<sup>124</sup> One Mumbai couple who are disciples of Rakeshbhai hosted an elaborate event at their home to celebrate the installation of Srimad's photograph in their domestic shrine. The celebrations included *bhakti* in the form of hymn singing, Indian dancing and the symbolic release of caged birds bought from the market. As a token of renunciation the couple had also placed some items that were of material value to them in a small chamber behind the photograph, which was then cemented over. Rakeshbhai was the guest of honour and consecrated the shrine during the celebrations.<sup>125</sup>

Rakeshbhai's disciples explained that the nature of a given consecration differs, depending upon the circumstances of the image. A photograph that receives daily attention, for example the one in the *svādhyāy* hall at Dharampur, will have a different type of consecration from one in a domestic shrine belonging to a family that is often away from home.<sup>126</sup> Some disciples with whom I spoke perceived a quality in consecrated images even beyond that of holiness described above. One of Rakeshbhai's disciples described an incident during which the photograph in her domestic shrine "came to life" before her eyes. The metaphysical power of the photograph

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<sup>123</sup> Agas, December 2001.

<sup>124</sup> This is a mix of sandalwood and saffron, See Court 1989, p335.

<sup>125</sup> See plate 12 figure 24. The handprints on the right were made when Rakeshbhai spontaneously pressed his hands, which were covered in *vāskep* powder, onto the shirt of the disciple who hosted the event. The disciple then had the shirt framed and mounted next to the shrine.

<sup>126</sup> Dhampur December 2001.

convinced her of Srimad's worthiness for veneration, of which she had been uncertain until then.<sup>127</sup>

Atmanadji also performed installation ceremonies for his disciples' domestic shrines, but these were described in terms of 'inauguration' rather than 'consecration'. Those present during the inauguration of a simple domestic shrine at Khambat sat on the floor in front of the shrine singing hymns, while Atmanandji wrote the Jain symbol for 'aum' in red paste on the wall.<sup>128</sup> Then the photograph of Srimad was hung in place over the symbol. The ceremony was an obvious mark of respect to Srimad by Atmanandji and the assembled devotees. Atmanadji's contribution had made the event of the photograph's installation a special occasion and this would now be a place that Atmanandji's disciples would want to come and visit. However, I was told that the photograph had not been given any special power.

ii) *Ritual attention.*

The consecration or non-consecration of Srimad's image effects the degree of ritual attention it is given. The metal image of Srimad at Agas receives *dravya pūjā* early every morning. The *pūjāri* usually performs the rite alone and is not accompanied by devotees, who should be engaged in their morning *bhakti*.<sup>129</sup> First the debris from the previous day is cleared away. Next the image and its surround are dusted with a brush made from peacock feathers. The image is wiped with a damp cloth to remove the previous day's sandalwood marks, then it is buffed with a soft dry cloth. Using the third finger of his right hand the *pūjāri* makes marks with sandalwood

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<sup>127</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

<sup>128</sup> See plate 10 figure 20.

<sup>129</sup> Three *pūjāris* are currently employed by the Shrimad Rajcandra Ashram at Agas, two of whom have become devotees of Srimad since their employment there.



paste on the two big toes and the forehead of the image. The image does not warrant all thirteen marks that it is customary for Jina images to receive on nine parts of the body because Srimad is still embodied and has not yet attained *mokṣa*.<sup>130</sup> The *pūjāri* then places one flower on the head of the image and three at its base, by the statue's feet. Then he lights two incense sticks and places one either side of the image. Once the *pūjāri* has completed the ritual, which takes about ten minutes, the image is ready for devotees to take *darśan* of it. On the morning that I attended, five devotees had already gathered by the time the *pūjāri* had completed his task.<sup>131</sup>

There are other instances in Jainism in which *pūjā* is modified to acknowledge that the being represented by the image has not attained *mokṣa*. For example, Cort records a *pūjā* during which Parsvanath's tutelary deities, Padmavati and Dharanendra, received only four sandalwood marks).<sup>132</sup> Guru *pūjā* is a rite during which lay devotees venerate living renouncers by anointing the renouncer's toe with *vāṣkeṇ* or sandalwood powder.<sup>133</sup> Cort recalls a heated debate that occurred amongst the Tappa Gacch in Gujarat in 1989. The cause of the controversy was the desire of some devotees to perform a nine-limbed *pūjā* to their living guru Acarya Ramcandrasuri. Opponents regarded this as sacrilegious because it appeared to them that Acarya Ramcandrasuri was claiming the status of a Tīrthaṅkar.<sup>134</sup> In comparison with the devotional zeal of Acarya Ramcandrasuri's devotees, the restraint executed by Srimad's devotees at Agas in their puja of Srimad demonstrates their commitment to the orthodox spiritual hierarchy, even though they believe Srimad to have attained *kevalgnān*.

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<sup>130</sup> Jina images are marked with sandalwood paste on their two big toes, two wrists, two shoulders, top of the head, forehead, throat, chest/heart and navel (Cort 1989, p367).

<sup>131</sup> Agas, December 2001.

<sup>132</sup> Cort 1989, p384.

<sup>133</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p270.

<sup>134</sup> Cort 1989, pages 331 to 332.

The marble image of Srimad in the guru *mandir* is not the object of *dravya pūjā* because it is encased in perspex, but this and the metal *image* are the object of *ārti* and *devo* rituals. These two rituals first take place at six o'clock in the evening before the Jina images in the Jain temples at the site. Then devotees spill out to either the guru *mandir* or to the shrine that contains the metal image of Srimad. Here they perform *ārti* followed by *devo* before the image. During *ārti* five small candles, which represent five types of knowledge, are placed on a tray and waved in a circular motion before the image.<sup>135</sup> During *devo* only one candle, representing pure knowledge (*kevalgnān*) is placed on the tray. As described in Chapter Two, all the portraits, statues and shrines at Agas associated with Srimad, Lalluji and Brahmacariji are attended daily by a *pūjāri* who places a fresh flower and incense stick by each, but only Srimad's statues receive *pūjā*, *ārti* and *devo*.<sup>136</sup> The consecration and ritual attention of Srimad's image reflects the spiritual hierarchy at Agas. Lalluji and Brahmacariji are revered as self realised people there, but only Srimad is venerated as a guru of divine status.

The attention Srimad's image received at Dharampur took a different form to that at Agas. When Rakeshbhai entered the *svādhyāy* hall for evening *bhakti* he first knelt before Srimad's photograph and placed his head on the footprint shrine below it. This is an often performed act of humility that humbles the disciple and venerates the guru. It demonstrates recognition on behalf of the disciple that their highest part, which is their head including their mind and intellect, is lower than the lowest part, the feet, of their guru. Rakeshbhai then lit a small candle that he placed next to the photograph. He also lit an incense stick with which he described three

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<sup>135</sup> The five types of knowledge are sensory, reasoning, clairvoyant, telepathy and omniscience (Jaini 1998, pages 121 to 122).

<sup>136</sup> The Jina images in the two Jain temples there also receive the appropriate ritual attention.

circles in front of Srimad's photograph before setting it beside the photograph to burn out.<sup>137</sup> As mentioned above, the single flame represents knowledge. The fragrance of the incense represents a saint's teachings and the ash produced represents the burning away of karma through the application of those teachings.<sup>138</sup> *Ārti* was performed once during my visit at Dharampur, as part of a special ceremony for newly married couples.

### *Function of Shrimad's image.*

Although consecration affects the treatment of Srimad's image, it seems to make little difference to its actual function, or to the ways in which followers use it. Image worship is inherent to much Jain and Hindu religious practice. Jainism in particular has a culture of devotional expression through the construction of ornate temples and the installation of images therein. After Srimad's death his followers were at liberty to idealise his life and religious achievements. As part of this process they have likewise built temples and memorials, and installed images to demonstrate their adoration of him. Even where Srimad's image is not the object of specific ritual attention it is the object of devotees' veneration. Followers, including *pratyakṣ* gurus, always bow before it when entering a *svādhyāy* hall or guru *mandir*.

Jains perform acts of worship for one of two reasons. These are to gain material reward or to gain soteriological benefit. Jains worship Jina images to gain soteriological benefit, but know not expect grace or material boons from the Jina in return for their veneration. This is because no transactional exchange occurs between the Jain and the Jina as an object of veneration. The reasons for this are that having attained *mokṣa*, the Jina is absent and has no dealings with the

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<sup>137</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

<sup>138</sup> Dharampur, December 2001.

mundane world, and also because, being renounced, the Jina has nothing to give the worshipper. A Jain's veneration of the Jinas is reflexive and emulatory.<sup>139</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, the transformative agent during worship is *bhāv* which is generated by the worshipper and effects only the worshipper. Babb suggests that during a *pūjā* ritual the worshipper emulates the Jina's renunciation by "giving up", or abandoning, the ritual 'offerings'.<sup>140</sup> In describing the rite of *Caitya Vandan* (adoration of the Jina) Cort explains that,

"The praises of this rite are very consciously not praises the Jina, for the Jina cannot respond to such praises. The Jina cannot interact with the worshipper. Therefore, the praises are of the Jina, and of the qualities embodied by the Jina."<sup>141</sup>

This means that Jains often turn to other deities to meet material needs. For example, some Jains that I knew in Mumbai (not devotees of Srimad) followed-up their routine visit to the Jain temple with a visit to a Hindu temple, in this instance dedicated to Ganesh, with the explanation that Hindu gods may respond to material requests that the Jinas cannot heed.<sup>142</sup> Jains routinely venerate the Jinas' tutelary deities in the hope of material reward, images of whom are found in most Jain temples.<sup>143</sup> Other beings, such as *bhairus* (warrior incarnations of Siva), *bhumiyas* ("lords of the soil"), and *kshetrapals* ("guardians of the place") are worshipped by Jains and Hindus alike in the hope of gaining boons. Laidlaw writes of all these deities,

"They are said to perform miracles - marvels (*camatkar*) or proofs (*parcya*) of their divinity. They guard Jain temples, and inflict illness and misfortune on those who show

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<sup>139</sup> Babb 1998, p150.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid p150.

<sup>141</sup> Cort 1989, p356.

<sup>142</sup> See Laidlaw 1995, pages 284 to 286 for a discussion of the veneration of Ganesh in Jainism.

<sup>143</sup> For a discussion on tutelary deities in Jainism see Jaini 1991, pages 187 to 199.

disrespect to the religion. Lay Jains pray and make vows to them to obtain worldly success and for their help in destroying enemies.”<sup>144</sup>

Cort suggests that such deities became accepted into Jainism specifically in acknowledgement of the fact that the laity expected some material benefit from their acts of worship, and to safeguard the Jinas from being looked-to for such provision, thus protecting the Jinas’ ontological status and soteriological role.<sup>145</sup>

Some Jains also venerate non-liberated ascetics with the expectation of receiving boons that they would not expect to receive from the Tīrthaṅkars. The Dādāgurus are a prominent example, images of whom receive the same type of puja ritual as the Tīrthaṅkars’ images.<sup>146</sup> Babb writes,

“The general view of the Dādāgurus is that they will give you wealth, health, success in business, or any of your heart’s desires (*manokāmnās*)”.<sup>147</sup>

The Dādāgurus are able to engage in a transactional exchange with the worshipper because they are not yet liberated. Srimad is similar to the Dādāgurus because, like them, he is an ascetic who, it is believed, is yet to attain *mokṣa*. Yet devotees’ attitudes towards the veneration of Srimad’s image is more like that of the Jina images than the Dādāgurus. He is regarded as non-transactional, devotees do not expect to gain material boons or grace from him, and the nature of their worship is reflexive and emulatory.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Laidlaw 1995, p65.

<sup>145</sup> Cort 1989, pages 405 to 406.

<sup>146</sup> Babb 1996, pages 126 to 130. See also Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, pages 172 and 230, note 8.

<sup>147</sup> Babb 1996, p126. See also Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p172. For a discussion on the Dādāgurus’ ability to perform miracles see Laidlaw 1995, pages 74 to 77.

<sup>148</sup> Babb makes an interesting comparison between Pustimarg Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Jain ritual cultures. He concludes that greater parallels are found between Śaiva and Jain ritual cultures because in both cases the objects of worship

That a worshipper's attitude towards, and expectation of their veneration of a Jina's image and of Srimad's image is similar should not automatically lead to the assumption that Srimad has been elevated to a status equivalent to the Jinas. Even at Agas, where his community of devotees believe him to have attained *kevalgnān*, the *pūjā* his image receives is modified to indicate his un-liberated state. Throughout the course of my research no devotee volunteered that - by now - Srimad may have actually attained *mokṣa*. Srimad's image is regarded in the same way as a Jina's image not because Srimad is the same as a Jina, but because his image has the same function as the Jina's image. The objective of his devotees' veneration of him is soteriological and not material. They worship Srimad because they want to become like the object of their veneration, a self realised person. They hope to achieve this, in part, by emulating the ideals that Srimad's represents. The presence of Srimad's image during followers' practices of *bhakti*, *svādhyāy* and *dhyān* is a reminder to them of his qualities and spiritual achievement, the same qualities that they hope to cultivate by their own religious practice, and is therefore a visual aid for his devotees' emulation of him. The nature of devotees' veneration is reflexive. Their spiritual transformation depends upon them generating the correct *bhāṇ*. As a focal point of their religious practices, Srimad's image assists devotees in generating *bhāṇ* and therefore has a similar effect to the consecrated Jina images discussed by the mendicant that Cort interviewed, as noted above.

The idea that Srimad's image fulfils the same function as the Jina's image raises a question over its necessity. Why not simply venerate before images of the Jinas? Jina images are objects of veneration for Srimad's followers, however the reasons why Srimad's image is also necessary

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"transact thinly, not thickly with devotees" (1998, pages 151 to 156; and 1996, pages 177 to 184). A similar comparison is made here between Srimad and the Jinas.

lay with his teachings about guru *bhakti* discussed in Chapter Four. It was shown in that chapter that, as long as a guru has the religious authority of self realisation, being in close proximity with the guru is of greater benefit to the aspirant than the actual level of the guru's spiritual purity. For this reason the devotee has a greater obligation to the present guru than to the absent Jina. Although Srimad is now absent, his proximity to the devotee is relatively closer than that of the Jina. Chapter Four explained that some devotees regard him as a *pratyakṣ* guru. Factors that have contributed to this are the presence of his writings, his image and the fact that he is a contemporary figure. So, Srimad's image is venerated because he is of greater benefit to devotees than the Jinās are with respect to their immediate goal of self realisation. However, this should not be taken to mean that the Jinās have been sidelined, but rather that they and Srimad are complementary to an aspirant's soteriological progression. The most obvious reason why Srimad's image takes a prominent role in the lives and religious practices of his followers is because he is their supreme guru and the presence of his physical image is an expression of their devotion to him.

## Conclusions



## Conclusions

In the Introduction to this thesis the two objectives of the study were outlined as; to contribute to the field of Jain studies by presenting data on one particular branch - the Srimad Rajcandra movement - and to analyse how the organisational structure of the movement has been influenced by its origins and historical development. This thesis has fulfilled the first objective by its exposure of this previously unstudied group of Jains. Data about the origins and structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement, and the beliefs and practices of its membership, is presented here for the first time in an academic study. The movement is a recent development in the history of Jainism and so the issues raised in this study are directly relevant to an understanding of modern Jainism.

The second objective of this thesis has been met by the way in which the data has been presented. The description of the organisational structure of the movement given in Chapter Two revealed it to be a nexus of communities and individual followers that, in the absence of a central administrative body, are autonomous and independent. Each community was shown to have its own local history arising from its particular origins and development, as well as its own interpretation of Srimad's teachings. The subsequent chapters of the thesis considered reasons for the movement's particular organisational structure by examining some factors of its historical development. Srimad's influence as a religious icon was discussed in Chapter Three, the impact of his teachings about self realisation and guru *bhakti* were discussed in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five considered the legacies of his writings and his image. The overall picture of the movement drawn from the data presented is that it is an organisation of unity and diversity. The formative influences discussed in this thesis are internal, which means they have arisen from

within the origin and historical development of the movement itself. An obvious next step for this research would be an examination of external influences, those arising out of India's social, religious and political climate during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The fragmented organisational structure of the Srimad Rajcandra movement, and the diversity of beliefs and practices amongst its members, raises the question of whether it may justifiably be described as a 'movement' at all. This thesis has argued that such a description is justified by the factors that unite Srimad's followers and which distinguish them from other groups of Jains. These factors are identified in this thesis as ideology, scripture and image. Ideology is centred around Srimad's life and teachings. The universal history of the Srimad Rajcandra movement, to which all followers subscribe, is an account of Srimad's life that confirms to his devotees his high level of spiritual purity and hence his religious authority. All his followers accept and practice his teachings about self realisation and guru *bhakti*, even though they interpret these teachings in a variety of ways. The elevation of Srimad's writings to scripture is a tangible statement of devotees' acceptance of his religious authority. Their veneration of his image is an expression of their devotion to him and of their commitment to guru *bhakti*. Reference to Srimad's writings as scripture and the use of his image in worship are unique to his followers and so distinguish them from other Jains. A description of the Srimad Rajcandra movement must recognise the characteristics of its organisation and embrace the cohesion and the diversity that it displays.

The factors that have served to unite Srimad's following into a movement are the same essential factors that have helped to give rise to it. Devotion to Srimad is the most fundamental unifying factor of his following, but his existence alone, even as a person of remarkable spirituality, is not

in itself sufficient for the inception and propagation of a religious movement. His role as a religious icon has been established, in part, by the publication and distribution of his image and his writings, in which his teachings are preserved. It is due to these factors that followers have been made aware of his religious message and personal example. Srimad is the progenitor of his ideology, scripture and image, but it is his disciples who were responsible for their preservation and dissemination. The activities of Srimad's disciples is therefore a further essential factor in the origin of the Srimad Rajcandra movement. In addition to the publication and dissemination of his writings and his image, disciples' actions include the proselytising efforts of Lalluji and the foundation of Agas, the origin of the guru lineage at Sayla with Sobhagbhai, the foundation of various guru-centred communities by *pratyakṣ* gurus who teach in his name, and the building of numerous temples and memorials by his following. These are all factors that have helped to publicise Srimad and his message, and so have contributed to the development and growth of the movement.

Each community of followers described in this thesis reported a steady rise in membership. The continued increase in Srimad's following, a century after his death, suggests that his teachings, and the ways in which they are implemented, are addressing a need amongst those Jains who choose to accept them. This point is magnified by the fact that Srimad is not part of an existing Jain sect and so his followers, particularly the first generation, must have taken a deliberate turn towards him. A closer look at some of the Srimad Rajcandra movement's characteristics, brought to light by this thesis, reveals something about the nature of these needs. The movement has shown itself to be an organisation of lay Jains who take an intellectual approach to their religion, in which lay gurus have religious authority and mendicants have been marginalised, and in which soteriology has been refocused as a concern of the laity.

These characteristics are interrelated. The majority of Srimad's followers who I met were intelligent and motivated people who sought a greater justification for their religious practices than the perpetuation of tradition, which is the opinion many of them had of their religious attitude prior to following Srimad. As Srimad's devotees, their religious practices were not motivated by a sense of commitment to tradition alone, but by a belief in their efficacy for the attainment of self realization leading to liberation. Most had a sophisticated intellectual understanding of the relationship between their religious practices and liberation. The religious outlook of these Jains is met and encouraged by Srimad's teachings about self realisation as an attainable goal. Their intellectual approach to their religion is satisfied by the prominent role of the guru in Srimad's teachings as someone with indisputable religious authority to guide them to self realisation. The Srimad Rajcandra movement is therefore attractive to its members because it satisfies them intellectually and spiritually. This is not an indication that other forms of Jainism do not meet these needs for their own members, but rather that Srimad's followers are particularly attracted by the elements offered by the Srimad Rajcandra movement.

The various reasons for the Srimad Rajcandra movement's development as a lay organisation have been stated clearly throughout this thesis as his followers' general scepticism of sectarianism, of which they regard mendicants to be representatives, as their dubiety of mendicants' religious authority and as Srimad's own lay status. Srimad's lay status is probably the most influential of these causes because it prohibited him from initiating his disciples and prevents current followers from taking initiation, as this would theoretically place them higher than their guru in the spiritual hierarchy. Lalluji is the only one of Srimad's mendicant followers whose self realised status is endorsed, but he did not initiate a new order of mendicants in the tradition of Srimad Rajcandra, perhaps because he did not want to divert attention from Srimad

as the supreme guru. The influence of Shrimad's lay status on the movement as a lay organisation is indisputable, but it is also incidental. Srimad died before he was able to fulfil his personal aspirations to mendicancy. The effects on his following had he taken *dīkṣā* and lived a full life may only be speculated upon, but what is of interest to this discussion are the reasons why the Srimad Rajcandra movement, as a lay organisation, attracts members. My suggestion is that lay gurus are in a better position than mendicant teachers to meet the needs of Srimad's followers described above. The reasons for this are assurance of religious authority and continued accessibility.

When the major objective of religious practice is soteriological, as it is for Srimad's followers, it is vital that the religious authority of one's guru is certain. It may be recalled that Srimad's principal, religious instruction to the aspirant of self realisation is devotion to a 'true' (self realised) guru, whilst he warned that heeding a 'false' (non self realised) guru will result in spiritual devastation. The traditional keepers of religious authority in Jainism are mendicants, but in the Srimad Rajcandra movement mendicants have been sidelined in favour of lay gurus, namely Srimad himself, and for some followers also a living guru. One reason for this is that the devotee can be sure of the lay guru's religious authority, whereas the authority of a mendicant teacher is speculative. A major cause of doubt over mendicant authority is sectarianism, which, it is believed, cannot reflect the universal truth of self realisation. That Srimad's self realised state is beyond doubt is proven to devotees by the example of his life and teachings, to which they have access through his writings. The religious authority of a *pratyakṣ* lay guru can be assessed by the disciple over a sustained period of contact until the disciple is certain of the guru's authenticity. This is because the lay guru is stationary, unlike mendicants whose lifestyle is peripatetic and which means a layperson's contact with them is sporadic. A mendicant's

religious authority has to be assumed on the basis that she or he is a mendicant. The disciple in a sustained guru-disciple relationship has the opportunity to be reassured of the guru's religious authority by observing their character and noticing the efficacy of their religious instructions. Therefore a lay guru, whether Srimad or a *pratyakṣ* guru, is preferable because the disciple can be certain of their religious authority in an age when they believe this cannot be assured by mendicancy alone.

The disciple feels able to confirm the religious authority of a *pratyakṣ* lay guru because this guru is stationary and so more accessible to the disciple than the wandering mendicant. The stationary lay guru is also in a better position to cater for disciples' intellectual spiritual needs than the mendicant who they may only meet from time to time. The lay guru is the disciple's personal religious preceptor, with whom they can develop a personal relationship, and who is constantly available to engage in discourse and to resolve any spiritual difficulties. The intellectual spiritual needs of the devotee are therefore better served by a stationary guru with whom they can develop a close relationship and who can direct their religious progression step by step, than by a peripatetic guru who may represent the religious ideal, but who is generally inaccessible. For those devotees who do not follow a *pratyakṣ* guru Srimad's own teachings fulfil this role.

The factors of a guru's secure religious authority and accessibility to the devotee meet the combined needs of soteriology and intellectualism described above. Only the 'true' guru can direct the disciple towards self realisation, and only the guru who is permanently available can offer sustained religious guidance. Therefore, by placing religious authority with lay gurus the Srimad Rajcandra movement can offer members purposeful guidance towards liberation, a guru whose religious authority is secure and, in the case of those devotees who are disciples of a

*pratyakṣ* guru, a stationary guru with whom they can have an interactive relationship and who is a permanent source of religious instruction.

The refusal of the Srimad Rajcandra movement to accept mendicant authority has set it apart from most other forms of Jainism and is one of the principal criticisms levied against it by those Jains who are not Srimad's followers. Srimad's concern that mendicants were falling short of the religious ideal they are supposed to represent is by no means rare. The history of Jainism includes a catalogue of reformers who have sought to re-establish a 'pure' form of the religion by returning to the original teachings and values laid down by Mahavir, as they perceived them. Srimad's teachings that place religious authority with the universal experience of self realisation is his attempt to enlighten his devotees about the 'true' message of Jainism, before it became corrupted by ignorance. Srimad was an idealist who strove to live by his spiritual ideals, rather than a realist who recognised that if Jainism was to survive and propagate, concessions had to be made to its strict religious standards. He falls into the school of reform that looks back to a pure, 'golden age'. However, continuity necessitates change and a tradition that does not evolve with its changing environment atrophies and dies. Although Srimad felt that he was representing a pure form of Jainism, the movement that has evolved in his wake, particularly because it has evolved as a lay movement, is actually an example of the 'modern face' of Jainism.

Through the Srimad Rajcandra movement Jainism has adapted to address the changing needs of Jains in the modern world. Followers' desires for a greater intellectual understanding of their religion is one example of this. As a lay organisation the movement is of particular importance to the development of diaspora Jain communities. Jains living outside India suffer the consequences of the travel restrictions placed on initiated mendicants and have to re-negotiate

patterns of social order and religious authority in the absence of mendicant supervision.<sup>1</sup> Some Jain leaders have recently begun to acknowledge the need of diaspora communities. One notable example is the famous Terapanthi leader Acarya Mahaprajna (born 1920). Amongst his various projects to raise the profile of Jainism Acarya Mahaprajna authorised selected semi-mendicant followers to travel abroad to visit Jain communities. Chitrabhanu is another example. He gave up his mendicant status and emigrated to USA where he is now a celebrated guru with an extensive following, and where he has established many Jain centres.

Acarya Mahaprajna and Chitrabhanu are two examples in which Jainism has reached out intentionally to Jains living outside of India. The Srimad Rajcandra movement, and also the Kanji Svami Panth, are organised lay movements that did not originate with an intention of serving diaspora Jains, but which are particularly suited to this because they do not rely on initiated mendicants for their religious authority. *Pratyakṣ* gurus in the Srimad Rajcandra movement are not curbed by travel restrictions. They travel abroad regularly to maintain links with communities of their disciples who live outside India. These visits also raise awareness amongst the broader Jain community. Also, because whilst in India these gurus are static and based at an ashram it is convenient for disciples to travel to India to spend time with their guru, Atmanandji and Nalinbhai have many disciples living abroad, and so the ashrams at Koba and Sayla both hold annual 'foreigners' *śibirs* that specifically welcome disciples from overseas. Therefore, members of the Srimad Rajcandra movement who do not live in India do not suffer the same lack of an authoritative spiritual presence as those Jains who continue to look to mendicants to fulfil these requirements but who, due to their vows restricting travel, are unable to meet them. Just as it was not Srimad's intention to establish a lay movement in Jainism, it was

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Jains in Leicester, UK see Banks 1992.



not his intention to promulgate Jainism outside of India. It may be recalled that he refused an invitation to visit London. Nevertheless, the particular qualities of the Srimad Rajcandra movement means that it has transferred well to diaspora communities.

Association with the Srimad Rajcandra movement is a medium by which diaspora Jains can re-forge links with their ethnic origins. A prominent example of this is the enthusiasm amongst some young Jains in London to learn Gujarati. Most British Jains are of Gujarati descent and most have parents or grandparents who came from Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya in East Africa.<sup>2</sup> Many of the British Jains I met had arrived in the UK via this route, which inevitably left some of them with a sense of national displacement. In some cases a desire to improve their religious understanding has re-established their links with India. One example is a disciple of Atmanandji, a Gujarati speaking Jain who was born in East Africa, but who moved to Britain when she was in her thirties (she is now in her sixties). A family bereavement focused her thoughts more sharply on religion. After a degree of searching she became attached to Atmanandji as a guru. She had listened to cassettes of his religious discourses and attended his lectures whilst he was in London in the 1980s. Her husband also became disciple of Atmanandji. It was their religious interest that drew them to India rather than familial or cultural concerns. Familial visits regularly take them back to Kenya. They now own a flat at Koba ashram and spend a substantial part of the year there. Further, one of their grown-up daughters is, in a gentler way, following her parents' interests and visiting India more frequently. This interest is being passed on to her school-age children who have visited India during family holidays. This disciple's rediscovery of her Jain

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<sup>2</sup> Banks 1991, p242. Banks qualifies that these Jains are British nationals, but that they originate ethnically from Gujarat.

identity through her devotion to Atmanandji and to Srimad has filtered through the generations of her family who are themselves rediscovering their Indian roots.

# Appendices

## Appendix One.

### Appendix One

Transcript of the marble slab at Srimad Rajcandra Ashram, Agas, which list the vows the aspirant should take, Translation by Harshad Sanghrajka, 2002.

### AUM

Obeisance is at all times: past, present and future, with the highest devotion, to the giver of a unique refuge and the holder of the highest compassion, Shrimad Rajcandra the true spiritual guide.

The super-compassionate, true, divine, spiritual guide, Srimad Rajcandra, with his infinite compassion, gave that great chant and daily order of ritualistic performance which is the essence of the 14 *pūrvas* (scriptures deemed to be derived preceding the life of Mahavir and no longer extant) to the Most Venerable Prabhusriji with a directive that the same be given as a duty to all those who are desirous of benediction for the liberation of their soul. This directive was later delegated to Venerable Brahmajariji. At present, since there is nobody authorised to administer this order, all those devotees who are desirous of the benediction of liberation should perform the duties as prescribed by the Most Venerable Prabhusriji and described hereunder.

Chanting of *Mantra*:

*“Sahajātma svarūp param guru”*

This auspicious *mantra* has miraculous powers. Remembering it, recalling it, reciting it, driving one's mental inclination towards it, all result in the destruction of millions of past karmas and

give rise to auspicious sentiments which in turn augur auspicious re-birth and liberation. If at the time of death, one is inclined to chant or hear this *mantra*, then, it improves the transmigration and re-birth and also becomes a potent reason for liberation from the cycle of death and re-birth (*samsāra*). It is well-worth turning the beads of the rosary 3 or 5 times, chanting this mantra, as a daily duty.

#### Daily Order:-

Recite the 20 verses of devotion, the hymn of *Yama-Niyama* and recite the lesson of plea for forgiveness everyday. This will result in the destruction of millions of past karmas; and in auspicious re-birth. You have come alone. You will depart alone. Only the religious righteousness created by devotion will accompany you. If you desire bliss for the soul, then wealth will not accompany you but only the auspicious sentiments born of devotion and devotional songs will accompany you. It will destroy many potential re-births. Therefore, this is a duty. It will render this life-time, in the human realm, successful.

#### Renunciation of 7 Vices:-

- 1 Gambling
2. Consumption of non-vegetarian food
3. Consumption of alcohol
4. Theft of the grosser kind
5. Association with prostitutes
6. Hunting (fishing, bird catching, etc.)

## 7. Association with other than one's own wife (husband)

Renunciation of these 7 vices is a duty.

Renunciation of 7 edibles not considered as fit for consumption:-

- 1 Fruits of vaḍa (banyan tree)
2. Fruits of pipal tree
3. Fruits of pipalā tree
4. Umardam
5. Añjīra (figs)
6. Madha (honey)
7. Mākhana (Fresh clotted cream)

Renunciation of these 7 “un-eatables” is a duty.

## Appendix Two

Reference 680 in *Srimad Rajcandra*. A personal note written by Srimad.

**Translation by Harshad Sanghrajka, 2002.**

**Mumbai, Chaitra Sud 13, 1952 (VS) (1896 CE)**

Aum!

Upon one who had no desire or craving for anything except *mokṣa* and because of uninterrupted self-absorption even the desire for *mokṣa* has become dormant, Oh God! What could you bestow if you were pleased?

O Merciful! Your indivisible self is my abode, and now, there, 'we' are relieved from the vain activities of taking and giving and that alone is our supreme bliss.

Nescient beings who do not understand the path of beneficence or the 'self' according to reality, who, assuming the path of salvation as imagined by their senses, although initiated in various recourses do not get liberated but instead are roaming in the cycle of death and rebirth. Knowing thus, 'our' heart weeps with selfless compassion.<sup>1</sup>

Ignoring the presently perceptible Veer, roaming in the delusions of the past to find Veer; how can such beings ever perceive Sri Mahavir?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Srimad is referring to himself in the third person.

<sup>2</sup> Srimad is using 'Veer' as a shortened form of 'Mahavir'.

O unfortunate souls (beings) of the painful era! Discard the delusions of the past and take refuge unto the presently perceptible Mahavir, that certainly is your good fortune.

Distressed by the afflictions of the cycle of death and rebirth and desirous of liberation from the bondage of karma; to beings who are fond of reality and anxious to find the path, 'we' are the ocean of nectar to douse the intense heat of the trio of fires.

'We' are the tree capable of granting all desires for the benefit of beings desirous of liberation.

What else is there to say? In this age of distress, we are the second Sri Ram or Sri Mahavir because 'we' have gained the status of Supreme Being.

This declaration of inner experience is not as a result of the rise of egotism born of the belief in supremacy from self realisation, but is inspired by the selfless compassion towards the pitiable and suffering karma - bound beings of the world, for their uplift and emancipation.

Aum Sri Mahavir (Personal).



### Appendix Three

Reference 265 in *Srimad Rajcandra*.

Translation by Harshad Sanghrajka, 2002.

#### What is the Seed of Omniscience?

Ralaj, 1947 (1890 CE)

You observed your precepts, discipline and restraints.

And again, practised boundless renunciation and detachment.

Lived in the forest and observed total silence.

Sat firmly in the lotus posture.

You practised mental restrain and breath control.

With hatha yoga you thought of the soul.

You recited mantras and practised austerities.

Mentally you cultivated apathy for all [material] things.

You learned all scriptures from different view-points

And were able to establish and demolish various views.

These remedies were practised infinite times,

Yet to date nothing has been gained.

Why not think in your mind, now

Is there anymore to be gained from those remedies?

Without the true preceptor nobody understands the mystery.

Bliss is with [in] you, what more to explain?

I feel compassionate towards you.

That matter is of understanding the true preceptor.

The mystery [of the soul] will reveal itself to your face

When your true love is firmly established at the feet of the true preceptor.

With body, mind, wealth and all else

The preceptor's command resides in the soul.

Then your efforts will be successful

And you will receive the nectar of eternal life in the form of intimate love.

That nectar of truth is expressed,

Is obtained when the intelligent finger points to it.

The nectar of the invisible divinity is drunk,

Grasping that opportunity, he [the aspirant] lives forever.

The flow of climactic affection with God increases.

The mysteries of the scriptures reside in the heart.

The learned call it the seed of omniscience.

Experience has shown this to me.

Srimad Rajcandra

## Plates

## Plate 1

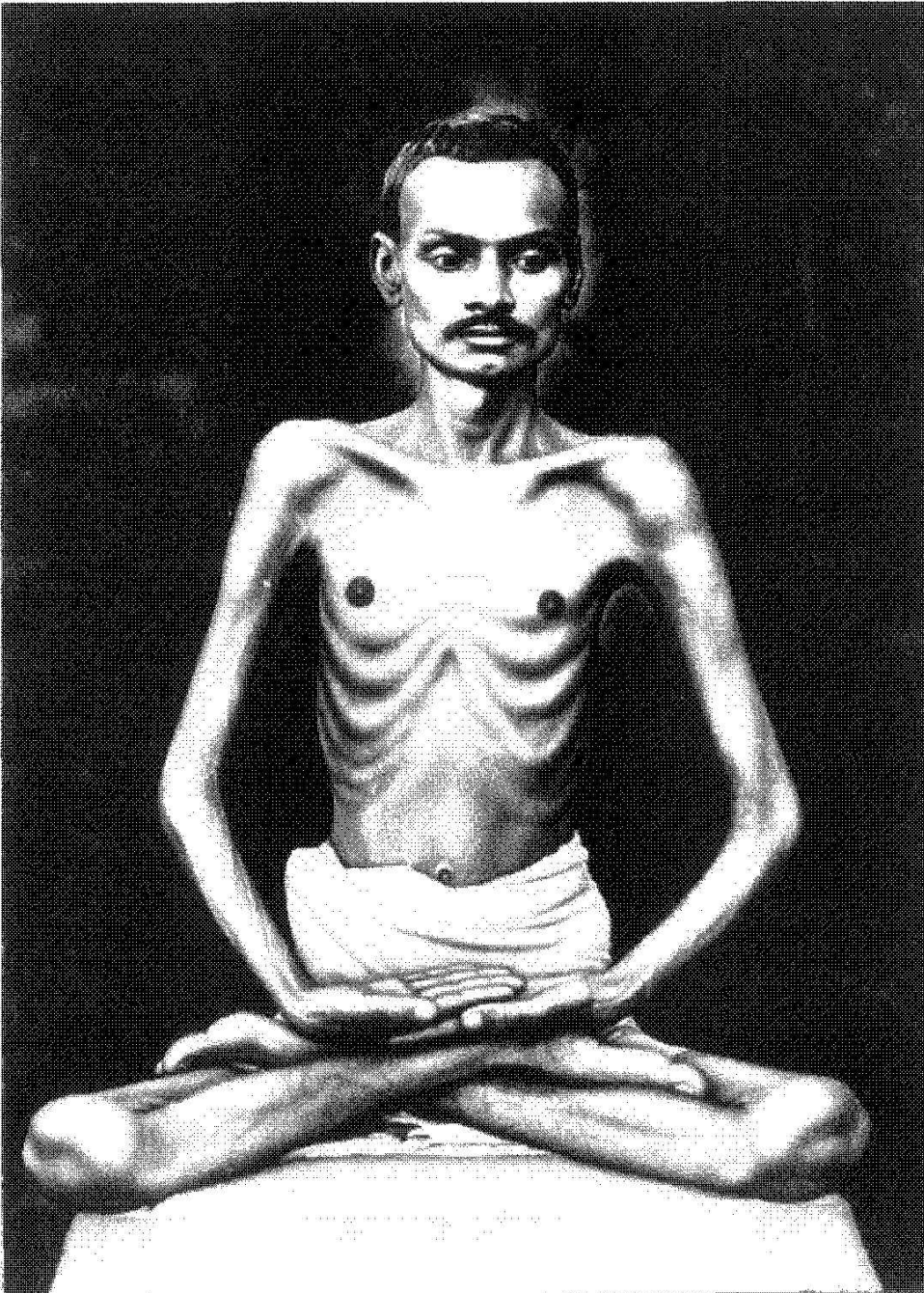


Figure 1. Portrait of Srimad Rajcandra

## Plate 2

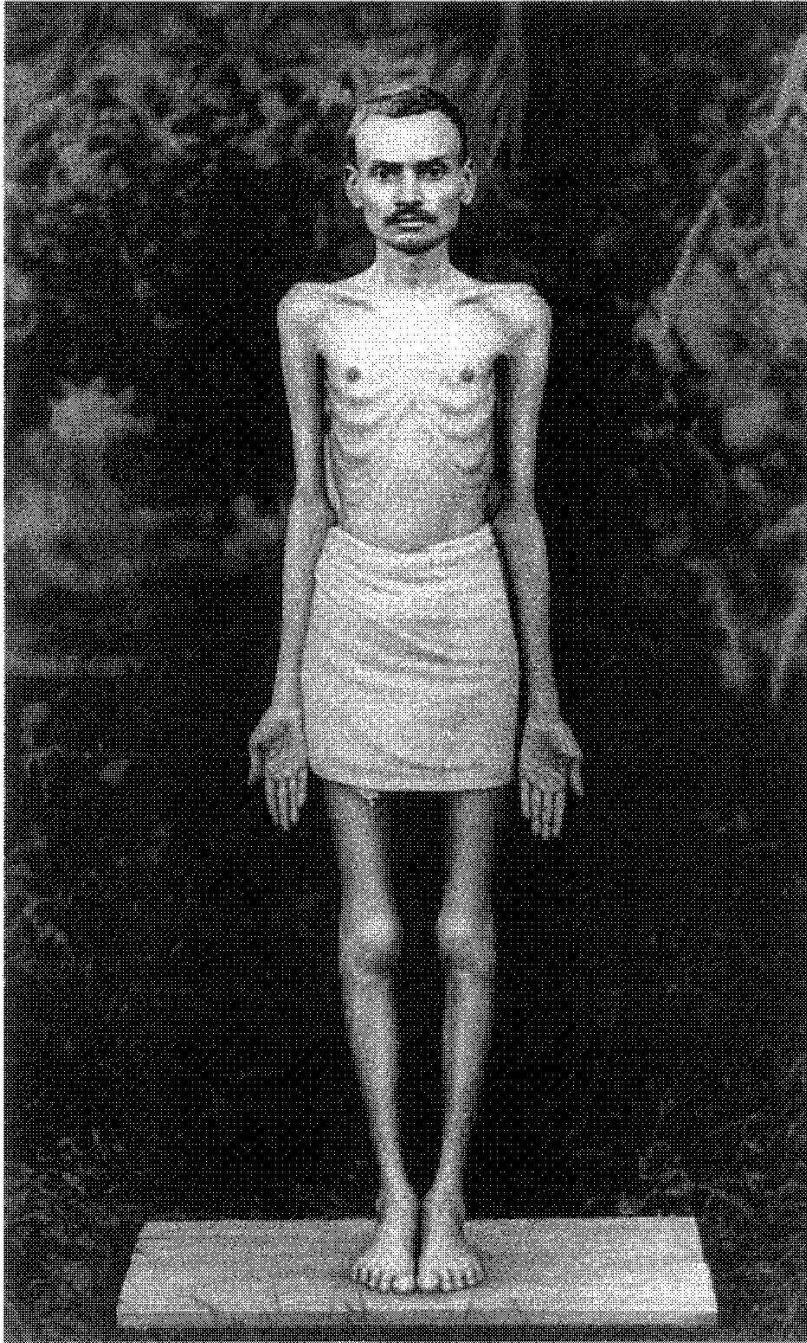


Figure 2. Portrait of Srimad Rajcandra

## Plate 3

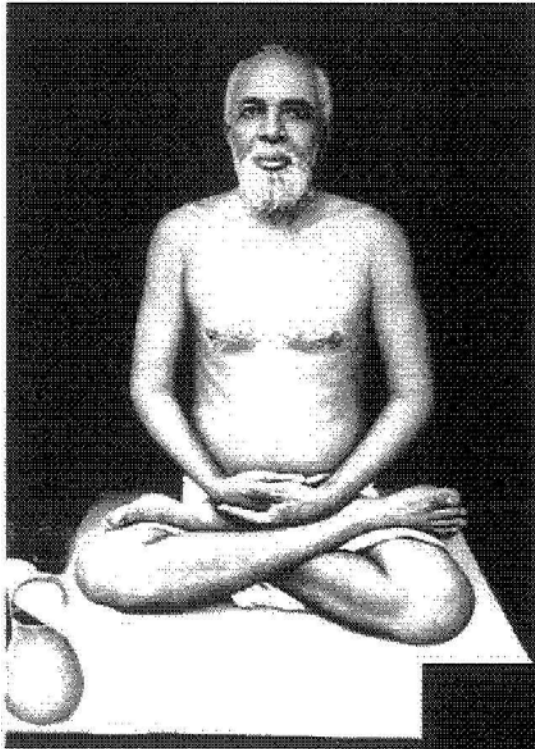


Figure 3. Portrait of Sri Maharaj  
Lalluji Svami



Figure 4. Portrait of Sri Govardhandas  
Brahmachariji

## Plate 4

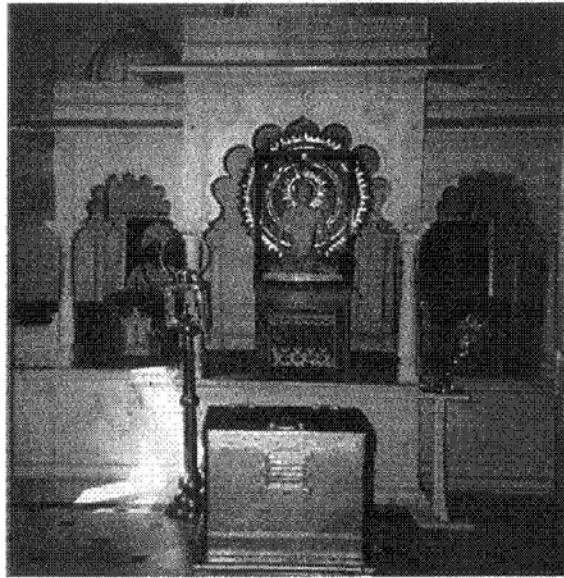


Figure 5. Shrine in the ashram at Vavania, Srimad's birthplace. Portraits of his parents are either side of the image, which is central.



Figure 6. *Svadhyay* hall at Sayla ashram. Note portraits of Lalluji on the right and Sobhagbhai on the left.

## Plate 5

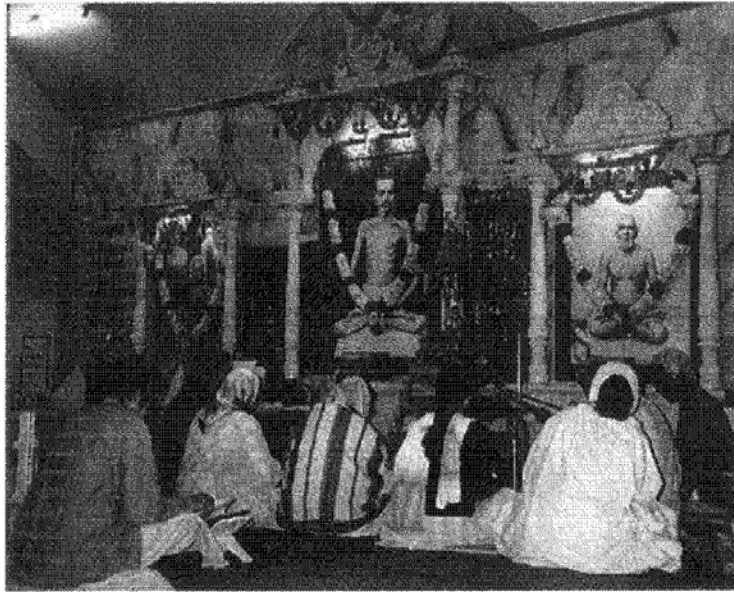


Figure 7. *Bhakti* in the *svadhyay* hall at Koba ashram. Note the portraits of Kundakundacarya (left) and Lalluji (right)

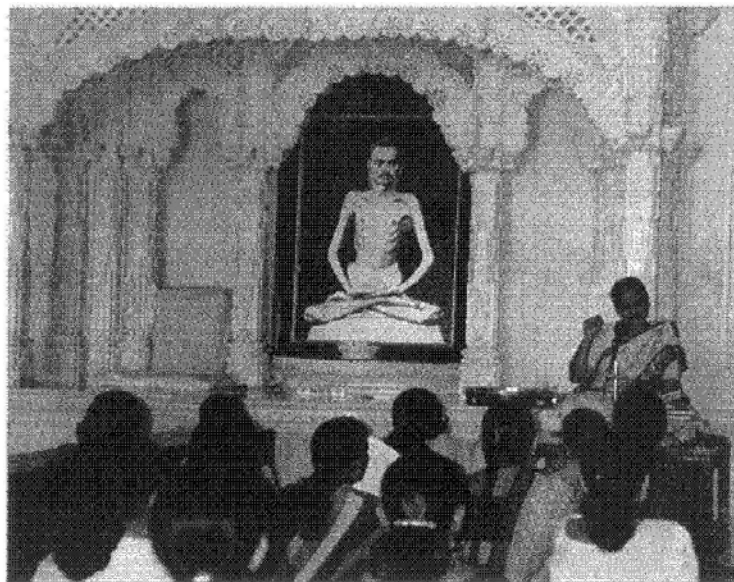


Figure 8. *Svadhyay* lead by a senior disciple at Dharampur.



## Plate 6

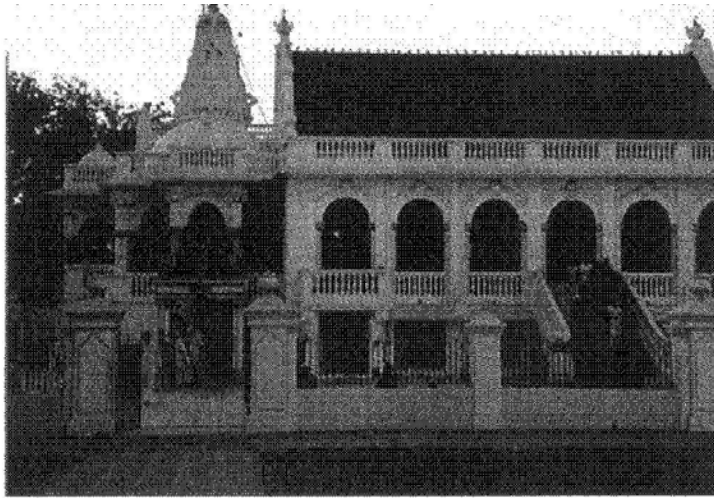


Figure 9. Original *svadhyay* hall at Agas ashram. The guru *mandir* is on the lower ground floor, the Svetambar temple is to the left, above and behind this (out of view) is the Digambar temple.

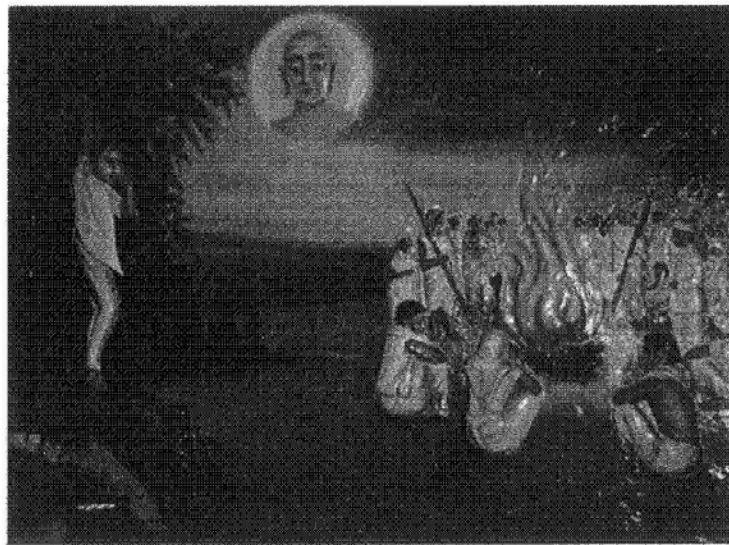


Figure 10. Painting of Srimad experiencing *jati smarna gnan*. It depicts Srimad as he watches the cremation of a friend. The face of the *muni* represents Srimad's memory of his incarnation as a disciple of Mahavir.

## Plate 7

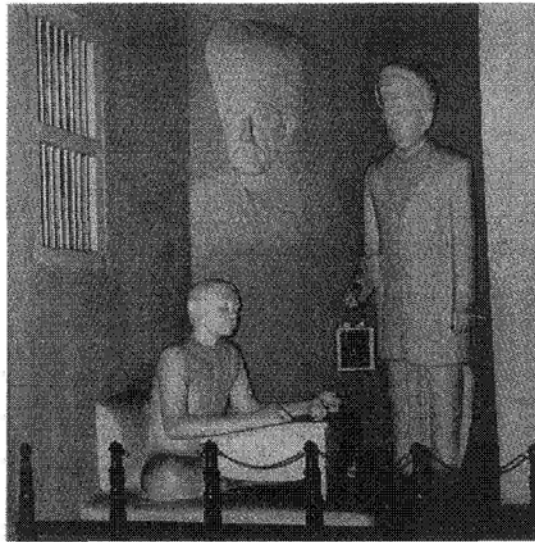


Figure 11. Plaster model in a temple at Rajkot that depicts Srimad composing *Atma Siddhi*. Ambalalbhair holds the lantern and the turbaned figure in the background is Sobhagbhair, who inspired Srimad in his work.

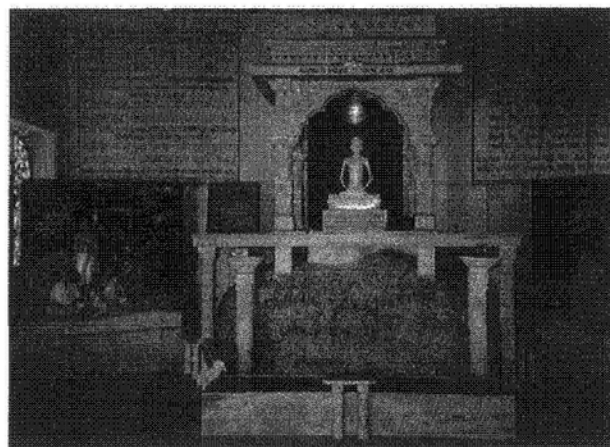


Figure 12. The *svadhyay* hall at the ashram at Idar is built around the rock on which Srimad sat when he preached to the *munis*. Note the image of Srimad above it and the portraits of the *munis* on either side.

## Plate 8

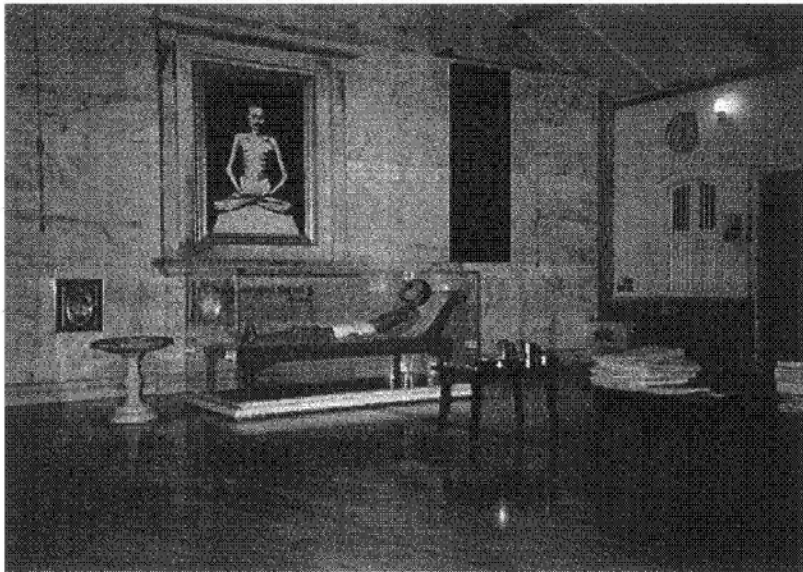
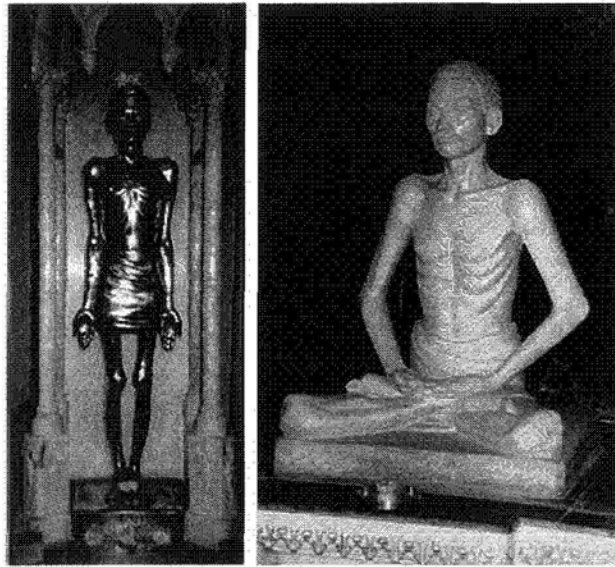


Figure 13. Life size image of Srimad in the room where he died at Rajkot.



Figure 14. Devotees at an exhibition of Srimad's life in pictures, during the inaugural celebrations of a new temple at Rajkot, 2002.

## Plate 9

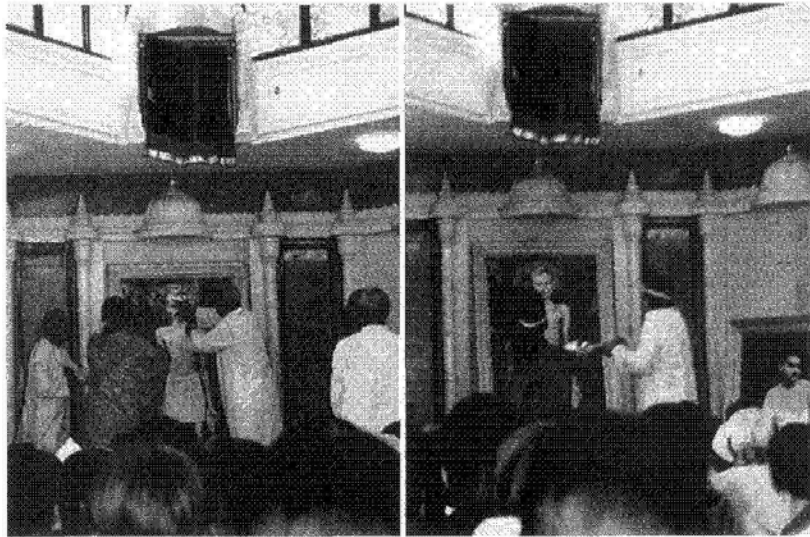


Figures 15-16. Two images of Srimad. In metal (left) at the ashram at Agas, soon after morning *puja*. Note the flowers and sandal wood paste on the head and feet. In marble (right) at the guru *mandir* at Sayla ashram.



Figure 17. A metal image of Srimad is processed through the streets of Rajkot during the inauguration of a new temple, 2002.

## Plate 10



Figures 18-19. Installing Srimad's photograph in the new temple in Rajkot, 2002

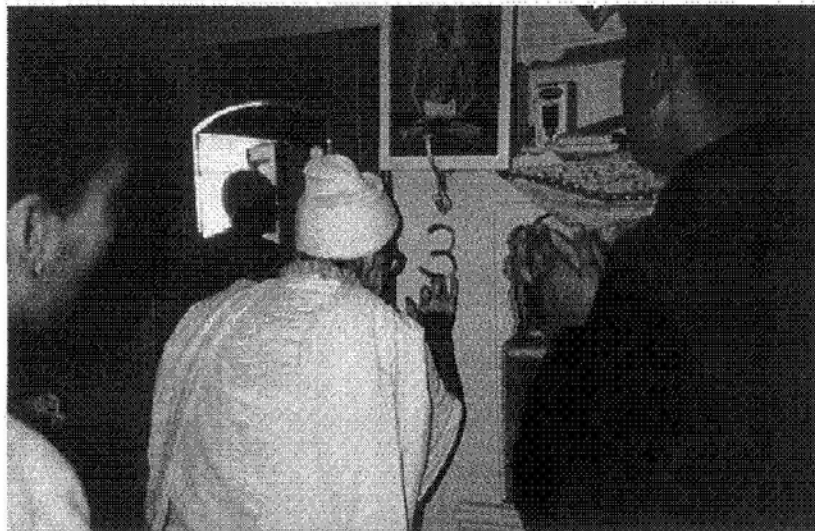


Figure 20. Param Pujya Sri Atmanandji inaugurates a domestic shrine for devotees in Khambhat.

## Plate 11

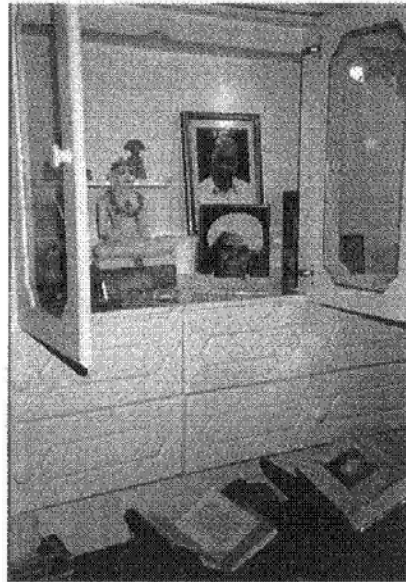


Figure 12. A domestic shrine. Notice the texts below the shrine, including a copy of *Srimad Rajcandra* (right).



Figure 22. A domestic shrine. Note the image of Mahavir in the centre and two images of Parsvanath behind it. The small object in front of the pictures of Srimad is a miniature copy of *Alma Siddhi*. This shrine belongs to a disciple of Sayla ashram, the other three photographs are of gurus Param Pujya Sri Ladakshandbhai (front right), Srimati Sadgunaben (rear left) and Param Pujya Sri Nalinbhai (rear right).

## Plate 12



Figure 23. A domestic shrine.

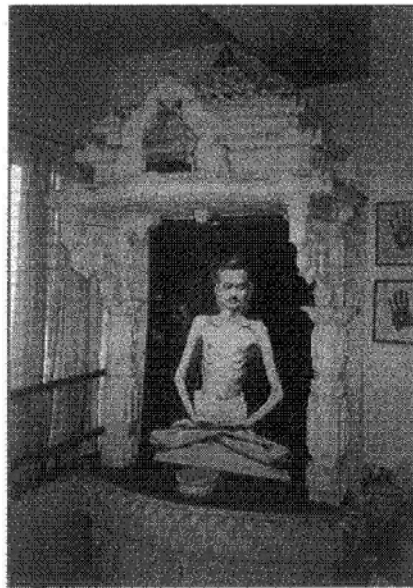


Figure 24. A domestic shrine. Notice the framed handprints on the right, they belong to Param Pujaya Sri Rakeshbhai who consecrated this shrine.

# Glossary



## ***Glossary***

<i>ācārya</i>	Mendicant teacher, head of a mendicant order.
<i>āgam</i>	Ancient Jain scripture.
<i>āgnā</i>	Religious instruction or permission given by a guru or elder.
<i>ahiṃsā</i>	Non-violence.
<i>ajīva</i>	Matter, anything that is not soul.
<i>aṇuvrats</i>	Lay vows.
<i>arhat</i>	Embodied omniscient soul. (Also called <i>kevaḥ</i> <i>fin</i> ).
<i>ārti</i>	Ritual image worship using lights (small candles or oil burners).
<i>ātma</i>	Soul.
<i>avadhāna</i>	Feat of concentration.
<i>avasarpinī</i>	Descending half of the cosmic time cycle.
<i>baniyā</i>	Business caste. (Hindu).
<i>bhajan</i>	Devotional song.
<i>bhakti</i>	Devotion.
<i>bhāva</i>	Sentiment.

<i>bhāv pūjā</i>	Ritual without the use of substances, but that focuses on sentiment.
<i>bīj gnān</i>	Seed of knowledge.
<i>brahmacāri</i>	Celibate person, often unmarried.
<i>darśan</i>	To view with devotion, usually a religious icon.
<i>dhyān</i>	Meditation.
Digambar	A Jain sect. Male mendicants are naked.
<i>dīkṣa</i>	Mendicant initiation ceremony.
<i>dravya pūjā</i>	Ritual that makes use of substances.
<i>dveṣh</i>	Attachment by aversion to a person or thing.
<i>gacch</i>	Mendicant lineage. Mendicant group identified by their lineage.
gnān	Knowledge.
<i>guṇasthān</i>	The fourteen stages of soul. purification encountered on the way to <i>mokṣa</i> .
<i>hiṃsā</i>	violence.
<i>Īśatprāgbhārā</i>	Location at the top of the cosmos where <i>siddhas</i> reside. (Also called <i>siddha loka</i> ).
<i>jāti smaraṇa gnān</i>	Knowledge of previous lives.

<i>Jina</i>	Embodied, liberated soul who teaches the path of Jainism. (Also called Tīrthaṅkar).
<i>jīva</i>	Embodied soul.
<i>kṣāya</i>	Passion generated by the soul that activates the binding properties of karma.
<i>kāyotsarg</i>	Psychological abandonment of the body.
<i>kevalin</i>	Embodied omniscient soul. (Also called <i>arhat</i> )
<i>kevalgnān</i>	A state of pure knowledge.
<i>mahāvrats</i>	Mendicant vows.
<i>Mahāvideha</i>	Part of the central region of the cosmos from where liberation is possible.
<i>mandir</i>	Temple.
<i>mantra</i>	Word or verse that is recited or written repeatedly as a form of religious practice.
<i>mokṣa</i>	State of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.
<i>mokṣa marg</i>	Path of liberation.
<i>muh patti</i>	Mouth covering worn by some Jain mendicants and sometimes by lay people whilst performing rituals.

<i>muni</i>	Male mendicant.
<i>mūrti pūjā</i>	Image worship.
<i>padmāsan</i>	Seated, crossed legged, meditation posture.
<i>pāp</i>	Demerit, unpleasant result of karma.
<i>parokṣ</i>	Non-present, indirectly perceived.
<i>paryuṣan</i>	Important Jain festival during the rainy season.
<i>pratyakṣ</i>	Present, directly perceived.
<i>pūjā</i>	Ritual worship.
<i>pūjāri</i>	Person, usually non-Jain, who prepares the substances for temple rituals and who sometimes performs the <i>pūjā</i>
<i>puṇya</i>	Merit, pleasing result of karma.
<i>rāg</i>	Attachment by attraction to a person or thing.
<i>sādhana</i>	Religious effort, the performance of religious practice.
<i>sadhu</i>	Male mendicant.
<i>sādhvī</i>	Female mendicant.

<i>sallekhanā</i>	Vow of gradually advancing renunciation, when death is certain, ending with a total fast.
<i>saṃsār</i>	Cycle of death and re-birth.
<i>samavasaraṇ</i>	Jina's teaching assembly. A silver, tiered pedestal that represents this assembly used in temple rituals.
<i>samyag darśan</i>	Self realisation.
<i>saṅgh</i>	Community of mendicants or laity.
<i>sat</i>	Absolute truth.
<i>śatāvdkāna</i>	Feat of concentrating simultaneously on one hundred activities.
<i>satsaṅg</i>	Group activity of reading or discussing religious literature.
<i>sevā</i>	Service, or charitable works.
<i>śibir</i>	Seminar or workshop on a religious topic.
<i>siddha</i>	Soul in the state of <i>mokṣa</i> in <i>īśatprāgbhārā</i>
<i>siddha loka</i>	Location, at the top of the cosmos, where <i>siddhas</i> reside. (Also called <i>īśatprāgbhārā</i> ).
<i>Sthānakvāsī</i>	Aniconic Jain sect.
<i>svādhyāy</i>	Study of scripture or other religious literature.

<i>stavan</i>	Devotional hymn.
<i>Śvetāmbar</i>	Jain sect. Mendicants wear white robes.
<i>Tīrthaṅkar</i>	Embodied, liberated soul who teaches the path of Jainism and re-establishes mendicant and lay Jain communities. (Also called Jina).
<i>upādhyāy</i>	Mendicant teacher.
<i>upāśray</i>	Halls where mendicants stay and deliver their discourses. Usually attached to temples for image worshipping sects.
<i>utsarpiṇī</i>	Ascending half of the cosmic time cycle.
<i>Vaiṣṇava</i>	Person/sect that worships the Hindu god Viṣṇu.
<i>vītrāg</i>	Passionless state.
<i>yakṣ</i>	Tutelary deities of the Jinas

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