

## Article

# Framing the Pandemic: An Examination of How WHO Guidelines Turned into Jain Religious Practices

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**Abstract:** This paper identifies and examines a Jain narrative that frames Jain tenets as being in line with some of the most impactful COVID-19 measures. It demonstrates how during the early stages of the pandemic (i.e., mid-March 2020 to January 2021), some Jains drew parallels between various Jain principles and the WHO guidelines, finding agreement, for instance, between the *muhpattī* ("face cloth") and the public face mask and the *dig-vrata* (a Jain vow of restraint) and social distancing. This paper shows how some also viewed several unintentional consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (such as not being able to go shopping during the lockdown) as being in line with Jain practices (here the practice of *aparigraha* or non-possessiveness). By means of an analysis of two Jain writings on the WHO guidelines, I demonstrate how some Jains framed several COVID-19 measures within a distinctive Jain worldview. I argue that the equation of Jain practices with the WHO guidelines should be understood within the ongoing universalization and scientization of Jainism, processes that present Jainism as a universal and scientific solution to global disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Jainism; COVID-19 pandemic; WHO guidelines; Jain worldview; environmentalism; scientization; universalization



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## 1. Introduction

Facts exist. By their very definition, they are actual, having an objective reality. When communicated, however, facts become embedded in narratives. And unlike facts, narratives are subjective. They hold ideologies, worldviews, and value systems, forming part of larger social, political, and economic structures. They give facts context and meaning and determine how we relate and act upon them. Narratives, in short, frame facts. As such, narratives can throw much light on the way individuals or communities view and experience certain realities. Subscribing to these views, this paper seeks to enhance our understanding of the various and complex ways the Jain religious community framed the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic through a critical discussion of a Jain narrative that emerged during the early stages of the pandemic (i.e., mid-March 2020 to January 2021). The Jain narrative in question frames the lifestyle changes required during the COVID-19 pandemic as being consonant with ancient Jain principles.

When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (World Health Organization 2020), many governments responded by adopting a war-like language, interspersing military metaphors with appeals to collective solidarity (McGormick 2020). With varying degrees of success, resolve, and strictness, they issued travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, and nationwide lockdowns. At the same time, public health agencies around the world recommended a wide set of new daily practices to help mitigate the spread of the virus, from adhering to social distancing and giving up handshakes, to using face masks and hand sanitizer. While many of these measures are by now well-known, they initially caused abrupt changes, requiring many people to drastically adjust their daily lives, routines, and habits.

The emerging scholarly literature on Jainism and the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that the COVID-19 crisis has been impacting the religious practices and the public discourse

of Jains around the globe in significant ways. In “Crisis and Continuation”, for instance, Tine Vekemans (2021) demonstrates how the Jain organizations in London (UK) embraced digital media to stay connected with their members. Shivani Bothra (2020) writes how the initial lockdowns in India (24 March 2020–31 May 2020) forced Jain ascetics to restrict both their movement (*vilhāra*) and interaction with the lay community, resulting in ascetics having more time to engage in the practice of *svādhyāya* (religious self-study). In “*Apavāda Mārga*: Jain Mendicants during the COVID-19 Pandemic”, Samaṇī Pratibhā Prajñā describes the various ways in which the Jain ascetic communities in India “adapted their rules and regulations to comply with national government restrictions” (Prajñā 2021, p. 5). In “Jain Life Reimagined”, I identified an exponential increase in Jain scholarly activities and showed how a Jain discourse on the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic is characterized by environmental concerns, as well as accentuating the ongoing trends within the Jain community to both bring Jainism and science together and to emphasize the need to teach the Jain way of life to non-Jains to prevent future global disasters (Maes 2021). Brianne Donaldson (Forthcoming) examines the response of North American Jains to the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how they give various philosophical explanations for the pandemic.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this new field of research by examining a Jain narrative that frames Jain tenets as being in line with some of the most impactful COVID-19 measures. I begin by elucidating the principal Jain sources lying at the basis of my analysis and methodology. I then proceed to discuss two public health recommendations: the face mask and the practice of social distancing. I demonstrate how some Jains actively reinterpreted classic Jain tenets to meaningfully comply with these COVID-19 regulations and, by doing so, present Jainism as a practical, resourceful, and scientifically supported way of life. In the final part, I consider how this Jain narrative fits within an early Jain discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic that reflects on the causes of the pandemic in environmental terms and that presents Jain principles as a universal, scientific solution to overcome the current COVID-19 crisis.

## 2. Sources and Methodology

In the fall semester of 2020, I taught a 16-week undergraduate course on Jainism at the University of Texas at Austin. I had taught this course before, during the spring semester of 2018. Unlike then, I did not meet the students on campus, but we met twice weekly on Zoom. To help mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the University of Texas at Austin, like many universities worldwide, had decided to offer most of its courses online. Given the omnipresent reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, I updated my syllabus to incorporate a unit on Jainism and the COVID-19 pandemic. I invited two scholars, Tine Vekemans and Ayla Joncheere, to introduce the students to contemporary ethnographical methods. The students afterwards applied some of these methods, conducting semi-structured interviews with Jains over Zoom and performing a discourse analysis of Jain magazines, blog posts, and other online platforms. In parallel, I was conducting my own research for “Jain Life Reimagined” (Maes 2021). While both the students’ and my own research focused on examining the ways the COVID-19 pandemic had been impacting the institutional organization of Jain centers, as well as the daily religious practices and the public discourse of Jains, the theme of Jains interpreting COVID-19 measures through a distinctive Jain lens soon became apparent. Several interviewees explained how they saw parallels between Jain tenets and COVID-19 measures. The interviews and the subsequent class discussions have thus been seminal in identifying this Jain narrative. In this article, I expound this Jain narrative by means of a critical analysis of the following two sources: “Peace in a Pandemic”, by Tejal Shah, and Shugan Jain’s “Minimizing a Pandemic’s Impact”. In addition to further examining Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain’s views on and participation in the universalization and scientization of Jainism, I conducted two semi-structured interviews over Zoom in February 2022 and March 2022.

“Peace in a Pandemic” is a virtual pravachan (Skt. *pravacana*), which Tejal Shah presented during the Young Jains of America (YJA) convention on 11 July 2020.<sup>1</sup> Tejal

Shah is a practicing Derāvāsī,<sup>2</sup> living in Mumbai. She is actively involved in Jain religious education as a pathshala (Skt. *pāṭhaśālā*) teacher and *shibir* (workshop) organizer.<sup>3</sup> She used to teach, for instance, at the Babu Amichand Panalal Jain Temple, where she also often went to listen to discourses. Since 2003, she has been teaching at the Parshwa Pragnalaya Pleasant Palace. Both places are Derāvāsī and located in Malabar Hill, one of Mumbai’s most exclusive residential areas. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Tejal Shah also used to lead *shibirs* (workshops) in both India and the United States. In India, she regularly co-organized and taught at the Tapovan Shibir, a seven-day workshop for Non-Resident-Indians (NRI) held yearly in Ahmedabad.<sup>4</sup> In the United States, she used to give Jain discourses to women and children on a yearly basis. Since January 2020, she has been organizing and teaching Jain classes online via Zoom for women and children. While the women’s group is relatively small (with ten to fifteen women attending on a regular basis), the group is highly international, with Jain women joining from the United States, India, the United Arab Emirates, and England. In these classes, she discusses the meaning of core mantras (such as the *namokar mantra*) and *sūtras* (such as the *Jīvavicāra*).<sup>5</sup>

Her discourse “Peace in a Pandemic” exemplifies well how some Jains framed several COVID-19 measures within a Jain worldview. As I demonstrate below, Shah draws parallels between various Jain tenets and the WHO guidelines. In addition, she also draws parallels between the limitations of life during the COVID-19 lockdown and Jain tenets. Shah argues that some of the unintentional consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (such as not being able to go shopping) agree with Jain tenets (here the practice of *aparigraha* or non-possessiveness). Connected to this, she frames the pandemic as an opportunity for Jains to adhere to tenets that are customarily practiced only by ascetics or spiritually advanced householders.

“Minimizing a Pandemic’s Impact”, is an essay Shugan Jain wrote for the journal of the International School for Jain Studies, the *ISJS-Transaction*. It was published during the summer of 2020 (July–September). Shugan Jain is a practicing Digambar, living in Delhi. In “Minimizing a Pandemic’s Impact”, Shugan Jain considers how the reality of the COVID-19 crisis requires lifestyle changes to mitigate the spread of the virus and, at the same time, ensure one’s continued feeling of well-being and health (Jain 2020a, pp. 34–35). This, he believes, can be achieved by practicing the teachings of the Tirthankaras. The core of his essay consists of a discussion of the Jain principles he deems most relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. He thus revisits the three jewels of Jainism, known as right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct (*samyak-darśana*, *samyak-jñāna*, and *samyak-cārita*), the virtue of nonviolence (*ahimsā*), the six daily ritual obligations (*āvaśyakas*), the traditional twelve vows of a layperson (the five minor vows or *anuvratas*, the three merit vows or *guṇa-vratas*, and the four learning vows or *śikṣā-vratas*), and penance (*tapas*). While discussing these Jain tenets, Shugan Jain merges traditional explanations with pandemic-specific concerns. The result, as I will illustrate, is a presentation of Jain tenets that align with several COVID-19 guidelines and facilitate one’s adjustments to the lockdown restrictions.

There are many similarities between Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain. They both live in major metropolitan areas (Mumbai and Delhi are today the two largest cosmopolitan cities in India). They both enjoyed a privileged education. Born to a successful business family,<sup>6</sup> Tejal Shah attended the Walsingham House School, an English-medium school in Malabar Hill. The school premises is the former palace of the late Maharao Pragmulji III of Kutch (1936–2021). During her time, the students appeared for Senior Cambridge and Secondary School Certificate examinations.<sup>7</sup> In our Zoom conversation, Tejal Shah described her education as modern, being a “nod toward Western society”, and unusual compared to other schools current at her time. Shugan Jain also attended an English-medium school. He was a student at the Hīrā Lāl Jain Secondary School, a boys-only school and the first Jain high school in Delhi.<sup>8</sup> He further obtained a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering at the then Delhi College of Engineering (DCE),<sup>9</sup> and a Master of Science in Operation Research (1967–1968) from New York University (NYU), a private research university in New York City. After a successful career as an IT consultant and

an advisor for multiple organizations in India, the U.S.A., and Europe, Shugan Jain has been dedicating himself more fully to Jainism and the development of Jain Studies. In 2006, he obtained a Ph.D. degree in Jainology from the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute (JVBI) in Ladnun, Rajasthan.<sup>10</sup> Since then, he has written numerous books and articles on Jainism. He also took up leadership roles at various national and international Jain institutions, from being the Vice Chairman of the Center of Jain Studies at Mangalayatan University in Aligarh to being the current President of the International School for Jain Studies, an educational institution that has been training international students, researchers, and teachers in Jain studies since 2005 (Cf. [ISJS Website n.d.](#)). Another point of similarity between Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain is the fact that they are both multilingual, but predominantly active in an anglophone environment. Having either studied, worked, or travelled abroad to give workshops, they are both international. They also both possess a high technology literacy, giving, e.g., regular lectures and workshops on Zoom. As such, Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain represent a vocal, privileged, and engaged group of elite, cosmopolitan, anglophone Jains who have the means to disseminate their views widely.

### 3. Framing the Pandemic

As shown on Tables 1 and 2, both Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain consider various Jain practices as supporting the WHO guidelines and the governmental petitions to regularly wash hands with soap, to wear a face mask and social distance in public places, to stay at home during lockdowns, and to not store provisions. In what follows, I discuss the face mask and the practice of social distancing and show how Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain equate these two COVID-19 guidelines with Jain tenets. Their equation involves a process, which I call the “stretching of the religious language”, that accommodates pandemic specific interpretations next to traditional understandings of the Jain practices.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1. The Face Mask and the Muhpattī

In her pravachan “Peace in a Pandemic”, Tejal Shah draws explicit parallels between the face mask and the *muhpattī* (“mouth cloth”). In her eyes, many of the COVID-19 measures agree with classical Jain practices. “Some of the do’s and don’ts put down by the WHO”, she states, “have been regular do’s and don’ts preached by Jainism for over 2500 years”. Showing the alleged correspondence between various COVID-19 measures and Jain practices (cf. Tables 1 and 2), Tejal Shah considers the face mask as identical to the *muhpattī*. In “Minimizing a Pandemic’s Impact”, Shugan Jain similarly views the *muh-pattī* and the face mask as being complementary. He argues that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic the five minor vows (*aṇuvratas*) direct one “to stay calm, contented, and healthy by minimizing . . . one’s contacts with regular friends and associates and use implements (like *muhapattī*) while venturing to meet them; to limit . . . one’s possessions and consumption and share the surplus with the needy” (Shugan Jain: 37). Given the context, when advising his readers to wear a *muhpattī* when going out, Shugan Jain is referring here to the face mask aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19.

**Table 1.** WHO Guidelines, Governmental Regulations, and Jain Practices<sup>12</sup>.

WHO Guidelines and Governmental Regulations	Jain Practice	Traditional Understanding of the Jain Practice <sup>13</sup>	Reference
Sanitizing hands	<i>pratilekhā</i>	To ritually inspect one's belongings for insects before use	(T. Shah 2020)
Sanitizing groceries <sup>14</sup>	<i>pratilekhā</i>	To ritually inspect one's belongings for insects before use	(T. Shah 2020)
Face mask	<i>muhpattī</i>	A piece of material Jain ascetics of various sects either wear permanently or hold in front of their mouth when speaking. Some lay followers wear a <i>muhpattī</i> when performing <i>pūjā</i> . The core idea of the <i>muhpattī</i> is to prevent harming <i>ekendriya jīvas</i> and small insects by inhaling or exhaling.	(T. Shah 2020; Jain 2020a)
To not hoard food (and other items) <sup>15</sup>	<i>Bhogopabhoga-parimāṇa-vrata</i>	This is the third of the three vows of restraint ( <i>guṇa-vrata</i> ) for laymen. It involves restrictions in terms of which professions a layman can carry out as well as what and when a layperson can eat.	(Jain 2020a)
To not hoard food (and other items)	<i>aparigraha</i>	This is the vow of non-possessiveness. For ascetics it means giving up all forms of possessions, whereas for lay followers it implies (1) the development of the feeling of non-attachment towards what one possesses, as well as (2) limiting one's possessions.	(Jain 2020a)
* To not eat salads during the COVID-19 pandemic <sup>16</sup>	Consuming <i>acit</i> food and avoiding the consumption of <i>sacit</i> food	<i>acit</i> food is devoid of life forms, whereas <i>sacit</i> food contains life forms. Raw vegetables and fruit are viewed to be <i>sacit</i> but can be made <i>acit</i> or fit for consumption by cooking or cutting, respectively.	(T. Shah 2020)
* To drink only boiled water during the COVID-19 pandemic <sup>17</sup>	Consuming water that is free of lifeforms	Ascetics and stricter lay Jains only drink water that has been boiled and has thus been made free of lifeforms.	(T. Shah 2020)

Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain are not alone in equating the *muhpattī* with the public face mask. In October 2020, *Jain Digest*, a magazine run by the Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), published a special issue dedicated to mapping out the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic of the Jain community in both North America and India.<sup>18</sup> For this purpose, the editorial team of *Jain Digest* conducted a survey in July and August 2020, to which 110 Jains responded (Jain Digest 2020, p. 4). One of the survey questions asked respondents to share which Jain teachings, values, and practices they considered most helpful in dealing with the everyday challenges of life under the COVID-19 lockdown. To this open-ended question, one respondent, Kaushal J. Gandhi from Allentown, Pennsylvania, remarked how during the lockdown “we [i.e., lay Jains] could follow many [Jain] values by default”, explaining how “[w]e are used to have ‘mukhkosh’ [i.e., *muhpattī*] during Puja so we avoid harming ekindriy jeev in air, we started following that practice



when we leave home now, isn't it great?" (Jain Digest 2020, p. 39). In other words, Kaushal J. Gandhi views the wearing of a face mask in public to be an extension of his Jain practice of wearing a *muhpattī* during *pūjā*.

Aadish Surana, a student of actuarial science at the Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce in Pune, who, in his own words, is "continuously exploring, learning, and following Jainism", similarly draws parallels between the face mask and the *muhpattī*. Asking the question whether following Jain practices could put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic on QUORA in July 2020, Aadish Surana argues that Jains follow "many rituals since ancient times which are now preventing measures and guidelines [against the spread of the] Corona Virus issued by WHO and our [i.e., Indian] government".<sup>19</sup> Against this background, he points out the different types of *muhpattīs* among Derāvāsīs and Sthānakavāsīs and states that now "we are all wearing the same thing" (namely, the facemask) to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 (ibid.).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Jains would rarely have framed the *muhpattī* in terms of public health benefits as its shape, purpose, and usage is too distinct from the medical face mask. Traditionally, the *muhpattī* is an ascetic attribute used by Mūrtipūjaka, Sthānakavāsī, and Terāpanthī ascetics. Depending on their sectarian tradition, they wear the *muhpattī* permanently or only during rituals such as the *pratikramaṇa* (a ritualized repentance ceremony for any harm committed, cf. Figure 1) or when speaking, in which case they will simply hold the *muhpattī* in front of the mouth. As each one of these sects has its own distinctive *muhpattī*, the *muhpattī* creates a visual difference, serving as a sectarian marker. In addition, some groups of image-worshipping lay Jains wear a *muhpattī* when performing a *pūjā* to the images of the Tīrthaṅkaras (cf. Figure 2). The *muhpattī* is thus first and foremost an ascetic attribute for monks and nuns and a worship-implement for lay followers. Ideologically, the *muhpattī* is typically framed within the principles of non-violence (*ahimsā*) and self-control (*saṁjama*) (Garai 2020, p. 50). Kaushal J. Gandhi and Aadish Surana, both quoted earlier, framed the *muhpattī* within the principle of non-violence towards one-sensed living beings (*ekendriya jīvas*). In terms of coverage, there are also essential differences between the face mask and the *muhpattī*. Unlike the face mask, not all *muhpattīs* cover the mouth and the nose (cf. Figure 3). The *muhpattī* for ascetics usually covers only the mouth, if at all (cf. above).



**Figure 1.** Terāpanthī *samanīs* wearing the *muhpattī* during an evening *pratikramaṇa* ceremony. Ladnun, December 2015. Photo by the author.



**Figure 2.** Jain lay follower performing *mūrti pūjā* wearing a *muhpattī*. Internet photo.



**Figure 3.** Sthānakavāsī monk with a *muhpattī*. Jodhpur, December 2015. Photo by the author.

Given these differences, why do Tejal Shah, Shugan Jain, Kaushal J. Gandhi, Aadish Surana, and others writing during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic use the word *muhpattī* to refer to the public face mask?<sup>20</sup> Are we dealing here with a creative reinterpretation of a classical ascetic attribute? Are they purposefully extending the traditional reference field of the word “*muhpattī*” so that it now also includes the public face mask? Or is it an unintentional misnaming? While the answer to these questions must remain hypothetical, the questions are worth considering since language use (such as particular word choices to refer to the public face mask) can tell us much how individuals experienced and framed the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. I suggest two hypotheses.

First, to refer to the public face mask with the term *muhpattī* could be viewed as a coping strategy where the familiar is being transposed onto the unfamiliar. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many abrupt changes, including the sudden need to cover the mouth and nose when being unable to keep a safe distance from others in public spaces. By using the word *muhpattī*, which is both a familiar word and a well-respected ascetic attribute, one makes the public face mask less new, less alien, and, therefore, also less threatening.

Second, the use of the word *muhpattī* could also be seen as an expression of the ongoing universalization of Jainism, where Jains stress the universal need of Jainism by showing its contemporary relevance (cf. Section 4). International public health agencies, such as the WHO, have been recommending the public face mask as an effective means in the battle against the spread of COVID-19. The public face mask, in other words, plays a significant role in the multilayered solution to overcome the current coronavirus crisis. When Jains name the public face mask with the term *muhpattī*, they, in a sense, present Jainism as being

part of this solution. In both cases, i.e., the coping strategy and the universalization of Jainism, the reference field of *muhpattī* is being altered or, at the very least, extended to include both the traditional ascetic face cloth and the public health mask.

### 3.2. Social Distancing and Lockdowns

In the early phases of the pandemic, the practice of “social distancing” primarily meant “staying home and away from others as much as possible to help prevent [the] spread of COVID-19” (Maragakis 2020).<sup>21</sup> When lockdowns were lifted and communities started to reopen, the term “social distancing” also came to be used interchangeably with “physical distancing” to emphasize the need to maintain physical space when in public areas (Maragakis 2020). As shown on Table 2, Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain view numerous Jain vows (*brahmacarya-vrata*, *dig-vrata*, *anarthadaṇḍa-vrata*, *deśāvakaśika-vrata*, *poṣadhovavāsa-vrata*, and *sāmāyika-vrata*) as well as the *namaskāra* greeting as supporting these different aspects of social distancing. I limit my discussion to the learning vows (*śikṣā-vratas*) and the merit vows (*guṇa-vratas*).

**Table 2.** Jain Practices and Vows that Support the COVID-19 Practice of Social Distancing.

Jain Practice or Vow That Supports the COVID-19 Practice of Social Distancing	Pandemic Specific Interpretation of the Jain Practice or Vow (When Available)	Traditional Understanding of the Jain Practice <sup>22</sup>	Reference
<i>brahmacarya-vrata</i>	To minimize the number of people one interacts with <sup>23</sup>	For ascetics, the <i>brahmacarya-vrata</i> refers to the vow of celibacy and of limiting one’s social contact with individuals of the opposite gender. For lay followers, it refers to refraining oneself from sexual activities outside one’s marriage as well as limiting these within one’s marriage.	(T. Shah 2020)
Jain <i>namaskāra</i> <sup>24</sup>	To greet without a handshake	A greeting by bringing the two hand palms together in front of the chest.	(T. Shah 2020)
<i>dig-vrata</i>	To restrict one’s movements within one’s home and to avoid physical contact with others	This is the first of the three vows of restraint ( <i>guṇa-vrata</i> ) for lay followers. Through this vow, lay followers strengthen their practice of <i>ahiṃsā</i> by limiting their movements and activities within specified spatial and temporal boundaries.	(Jain 2020a)
<i>anarthadaṇḍa-vrata</i>	To restrict one’s movements within one’s home and to avoid physical contact with others (Jain 2020a)	This is the second of the three vows of restraint ( <i>guṇa-vrata</i> ) for lay followers. It involves ceasing harmful or useless activities.	(T. Shah 2020; <sup>25</sup> Jain 2020a)
<i>deśāvakaśika-vrata</i>	To avoid exposing oneself or others to the COVID-19 virus by staying at home or in an isolated place	One of the four learning vows ( <i>śikṣā-vratas</i> ) for lay followers. It involves a stricter application of the self-imposed travel limitations than under the <i>dig-vrata</i> . A lay follower can vow, e.g., to stay in only one room and to avoid all social contact for a certain period of time.	(Jain 2020a)
<i>poṣadhovavāsa-vrata</i>	To limit one’s activities to one’s place, where one fasts and focusses on self-study	One of the four learning vows ( <i>śikṣā-vratas</i> ) for lay followers. It involves fasting and an extension of the practice of <i>sāmāyika</i> (developing equanimity). The lay follower becomes like a mendicant for the duration of the vow.	(Jain 2020a)
<i>sāmāyika-vrata</i>	To dedicate oneself to self-study (with the implication that one stays at home or in one place and thus avoids physical contact with others)	One of the four learning vows ( <i>śikṣā-vratas</i> ) for lay followers. Under this vow, the lay follower becomes temporarily an ascetic. One engages in meditation, chants a mantra, listens to a sermon, or performs other such like religious practices.	(Jain 2020a)



Concerning the *śikṣā-vratas*, Shugan Jain seems to consider the *deśāvakaśika* vow as supporting the government requirement for non-essential workers to stay at home during the pandemic lockdowns and, if needed, to self-isolate in the case of infection. Traditionally, the *deśāvakaśika-vrata* is viewed as a stricter application of the *dig-vrata* vow (cf. below), where one observes more rigid travel limitations by vowing, for instance, to stay in only one room and to avoid all social contact for a period of time. Shugan Jain also views the two other learning vows, namely the *sāmāyika* and the *poṣadhovavāsa* vows, as supporting the COVID-19 practice of social distancing. Under both vows, one dedicates oneself to self-study with the implication that one stays at home or in one place and thus avoids physical contact with others. In this context, he reiterates the importance to “spend as much time spared by staying at home or isolated places as possible to enhance our spiritual, mental and physical health and familial interactions” (Jain 2020a, p. 38).

With regard to the *guṇa-vratas* for laypeople, Shugan Jain reinterprets the first two *guṇa-vratas*, namely the *dig-vrata* and the *anarthadaṇḍa-vrata*, to mean that during the COVID-19 pandemic we should “stay aloof by restricting our movements within our home, [and] avoid physical contact with others” (Jain 2020a, p. 38). Traditionally, lay followers observe the first *guṇa-vrata*, the *dig-vrata*, by limiting their movements and activities within specified spatial boundaries for a set period. The intention is to increase one’s adherence to the principle of *ahiṃsā* by diminishing the geographical area where one is inadvertently committing violence to different types of living beings. The second *guṇa-vrata*, the *anarthadaṇḍa-vrata*, is a vow traditionally aimed at ceasing harmful and useless (*anartha*) activities.

Tejal Shah also indirectly refers to the *anarthadaṇḍa-vrata* when arguing that “Mahāvīra’s instruction to not waste your time” aligns with the COVID-19 practice of social distancing. In the second part of her lecture, she refers again to the *anarthadaṇḍa-vrata*, but this time explicitly and as an example of a Jain tenet everyone practiced by default because of the lockdown restrictions. She explains how not being able to go to the movies during the lockdown reduces the possibility of Jains committing *anarthadaṇḍa*. She defines *anarthadaṇḍa* in this context as “the sin of punishing the soul by doing things that are unnecessary to lead a simple, normal life”. Tejal Shah’s analysis of the COVID-19 regulations and Jain practices is thus twofold. On the one hand, she draws parallels between Jain tenets and the WHO guidelines, such as Mahāvīra’s instruction to not waste time and the COVID-19 guideline to social distance. On the other hand, she frames the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown regulations as conditions for Jains to, inadvertently, adhere more strictly to Jain practices. Table 3 gives other such examples. For Tejal Shah, the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity for Jains to make progress on the Jain path. Because of the pandemic, she argues, Jains are capable of realizing their full potential. She refers to this as “the hidden benefit that comes with the challenge[s] of the COVID-19 pandemic”, for which she explicitly “thanks corona”.<sup>26</sup>

Like the *muhpattī* and the face mask equation, the equation of various Jain vows (*brahmacarya*, *guṇa*, and *śikṣā-vratas*) with the different aspects of the COVID-19 practice of social distancing requires a revision of the traditional reference field and understanding of the Jain vows. This active recontextualization of classical Jain practices results from a process that could aptly be described as “the stretching of the religious language”.<sup>27</sup> During this process, the traditional reference field is being extended to include new, pandemic-specific interpretations of the Jain concepts.

Table 3. Lockdown Restrictions and Jain Principles.

Limitations and Adjustments of Daily Life and Routines during lockdown	Jain Practice and Traditional Understanding of the Practice <sup>28</sup>	Emic- or Pandemic-Specific Interpretation of the Jain Practice or Vow (When Available) <sup>29</sup>	Reference
To not be able to eat out	Refraining from the 22 <i>abhakṣyas</i> (“that which should not be eaten”)		(T. Shah 2020)
To not be able to eat out	To not eat leftovers [from restaurants] or [takeaway] food that was prepared a few days prior	To eat leftovers is to commit <i>himsā</i> as food overnight “gives birth to lots of bacteria, viruses, and <i>ekendriya jīvas</i> ” (T. Shah 2020).	(T. Shah 2020)
To not be able to eat out	<i>sallekhanā</i> The voluntary practice of fasting to death involving the gradual reduction in solid foods and drinks.	“I used to enjoy street food, but now I only eat at home. My wife and I have cut down our food intake. For breakfast, we only eat fruit. This is like <i>sallekhanā</i> ” (Jain 2021).	Jain (2021, Zoom interview, January)
To not be able to go to the movies	Reducing the possibility of committing <i>anarthadaṇḍa</i>	“ <i>anarthadaṇḍa</i> is the sin of punishing the soul by doing things that are unnecessary to lead a simple, normal life” (T. Shah 2020).	(T. Shah 2020)
To not be able to travel (as much)	Increasing one’s practice of <i>ahiṃsā</i>	By decreasing one’s moving around, one simultaneously diminishes the (unintentional) killing of living beings, whether minute or gross.	(T. Shah 2020)
To not be able to travel (as much)	Help restore the ecosystem	By not travelling as much, one pollutes less and is less susceptible to “free-will consumption”, which is good for the environment.	(T. Shah 2020)
The closing of malls, mass-meeting areas, and the reduction in factory operations	Help restore the ecosystem	The closure of malls and mass-meeting areas and the reduction in factory activities reduced the commercial air conditioning consumption and man-made waste, which in turn reduced the environmental pollution and the global warming.	(T. Shah 2020)
To not be able to shop for nonessential items	Increasing one’s practice of <i>aparigraha</i>	Because shopping was only allowed for essential items, one was forced to reduce one’s needs for nonessential items, resulting in “a compulsory move towards <i>aparigraha</i> ”.	(T. Shah 2020)
Selfless service of doctors and nurses	Developing <i>sevā</i> (selfless service to others)		(T. Shah 2020)
Distributing food packages to the needy	Developing <i>sevā</i> (selfless service to others)		(T. Shah 2020)

#### 4. An Early Jain Discourse on the COVID-19 Pandemic

This section considers how Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain's writings and reinterpretation of various Jain practices in light of the COVID-19 regulations fit within an early Jain discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic. In "Jain Life Reimagined: an Examination of Jain Practice and Discourse during the COVID-19 Pandemic", I theorized that an early Jain discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic is characterized by environmental concerns and the processes of universalization and scientization (Maes 2021).

##### 4.1. Environmentalism

In general terms, Jains reflecting on the causes of the pandemic stress the human overexploitation of the natural resources as the pandemic's main factor. They consider the pandemic as a manmade environmental crisis that, they further argue, could have been avoided if everyone had been adhering to Jain principles, especially the principle of *ahimsā* or non-violence. In this context, Jains often bring in the law of karma (*karmavāda*) as a theological explanation (see, e.g., Jain 2020, 2021; R. Jain 2020; Jain and Jain 2020). "Connected to this", I argued, "they imbue nature with a moral force and agency, suggesting that the pandemic is the revenge of an abused planet earth or that it is the outcome of nature trying to teach everyone a lesson" (Maes 2021, p. 14).

Both Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain subscribe to similar environmental concerns when elucidating the origins of the COVID-19 virus. Tejal Shah claims that the pandemic is the result of "the human destruction of the world's natural environment" and argues that "if every living being in the world followed *ahimsā*, the pandemic may not even have taken birth in the first place" (T. Shah 2020). She articulates this latter point several times in her lecture, wondering whether the pandemic should be seen as "nature trying to tell us something" (T. Shah 2020). Tejal Shah further echoes the Jain values of protecting and preserving the environment when interpreting several unintentional consequences of the COVID-19 lockdowns as benefiting Jains in their spiritual practice of caring for the ecosystem. She points out how the COVID-19 lockdowns entailed less travel, a decrease in factory operations, and the temporary closing of shopping malls and large meeting areas (cf. Table 3). This resulted, she argued, in Jains inadvertently increasing their practice of *ahimsā* and in bettering the environment.

While Shugan Jain does not reflect on the causes of the pandemic in his essay "Minimizing a Pandemic's Impact", in a semi-structured Zoom interview, he similarly opined that the pandemic was manmade. He saw it as resulting from men giving in to *himsā* and destroying nature. Supporting the *karmavāda* theory, he also considered the COVID-19 virus as nature's revenge.

##### 4.2. Universalization and Scientization

In "Jain Life Reimagined", I coined the expression "the universalization of Jainism" to refer to the ongoing process where Jains "argue for the need to teach Jainism beyond the Jain community by showing its contemporary relevance and applicability to overcome global problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic" (Maes 2021, p. 3). This trend is not novel; it was already observed by Anne Vallely twenty years ago in her analysis of the environmental ethics among the diaspora Jains in North America (Vallely 2002a, p. 204). What is new, however, is the frequency and the variety of contexts in which the Jain way of life is put forward as a solution, from the medicalization of death and poor end-of-life care to global warming and the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>30</sup> Shugan Jain and Tejal Shah's equation of several Jain practices and vows with COVID-19 regulations also fits within this universalization discourse. By drawing parallels between Jain practices and COVID-19 regulations, they present Jainism as a highly practical religion that offers ready-made solutions to help mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus while, at the same time, making progress on the spiritual path. In other words, they validate the usefulness of Jainism for present day society by presenting it as a way of life that is in the best interest of everyone, including (or perhaps especially) non-Jains.

In her lecture, Tejal Shah says “should living with *ahimsā*, *jayna* [compassion to all living beings], *brahmacarya* and all other Jain principles had been the norm, humanity would not have welcomed corona with arms wide open” (T. Shah 2020). During the Zoom interview, she further iterated the view that non-Jains should learn about Jainism. “Everyone”, she said “should get a chance to hear about Jainism”. Similarly, Shugan Jain, when asked whether Jain principles should be spread beyond the Jain community, expressed his belief that the world would be a better place if the core principles of Jainism were better known.<sup>31</sup> Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain both subscribe to the views that their religion can offer solutions to help resolve universal problems and that Jainism, as a way of life, should, therefore, be spread beyond the Jain community.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere, I noted that “in the past, Jains who were actively proclaiming the need of promoting Jainism were mainly lecturing for Jain audiences and writing in journals, magazines, and websites published by and for Jains. In recent years, however, this audience has become diverse and international, consisting of both Jains and non-Jains alike” (Maes 2021, p. 17). This internationalization of the audience should be seen as the result of the academization of Jainism, the process where Jains are establishing institutions that mimic mainstream academia, seeking academic appraisal of their religion (Aukland 2016, p. 209; Maes 2021, p. 17).

The scientization of Jainism is a process, as Aukland demonstrates, that already started during the colonial era (Aukland 2016, p. 195). This process involves Jains appealing to the authority of science by underlining the convergence of their religion with modern science (Aukland 2016; Maes 2021). These appeals can be either in form or in content. With respect to the Jain discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic, I argued that appeals in form “can comprise accounts that show the benefit of traditional Jain tenets for today’s society by explaining these in a scientific, modern, rational, or health-oriented language” (Maes 2021, p. 15). Appeals in content, on the other hand, “include claims that Jain principles and practices are scientifically proven solutions to the pandemic (and other world problems)” (Maes 2021, p. 15). Shugan Jain and Tejal Shah make both types of appeals to show the relevance of Jain practice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shugan Jain, for instance, uses a scientific language when explaining the importance of applying the three jewels of Jainism, known as *samyak-darśana*, *samyak-jñāna*, and *samyak-cārita*. He does not use the customary translation of “right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct”. Rather, he translates the three concepts with “rational belief/perception, rational knowledge, and rational conduct”, respectively (Shugan Jain: 35). His word choice is not accidental; it reflects his aspirations to coat Jain concepts in a modern and rational language. With respect to the second jewel, *samyak-jñāna*, he instructs one to not only “study the spiritual texts” but also to “acquire knowledge about the problem of COVID-19 concerning its structure, functioning and ways to protect us from its attack and spread from trustworthy sources like Government announcements, your doctor and your own experiences” (Shugan Jain: 35). This advice of Shugan Jain to stay informed about the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic from authoritative sources as well as from one’s own personal experiences is expressive of his scientific approach to Jainism. In her lecture, Tejal Shah also makes several claims that Jainism is scientific, arguing for instance, that Jainism is a way of life that agrees with “the laws of the universe” and that relies on “proven scientific principles” (T. Shah 2020).

In addition to such statements, we need to recognize that the very equation of Jain practices with the WHO guidelines is expressive of the scientization of Jainism. Shugan Jain and Tejal Shah appeal to the authority of science in a twofold move. First, they acknowledge the authority of the WHO in matters of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we have seen, both Shugan Jain and Tejal Shah encourage their audience to follow the recommendations laid down by this international public health agency of the United Nations. Second, having recognized the authority of the WHO, they argue that several guidelines of the WHO have already been advocated by Jains for millennia. By doing so, they indirectly tap the authority of the WHO to argue for the scientific nature and the continued relevance of Jainism, especially in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, by



stressing the antiquity of the Jain principles in comparison to the WHO guidelines, they elevate Jainism above the WHO organization. They, so to speak, “Jainify” the World Health Organization. To draw parallels between the WHO guidelines and Jain practices thus results, on the one hand, in Jainism being “scientized” and, on the other hand, in modern science being “Jainified”.<sup>33</sup>

In line with this “Jainification” of modern science, Tejal Shah explicitly expressed the view during the Zoom interview that as science will continue to develop, the validity and value of Jain postulates (such as the existence of the *jīva* or soul) and practices (such as fasting and drinking boiled water) will be confirmed by modern science in due time. The same view is expressed by Jagat Kinkhabwala in *Jain Avenue Magazine* when he states that “[t]he principles of Jainism are getting scientifically confirmed with time” (Kinkhabwala 2021, p. 1). There are three implicit claims connected to this view: (1) “Jainism” (as an amalgam of Jain practice, philosophy, cosmology, doctrine, etc.) is “correct”;<sup>34</sup> (2) science is not advanced enough to grasp all the Jain truths; and, related to this, (3) “Jainism” is more advanced than modern science. For Jains who subscribe to these views, Jain scriptures contain in one way or other everything modern science discovers and “knows”. The article “Eradication and Prevention: Jain Scriptures”, posted on *Jainuine* during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic is a good case in point.<sup>35</sup> Similar to Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain, Muni Trailokyamaṇḍan Vijayjī begins by accrediting a scientific authority to the WHO organization on all matters regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, before proceeding to raise his religion above it. In his article, he examines the *Oghaniryukti*, an ancient Jain text attributed to Bhadrabāhu,<sup>36</sup> with the objective “to point out the similarities between the instructions or advice that is being given by renowned health bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and Health Ministries across the globe with those written in this scripture [i.e., the *Oghaniryukti*]” (Vijayjī 2020a). Finding multiple purported agreements between the verses of the *Oghaniryukti* and the WHO guidelines aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, he further points out to his readers that Bhadrabāhu arrived at the same insights as today’s scientists without needing any of the modern high-tech laboratory equipment they use. This, he concludes, proves the continued relevance of “age-old scriptures . . . in today’s day and age” (Vijayjī 2020a).<sup>37</sup>

The narrative that seeks to harmonize Jainism and science, whether by “scientizing” Jainism or “Jainifying” science, is not unique to the Jain tradition. Also in the Hindu tradition, there are processes of scientization that go back to the middle of the nineteenth century. As the historian of science Meera Nanda writes: “Claims to the effect that ‘it is all in the Vedas’—where ‘all’ includes all known facts and artifacts of modern science and technology . . . are not new”. In fact, “[t]he current craze”, she continues, “for finding modern science in ancient religious texts is part and parcel of the history of modernity in India” (Nanda 2016, pp. 4–5). As a result, “accommodating science and Hindu beliefs has become a part of the common sense of most Indians” (ibid., p. 5).

Considering these facts, we may ask why the processes of scientization have become so conspicuous in various religious traditions. What does one seek to accomplish when aligning one’s religion with modern science? With regard to the Hindu tradition, Meera Nanda shows how the active efforts to harmonize one’s religion with modern science need to be understood as a heritage-making enterprise, a way of glorifying and finding pride in one’s past and tradition (ibid., pp. 6–10). These observations are equally applicable to the efforts of Jains who seek to show the universal relevance of Jain principles (universalization) and the scientific nature of their religion (scientization).

Whether intended or unintended, the narrative of Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain that, as we have seen, not only aligns Jain principles and the WHO guidelines, but also raises “Jainism” above the WHO organization when making priority claims, must help in cultivating a sense of pride in the Jain tradition. During the semi-structured Zoom interviews, I asked Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain about their motivations to participate in this narrative. They both shared similar views. Today’s Jain youth, they claim, need scientific proof of Jain principles. Tejal Shah explained how in her childhood “being Jain” informed every aspect

of her upbringing. “When growing up”, she says, “Jainism was more like mannerism”, being instructed not to show teeth when smiling or not to laugh too loudly.<sup>38</sup> She learned “the Jain way of life” from her mother.<sup>39</sup> She describes how she accepted her upbringing without questioning it. By contrast, she continues, the Jain youth ask many “how, why, and what questions”. To prevent that they discard Jain values and principles, it is necessary, she stresses, to connect Jainism with science.

Likewise, Shugan Jain expressed his belief that to successfully inculcate young Jains with Jain values, they need to be convinced of the relevance of Jain practices by means of scientific arguments. He compares this with his upbringing, explaining how his Jain values are deeply ingrained because he grew up in a strong Jain environment. It may be remembered that Shugan Jain attended the Hīrā Lāl Jain Secondary School in Delhi where many of his fellow students were also Jain. He “learned Jainism”, he explains, from his extended family, the wider Jain community, and from the *sādhus* (monks) and the *sādhvīs* (nuns). While he regrets the fact that the extended family unit has today largely been dissolved and replaced with the nuclear family unit, he embraces the scientization of Jainism, which results, in his eyes, in a more critical and value-oriented religious education instead of a blind focus on ritual.

Both Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain stress that the scientization is necessary for a youth that respect the authority of “science” more than the instructions of one’s peers. While historicizing and contextualizing their view in detail lies beyond the scope of this article, it may be noted that in recent years various Digambara and Śvetāmbara pathshalas have been making conscientious efforts to explain the relevance of Jain tenets in scientific terms (Bothra 2018; Maes 2020, p. 16). In her ethnographical study on contemporary Jain education, Shivani Bothra argues that since the 1990s there has been an ongoing shift in the religious education of Jain children (Bothra 2018). She observes how pathshalas have started to incorporate modern educational tools and use scientific rationales for age-old Jain rituals and dietary practices to keep Jain children involved (ibid., p. 70). She writes:

“In recent times, Jains have been providing a lot of scientific reasoning to the non-Jain world in support of vegetarianism. This application of scientific principles is not limited to vegetarianism but is carried across several other Jain precepts. Gyanshala teachers apply a similar strategy to explain several principles, including vegetarianism, to convince the new generation of Jains how scientific the Jain religion is. Such innovative treatment in religious education is similar to my analysis in the Digambar pathshala curriculum. Some Gyanshala teachers with whom I interacted show children pictures of human anatomy and physiology, either from science books or through Power Point presentations”. (p. 141)

The reasons why some Jains choose to actively participate in the scientization of Jainism are undoubtedly more varied and complex than the ones stated here. We may, for instance, want to consider how the minority status of Jainism drives some Jains to promote their religion to others using a universal, scientific language.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the role and vision of ascetic leaders in developing and encouraging the universalization and the scientization of Jainism has yet to be critically examined.<sup>41</sup> Be that as it may, the narrative that Jainism is a scientific religion, whose principles could help solve global problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has become a dominant trope in the Jain discourse.

## 5. Conclusions

In some way or other, the COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting everyone and everything. While we all, theoretically, may have adopted and incorporated the same measures against COVID-19, we all, theoretically, may have framed and experienced these measures differently. In this article, I showed how some Jains framed several COVID-19 measures within a Jain worldview by means of a critical analysis of Tejal Shah’s pravachan “Peace in a Pandemic” and Shugan Jain’s essay “Minimizing a Pandemic’s Impact”. I demonstrated how Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain drew parallels between various Jain principles and the

WHO guidelines. Focusing in particular on the public face mask and the practice of social distancing, I pointed out that the equation of Jain practices with COVID-19 measures involves a “stretching of the religious language” to include, for instance, the medical face mask into the reference field of *muhpattī* and the practice of social distancing in the vow of *brahmacarya*. In the same context, we have seen how Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain also viewed several lockdown restrictions as being in line with Jain practices.

In the final section, I considered how Tejal Shah’s pravachan and Shugan Jain’s essay fit within an early Jain discourse on the pandemic that reflected on the causes of the pandemic in environmental terms and that presented Jain principles as a universal, scientific solution to overcome the current COVID-19 crisis. I showed how both Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain view the COVID-19 pandemic as the result of an environmental crisis. I argued that their very equation of Jain practices with the WHO guidelines should be understood within the ongoing universalization and scientization of Jainism. In this context, I showed how drawing parallels between the WHO guidelines and Jain practices results, on the one hand, in Jainism being “scientized” and, on the other hand, in modern science being “Jainified”.

By framing the COVID-19 guidelines within a Jain worldview, Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain turned secular guidelines into theological practices. In a lecture titled “Brief on COVID-19”, Shugan Jain (2020b) explained how he felt he was participating in a pilgrimage or meditation camp when adhering to the “do’s and don’ts of COVID life”.<sup>42</sup> In other words, through their narrative on the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO guidelines, which, one should note, are inherently secular, turned into Jain religious practices.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> YJA Day 2020—Peace in a Pandemic: Adult Pravachan by Tejal Shah: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAYGWK7mWZg&t=1133s> (accessed on 17 October 2021). See (Young Jains of America 2020).
- <sup>2</sup> Derāvāsī is the term of self-identification Tejal Shah used during our Zoom conversation. In certain parts of India, the term Derāvāsī is used to refer to image-worshipping Śvetāmbaras. Cf. (Wiley 2004, s.v., p. 74).
- <sup>3</sup> The term *pāṭhaśālā* translates to “a hall” (*śālā*) of “recitation” or “learning” (*pāṭha*) and thus refers to a place of religious education. On Jain religious education, see (Bothra 2018; Donaldson 2019a, 2019b; Maes 2020). *Shibirs* are workshops organized by the lay community. The workshops can range from two hours to a few days. Possible topics of *shibirs* are meditation, the reading of scriptures, or value education for children.
- <sup>4</sup> In 2018, there were over 50 NRI children from 11 different countries participating in the Tapovan Shibir. Cf. [https://www.jaina.org/page/07\\_28\\_18\\_ENewsletter](https://www.jaina.org/page/07_28_18_ENewsletter) (accessed on 8 March 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> The *namokar mantra* (Skt. *namaskāra mantra*) is the most sacred Jain mantra. It pays homage to the five supremely worship-worthy beings: the *arihaṃtas* (one who has achieved omniscience), the *siddhas* (liberated soul), the *ācāryas* (mendicant leader), the *upādhyāyas* (preceptor), and the *sādhus* and *sādhvīs* (male and female mendicants). The *Jīvaśīkāra* is a *sūtra* that treats the various types of living beings, consisting of fifty *gāthās* (verses). It is attributed to the eleventh-century Śvetāmbara *ācārya* Śāntisūri.
- <sup>6</sup> Tejal Shah’s father was a successful international trader in pearls. Shortly after her father passed away, both her mother and sister took *dīkṣā*. Semi-structured Zoom interview, February 2022.
- <sup>7</sup> Today, Walsingham is registered as an Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (I.C.S.E.) School. Cf. <http://walsinghamschool.org/abt-profile.html> (accessed on 5 March 2022).
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. <http://www.hljain1901sch.org/> (accessed on 23 March 2022). During our Zoom conversation, Shugan Jain explained that his great-grandparents were involved in the establishment of the school in New Delhi.

- Today, it is known as the Delhi Technological University (DTU). The name change reflects the fact that the DCE was given a university status in 2009. Cf. <http://www.dtu.ac.in/Web/About/history.php> (accessed on 6 March 2022).
- The JVBI was established in 1970 under the auspices of Ācārya Tulsī of the Śvetāmbara Terāpanth community. In 1991, it was awarded the accreditation of Deemed University. For a description of the JVBI as a higher Jain educational institution, see (Maes 2020).
- For what I mean with “traditional understandings”, see Note 13.
- It should be noted that in a few instances Tejal Shah seems to unjustly attribute popular COVID-19 beliefs that were not supported by the WHO or other public health organizations as being sanctioned by the WHO. Whenever this is the case, I marked the so-called WHO guideline with an asterisk. This table aims to show how Tejal Shah and Shugan Jain actively tried to find parallels between Jain tenets and COVID-19 practices that they attribute to the WHO.
- With “traditional understanding”, I refer to how the practice in question would have been commonly explained by Jains before the COVID-19 pandemic. By incorporating this traditional explanation, I hope to make readers aware of how the traditional understanding of the Jain practice is being modified to incorporate the COVID-19 practice.
- It is unclear whether sanitizing groceries was recommended by the WHO or other public health agencies. An archived webpage of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which was last updated on 31 December 2020, warns against using “disinfecting products on food or food packaging”. Cf. (CDC 2019). The fact is, however, that during the early stages of the pandemic, when it was not known how long the COVID-19 virus could last on surfaces, many were disinfecting their groceries and food packages.
- In his national address on 19 March 2020, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, urged his “fellow citizens to make purchases as normal, and not hoard essential items in Panic Buying”. Cf. “PM’s address to the nation on combating COVID-19”. [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/pms-address-to-the-nation-on-comabting-covid-19/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-to-the-nation-on-comabting-covid-19/) (accessed on 13 December 2021).
- Tejal Shah attributes this recommendation to the WHO, but in its “Food and Nutrition Tips during Self-Quarantine”, the WHO official standpoint is “to prioritize fresh product”. Cf. WHO: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/publications-and-technical-guidance/food-and-nutrition-tips-during-self-quarantine> (accessed on 24 October 2021).
- Tejal Shah presents this as a WHO guideline. It is, however, unlikely that the WHO advised to boil water within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In comparison, an archived website of the CDC dated from 31 December 2020 notes how “the virus that causes COVID-19 has not been found in drinking water”. (CDC 2019). During the early phases of the pandemic, many, being unsure if the virus could spread through tap water, boiled their drinking water.
- (Jain Digest 2020, vol. 15): “Life During Pandemic: Experiences of Jain Community”, October 2020. <https://www.jaina.org/page/JainDigest> (accessed on 15 December 2021).
- Cf. Quora post: <https://www.quora.com/Are-Jainism-practices-the-solution-to-Corona-virus/answer/Aadish-Surana> (accessed on 15 March 2022).
- In this context, it is interesting to note that Shugan Jain also gave a lecture entitled: “A Brief on COVID-19”, which was published online on 23 March 2020 by the ISJS. In this lecture, he uses the word “face mask” and not *muhpattī*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsUpIS5JBW&t=31s> (accessed on 25 September 2021)
- (John Hopkins Medicine Website n.d.): “Coronavirus, Social and Physical Distancing and Self-Quarantine” by (Maragakis 2020). See Note 13.
- Also Aadish Surana finds agreement between the vow of *brahmacarya* and the COVID-19 practice of social distancing. He writes: “Jain monk can’t touch other monks and nuns or any other laymen without any reason as it violates their Celibacy vow. Now same thing is followed by us as Social Distancing”. <https://www.quora.com/Are-Jainism-practices-the-solution-to-Corona-virus/answer/Aadish-Surana> (accessed on 11 March 2022)
- The *namaskāra* greeting is a common greeting in India. It is interesting to note that T. Shah refers to it as the “Jain” *namaskāra*. Shah does not refer to this practice with the technical term, but with “Mahāvīra’s instruction to not waste time”.
- Tejal Shah “thanks corona” several times in her pravachan. When arguing, e.g., that the pandemic brought out the virtue of *sevā* (service) in doctors, nurses, and in those who were making and delivering food packages to the needy, she concludes by saying “thank you corona for making us realize our own true potential”.
- “The stretching of the religious language” is an expression inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith’s analysis of Columbus’ discovery of America. In “What a Difference a Difference Makes”, Smith argues that the conquest of America was “primarily a linguistic event” where difference or otherness constituted “a challenge to ‘decipherment’ [and] . . . an occasion for the ‘stretching’ of language” (Smith 2004, pp. 274–75).
- See Note 13.
- “Emic- or Pandemic-Specific” interpretation refers here to how either Tejal N. Shah (2020) or Shugan Jain (2020) explain the Jain practice or vow in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.



- 30 For an example where Jainism is proposed as a solution to today's medicalization of the dying process and the poor end-of-life care, see (N. Shah 2020). For examples where Jainism is proposed as a solution to environmental problems such as global warming, see, among others, Rahul Kapoor Jain's Say No to More. A Three Step Solution to Climate Change. <https://jainavenue.org/videos/> (accessed on 20 March 2022) and *Environmental Doctrines of Jainism* by S.M. Jain, a retired Rajasthani Forest Officer. In his book, Jain "systematically compiled salient doctrines of Jainism which address problems of environmental degradation and practical measures to solve them". Cf. (Jain 2012): iv. For an example where Jainism is proposed as a solution to avoid future COVID-19-like pandemics, see (R. Jain 2020).
- 31 For Shugan Jain, there are four core principles of Jainism, consisting of *śraman*, which he defines as work ethics, and *ahimsā*, *anekāntavāda*, and *aparigraha* (also popularly known as the "Triple A of Jainism").
- 32 For other examples of Jains endorsing such views, see, e.g., (Dipak Doshi in Young Minds 2020, p. 7; P. Jain 2020d; R. Jain 2020).
- 33 I thank the reviewer who brought to my attention the "Jainification" of modern science or, in their words, the fact that "modern science is 'Jainified'" when Jains draw parallels between the WHO guidelines and ancient Jain principles.
- 34 In this context, it is worth noting that Shugan Jain mentioned during the Zoom interview that he had asked scientists to prove certain Jain tenets. Upon the initiative of the Jain Academy of Scholars (<https://www.jainscholars.com/>, accessed on 23 March 2022), Shugan Jain gave in March 2022 a lecture to "a group of highly educated scientists" on the importance of "non-violent food" and asked them to "prove" (i.e., to scientifically substantiate) his arguments.
- 35 Cf. [https://medium.com/@connect\\_26403/eradication-n-prevention-jain-scripture-5ba02994567](https://medium.com/@connect_26403/eradication-n-prevention-jain-scripture-5ba02994567) (accessed on 23 March 2022). The blog was posted on 6 May 2020 on *Jainuine*. A few days later, on 28 May 2020, a near-identical version was posted in Hindi on <https://medium.com/tirthbooks> (accessed on 23 March 2022) under the title "कोरोना वायरस के संदर्भ में जैनशास्त्रों का जबरजस्त मार्गदर्शन". Both posts are accredited to Muni Śrī Trailokyamaṇḍan Vijayjī. See also Note 37.
- 36 The *Oghaniryukti* ("A General Explanation", Prakrit: *Oghanijjuti*) is one of the four *Mūlasūtras*. This *niryukti* or verse commentary is also known as the *Pinḍanijjuti* as it gives detailed instructions on how Jain ascetics should ask, receive, and inspect alms (*pinḍa*). It is attributed to Bhadrabāhu, whose exact persona and date are subject to much contestation. Cf. (Wiley 2004, pp. 50–52).
- 37 While it is difficult to trace the reach and popularity of Vijayjī's claims, it should be noted that *Jainuine*, the blog where his article was posted, is especially aimed at young, anglophone Jains. Cf. <https://jainuine.com/about-us/> (accessed on 24 March 2022). Further, it is clear that this claim (namely, that Jain canonical texts already knew how to prevent the spread of infectious diseases before modern science discovered "the same") gained some currency among some Jains during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is seen from the facts that Vijayjī's article was reposted on a different blog in Hindi on 28 May 2020 and that Tejal Shah drew identical parallels between the WHO guidelines and the verses of the *Oghaniryukti* in her pravachan. Cf. (Vijayjī 2020b; T. Shah 2020). See also Note 35.
- 38 The "mannerism" described by Shah exemplifies, in a way, the gender socialization in India. For a discussion of how "women and men are produced as gendered beings in patrilineal Jain society" in India, see (Vallely 2002b, especially pp. 222–57).
- 39 For an ethnographical work discussing the role of family, and especially women, in Jain education in India, see (Kelting 2001).
- 40 I thank Shivani Bothra for pointing this out. In a conversation on this topic in February 2022, she remarked how "the question of science comes when you want to prove your religion; when you want your religion to be acknowledged by other traditions".
- 41 For instance, in the 1980s Ācārya Tulsī, the then head of the Śvetāmbara Terāpanth community, developed a song on how science and religion should go hand in hand. Shivani Bothra, personal communication. Email 7 February 2022.
- 42 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsUpIS5JBuW> (accessed on 2 October 2021). When Shugan Jain gave this lecture in March 2020, India was going through its first nationwide lockdown (24 March 2020–14 April 2020).

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