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Review of Gough, E. Making a mantra: tantric ritual and renunciation on the Jain path to liberation

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Ellen Gough, *Making a Mantra: Tantric Ritual and Renunciation on the Jain Path to Liberation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-226-76690-4 (cloth) / 978-0-226-76706-2 (paper) / 978-0-226-76723-9 (e-book). \$95.00 (cloth) / \$30.00 (paper) / \$29.99 (pdf).

One cannot deny that Jain ascetics have a sense of humour. At the start of her introduction to the *ṛddhimaṅgala*, the Prakrit mantra that forms the subject of this timely and well-conceived book, Ellen Gough reports: ‘When I asked one monk why he could not explain to me the contents of the mantra, he replied: “Why can’t just anyone go into the Pentagon?”’ (p. 6). This little anecdote is illustrative of two features that characterize the book as a whole: (1) while being largely concerned with premodern texts, Gough also brings in an anthropological perspective based on several seasons of ethnographic fieldwork (in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra), which is revealing and often lacking in works of this kind; (2) the debunking of stereotypes of Jainism, in this case that of the Jain monk aloof from the ways of the world, as well as that of Jain *mantraśāstra* being something external to the ‘authentic’ ascetic values of Jainism. It is the latter stereotype with which Gough takes issue and which she challenges by engaging with the ritual elements that define the field of tantric studies.¹ The book is good to think with and fittingly published in *Class 200: New Studies in Religion*, a new book series published by the University of Chicago Press.

In the Introduction (‘Tantra, Asceticism, and the Life a Mantra’) Gough sets out the main parameters and argument of the book, opening with an account of Manju Jain, ‘a businesswoman and counselor at the Spiritual Center in Nagpur, Maharashtra’ (p. 3) who published a book called *Jaina Method of Curing* in 2011, which ‘describes the creation of forty-eight different geometric diagrams (*yantra*) that can be made out of foodstuffs, painted on cloth or paper, or inscribed on metal. These diagrams are composed mainly of words: they contain different incantations (mantras) and praises to people Jains regard as being spiritually advanced and having superhuman powers.’ (p. 4). It will not be hard to notice in this brief description ritual components generally associated with Tantra, although *Jaina Method of Curing* never once uses the term. The avoidance of the term is characteristic of Jain attitudes as well as of academic scholarship: Tantra tends to be seen as opposed to the celibate, ascetic path

1 A major frame of reference is the ‘ritual syntax’ identified in Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson, ‘On the Shared ‘Ritual Syntax’ of the Early Tantric Traditions,’ in: *Tantric Studies: Fruits of a Franco-German Collaboration on Early Tantra*, ed. Goodall and Isaacson (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2016), pp. 1–76.

of Jainism in which karma is destroyed through austerities.² Gough proposes ‘that scholars move beyond the framework of defining entire systems, world-views, traditions, time periods, texts, or religious practitioners as “tantric” and instead use the term primarily to refer to ritual components’ (p. 7). In doing so, she brings into focus a historical process of ‘tantricization’ in Jainism and critically reviews the ascetic-tantric divide in scholarship on Tantra, which has led either to the sidelining of Jainism in studies of Tantra or treating it as derivative, secondary and dependent upon ‘Hindu’ Tantra. (e.g., André Padoux, in *The Hindu Tantric World*, quoted on p. 15: ‘There are also Jain Tantric texts, but they are not important enough or original enough to be described here’). The book maps this process of ‘tantricization’ by tracking the developmental history of a single ritual component, namely the set of Prakrit praises called *ṛddhimaṅgala*, across the sectarian divide of Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras, and from its earliest, pre-mantric origins in the Digambara *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* (ca. first half of the first millennium) to its appearance in the 21st-century *Jaina Method of Curing*.

Chapter 1 (‘From *Maṅgala* to Mantra: Destroying Karma with Sound’) examines Jain commentarial literature on *maṅgalas*, the benedictions at the start of a work to remove obstacles, in the light of Jain understandings of the power of sound, focusing on the *ṛddhimaṅgala*, so-called ‘because it is made up of forty-four praises, most of which are offered to Jain practitioners who have achieved certain human powers (*ṛddhi*), such as the ability to fly or to generate an unlimited amount of food’ (p. 23). Together with the *pañcanamaskāra*, which honors the *arhats*, *siddhas*, *ācāryas*, *upādhyāyas*, and *sādhus*, the *ṛddhimaṅgala* is found for the first time in the *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and constitutes one of the most important Jain mantras to this day. The *ṛddhimaṅgala* honors a range of powerful beings, including not only the enlightened *jinās*, but also groups of beings who have achieved ‘(1) powers of intellect, (2) powers of transformation, (3) powers of austerities, (4) powers of healing, (5) powers of physical strength, (6) powers to transform speech or food from ordinary to sweet, and (7) powers to make food and dwellings inexhaustible (*akṣīṇa*)’ (p. 26). While the *ṛddhimaṅgala* is first found in a Digambara text, its ritual use by Śvetāmbaras is well attested relatively early on, for example in the Śvetāmbara

2 There are exceptions to this portrayal. See, for example, the contributions by Paul Dundas (pp. 231–238), John E. Cort (pp. 417–433) and Olle Qvarnström (pp. 595–604) in David Gordon White (ed.), *Tantra in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. Also Paul Dundas, ‘Becoming Gautama: Mantra and History in Śvetāmbara Jainism,’ in: John E. Cort (ed.), *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 31–66.

Prakrit *Aṅgavidyā* (= *Aṅgavijjā*) and the *Mahānīśīthasūtra* (= *Mahānīsiha*).³ A lengthy discussion of the *pañcanamaskāra* and the *ṛddhimaṅgala* features in the *Dhavalā*, a Prakrit commentary on the *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* written by the Digambara Vīrasena in Karnataka in 816 CE. The work of Vīrasena sheds considerable light on how Jains conceptualized the workings of Jain mantras: 'Because [according to Vīrasena] these praises are essentially a form of *tapas*—praising mendicants—they destroy the karma that blocks the infinite knowledge and power of the soul.' (p. 40). In other words, the ritual use of a set of mantras (importantly not adapted from a non-Jain source, but a set of invocations at the heart of the Jain tradition itself) is brought in line with the key Jain doctrine of karma-destroying *tapas*. In addition, 'Vīrasena may have even known about geometric diagrams on which the *ṛddhi-maṅgala* were inscribed, since he references the name of one of these diagrams, the Ring of Disciples (*gaṇa-dharavalaya*).' (p. 39). This 'Ring of Disciples,' in which the powers associated with the *tīrthaṅkaras*' disciples are inscribed on a ring, is taken up as a subject in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 ('Maṇḍalas and Mantras: The Jina's Preaching Assembly as a Tantric Initiation Diagram') opens with a discussion on Jain mendicant initiation, highlighting its ascetic features and how these have prevented scholars from recognizing its tantric components. Through a detailed description of two contemporary initiation ceremonies (one Digambara and one Śvetāmbara), Gough shows how it is constituted of 'ascetic' and 'tantric' components. The rest of the chapter traces the way in which 'medieval Jains drew upon early ascetic models to insert key "tantric" components of initiation—mantras and *maṇḍalas*—into existing monastic ordinations' (p. 53). Texts from the first half of the millennium not only attest to the celebratory and ascetic components of modern-day initiation (procession around the town of the initiate, pulling out of the hair, adoption of mendicant vows, etc.), but also to the presence of the Jina's Preaching Assembly. How this assembly was materialized is not so clear (Gough speculates, for example, on the possible use of diagrams like the *āyagaṇaṭas* found in Mathura, from as early as the first century BCE), but what is important is that the medieval Jains, when they started to 'tantrify' their mendicant initiation ceremonies, 'did not need to appropriate the *maṇḍala* from another tradition—they had for centuries been using a perfectly symmet-

3 Note that throughout the book, 'all terms and titles of texts' have been 'transcribed into Sanskrit' (p. ix: 'A Note on Transliteration and Translation'). This is curious in a book dedicated to a Prakrit mantra and involving a number of Prakrit sources. On the other hand, the *ṛddhi-maṅgala* itself (pp. 26–29, with English translation) as well as other mantras referred to are given in the original Prakrit.

rical representation of their tradition with their main object of reverence at the center' (p. 58). What this tantricization of initiation looked like is discussed in the remainder of the chapter with respect to both Śvetāmbara and Digambara initiation. It involves easily recognizable tantric components such as the throwing of a flower on a maṇḍala and the imparting of liberating mantras, evincing 'a gradual integration of tantric and ascetic components' (p. 67). The Śvetāmbara case is presented through the work of the eighth-century Haribhadrasūri, which shows a deep engagement with Śaiva and Buddhist tantric traditions, while at the same time emphasizing the ideological primacy of the *jīnas* and the laws of karma: 'instead of having the flower-throwing rite determine the initiate's name or chosen mantra, Haribhadrasūri's version of the rite determines the candidate's eligibility to renounce and karmic status' (p. 62).

Chapter 3 ('Sects and Secrecy: Comparing the Mantras of the Levels of Initiation') traces the historical connections between the Digambara and Śvetāmbara initiation mantras and *yantras*, specifically the 'Digambara Ring of Disciples' and the 'Śvetāmbara Cloth Diagram of the Mantra of the Mendicant Leader' in the context of non-Jain tantric traditions, since '[b]oth Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras used the *ṛddi-maṅgala* to develop rites of promotion to various ranks of mendicancy that in some ways parallel the levels of promotion in the traditions of the Śaiva Mantramārga, Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra, and tantric Buddhism' (p. 74). Indeed, while using different, characteristically Jain terms (see tables 3.1 and 3.2), the hierarchical levels of promotion show certain similarities with those of the Śaiva Mantramārga, like the *saṃayin*, *putraka*, *sādhaka*, and *ācārya*. Tantric elements abound in the promotion ceremonies, as illustrated, for example, by the use of a hexagram with the syllables *a pra ti ca kre phaṭ* inscribed in its six corners, linked to the *apratīcākṛā*-mantra as well as the goddess Apraticākṛā ('another name for Cakreśvarī, the *yakṣī*, or protector goddess, of Ṛṣabhā', p. 102), and with the seed syllable *kṣmā* in the centre. The process of 'tantricization' of Jain levels of monasticism can be traced from the eighth century onward and reaches its apex around the thirteenth-fifteenth century CE. Crucially, however, the incorporation of tantric components did not lead to a separate tantric path to liberation, as in the non-Jain tantric traditions, but was seamlessly integrated in the mendicant initiations that remained essentially an ascetic path.

Chapter 4 ('Tantric Meditation as a Means of Liberation') opens with a detailed description of a modern-day performance of the 'Worship Ceremony of the Wheel of the Liberated Soul' (*siddhacakravidhāna*) for the 'Festival of Eight Days' (*aṣṭāhnikaparva*), drawing attention to its tantric ritual structure, comprising 'purifications with water (*snāna*) and mantras (*bhūtaśuddhi*), the deification of the worship (*sakalīkaraṇa*) via visualizations and the placement

of mantras on his body (*nyāsa*), and the physical worship of a *yantra* or icon that becomes a receptacle of objects of worship of the tradition' (p. 114). There are also elements that are strikingly different in comparison with non-Jain traditions, however. For example, in the Śaiva rite of *sakalīkaraṇa* the worshiper transforms himself into Śiva, according to the dictum—with variants—*śivo bhūtvā śivaṃ yajet* ('having become Śiva he may worship Śiva'),⁴ but in the Jain case a worshiper is transformed not into a Jina, but into a Jina-worshipping 'king of the gods, an *indra*, the prototypical worshiper of a *jina*' (p. 122). In other words, one does not identify with the object of worship itself, but only with an exemplary divine worshiper. In the remainder of the chapter Gough convincingly shows how medieval Jain monks argued for the soteriological use of *yantras* ('as effective in destroying karma and advancing toward liberation', p. 114), thus criticizing earlier scholarship on Jainism, as expressed for example by Padmanabh Jaini, that, while Jains developed rituals involving *yantras* in the medieval period, these 'lack[ed] the basic ingredient of the tantric cult—fusion of the mundane and the supermundane' and 'such practices seem to have had little effect upon the development of Jainism' (p. 114, quoting from Padmanabh Jaini's *The Jaina Path of Purification*).⁵ An investigation into the possible origins of a set of terms referring to categories of meditation whose names end in *stha* (*piṇḍastha*, *padastha*, *rūpastha*, and *rūpātīta*), which are foreign to early Jain texts and occur for the first time in tenth-century Digambara texts of Central India, provides more evidence for Alexis Sanderson's argument that 'the contents of the key texts of the Western Transmission (*paśīmāmnāya* [sic: *paścimāmnāya*]) of the Śaiva Kulamārga, the *Kubjikāmata* and the *Manthānabhairava*, are "product[s] of the Deccan"' (p. 131)⁶ and firmly dates the Paścimāmnāya's presence in that region in the tenth century.

Chapter 5 ('The Tantric Rituals of Modern Monks'), as indicated by its title, explores the survival and renewal of Jain tantric rituals in modern times, based on ethnographic research and analysis of modern manuals. A *yantra* referred to as the 'Cloth Diagram of the Spell of Mahāvīra' (*vardhamānavidyāpaṭa*) lies at the heart of these rituals. Gough provides a detailed description of its worship, illustrated with various photographs showing the individual *mudrās* employed

4 Although generally associated with tantric Śaivism, this dictum may have a non-tantric origin. See Peter C. Bisschop, Nirajan Kafle and Timothy Lubin, *A Śaiva Utopia: The Śivadharmā's Revision of Brahmanical Varṇāśramadharmā. Critical Edition, Translation & Study of the Śivāśramādhyāya of the Śivadharmāśāstra*. Napoli: UniorPress, 2021, p. 11, with references.

5 Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jain Path of Purification*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, p. 254, n. 20.

6 Alexis Sanderson, 'The Śaiva Literature.' *Journal of Indological Studies* 24 and 25 (2021–2013): 1–113 (62).

in the ritual (figures 5.4 and 5.5), which once again attests to an underlying ritual syntax shared with non-Jain tantric traditions. The elaborate *yantra* is illustrated (figures 5.2)⁷ and discussed in detail, including tantric syllable clusters like *iri, kiri, giri, piri, siri, hiri, āiri* which form part of the *sūrīmantra*, drawing specific attention to its 'claims about lineage and the hierarchy of deities in the universe' (p. 174). An investigation into the history of this kind of ritual once again shows significant interconnections with non-Jain tantric traditions, for it is centred around 'four key goddesses common to Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions: Jayā, Vijayā, Aparājītā, and Jayantī' (p. 191). These goddesses are depicted in the cloth diagrams with the same colour and in the same position as described in the Śaiva *Vīṇāśikhātāntra* (ca. seventh century), where the four goddesses are called the 'Sisters of Tumburu'. Moreover, the four-headed Tumburu at the centre of the square *maṇḍala* of the *Vīṇāśikhātāntra* is matched by the four-headed Mahāvīra at the centre of the *vardhamānavidyā-paṭa*. An intriguing and widespread element in modern tantric rituals concerns the preparation of sandalwood powder consecrated with a mantra (*sūrīmantra*, *vardhamānavidyā*), called 'a throw of scent' (*vāsakṣepa*), which is subsequently used for various ritual and empowering purposes. Gough does not make the comparison, but it seems strongly parallel to the use of ashes (*bhasman*) in the Śaiva tradition.⁸

In the Conclusion ('The Past Lives of Modern Mantras') Gough reflects on the historical trajectory of the *ṛddhimaṅgala*, what she calls 'the life of a mantra,' arguing that it 'rose to prominence in the medieval period through the tantricization of the ascetic Jain path to liberation' (p. 201). Important in this trajectory is the fact that it already existed as a *maṅgala* in the Jain tradition, making 'tantricization' a more or less seamless process as it could build upon its own earlier and canonical prototype. The book concludes with a brief historiography of modern scholarship on Jainism and the influence of Hermann Jacobi's choice of translating the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, the *Kalpasūtra*, the *Uttarādhyayanāsūtra* and the *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* for his contribution to Max Müller's *The Sacred Books of the East*, and not the *Bhaktāmarastotra*, his very first trans-

7 For reproductions in colour of two beautiful 15th-century examples of this type of *yantra* from Rajasthan, see Phyllis Granoff (ed.), *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection*. New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2009, pp. 289–290 (the two *yantras* illustrated there accompany the chapter 'Contemporary Jain Maṇḍala Rituals' by John E. Cort, pp. 140–157 in the same volume).

8 For the textual history of the term *vāsakṣepa*, see the references provided by Willem B. Bollée in his review of John E. Cort, *Jains in the World. Religious Values and Ideology in India* (New York/New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001) in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 47 (2003): 233–235.

lation of a Jain scripture,⁹ leading Gough to posit a What if? scenario: 'Had he defined Jainism in terms of the *Bhaktāmarastotra*, he could have begun the project of this book: a comparative historical study of the texts, images, and practices of modern Jainism' (213).

While being first of all concerned with a Jain subject, *Making a Mantra* should be of interest to a much broader readership, in particular those engaged in the field of tantric studies. Its methodology of tracking the 'tantrification' of a single invocation across time and across different traditions could be fruitfully applied, for example, to the set of five *brahmamantras* (Tatpuruṣa, Aghora, Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, and Īśāna), which, while first adopted by the ascetic Pāśupatas, reappear in a variety of forms, with the addition and/or replacement with *bīja* syllables, and multiple uses across a range of different Śaiva, Śākta, and even Vaiṣṇava tantric traditions.¹⁰ In fact, the Pāśupatas also provide a possible comparative case for the tantrification of an ascetic tradition, as it developed its own ascetic-cum-tantric model in the form of the Lākulas and Kāpālikas, what Alexis Sanderson has come to refer to as Atimārga II and Atimārga III, thus forming part of the Śaiva ascetic Atimārga but incorporating strong tantric ritual components.¹¹ The historical reality is often more complex than our scholarly categorizations allow for and *Making a Mantra* makes an excellent case for critically engaging with them anew, by bringing the ascetic perspective into the heart of tantric studies and granting Jainism a place in it.

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9 Hermann Jacobi, 'Zwei Jaina-Stotra.' *Indische Studien* 14 (1876): 359–391.

10 For the Vaiṣṇava form of the *brahmamantras* as given in the newly discovered Pāñcarātra *Aṣṭādaśavidhāna*, see Diwakar Acharya, *Early Tantric Vaiṣṇavism: Three Newly Discovered Works of the Pāñcarātra. The Svāyambhuvapāñcarātra, Devāmṛtapāñcarātra and Aṣṭādaśavidhāna. Critically edited from their 11th- and 12th-century Nepalese palm-leaf manuscripts with an Introduction and Notes*. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry / École Française d'Extrême-Orient / Asien-Afrika Institut, Universität Hamburg, 2015, pp. lviii–lx.

11 Alexis Sanderson, 'The Lākulas: New Evidence of a System Intermediate Between Pāñcārthika Pāśupatism and Āgamic Śaivism.' *Indian Philosophical Annual* 24 (2006): 143–217.