



## framing the jina

Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History

JOHN E. CORT

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# Acknowledgments

The origins of this book are found in some of my earliest research on the Jains, and questions that began to emerge in the course of my doctoral fieldwork in India in 1985–87. That fieldwork eventually resulted in my 2001 *Jains in the World: Religious Values and Ideology in India*. The 1985–87 research was funded by a Fulbright-Hays Research Abroad Grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education through Harvard University. I was able to return to India to conduct fieldwork more directly related to this project in 1995 and 1996 through an Art and Religion Fellowship from the Asian Cultural Council, and in 1999/2000 through a Senior Short-Term Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies. I also conducted research that filled out this book while in India doing fieldwork for two other projects, funded by a Getty Grant Program Senior Research Grant (1997 and 1998), and a second Senior Short-Term Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies (2007/08).

I wrote the bulk of this book in 2005/06, when I was the recipient of a Fellowship for College Teachers from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The opportunity to spend an entire year focusing my energies on the book was invaluable, and the luxury of having so much time allowed me the freedom to let the manuscript take several turns which I did not expect. I am grateful to the NEH for this opportunity, and can only wish that the U.S. government dedicated more of its resources to such non-harmful enterprises. My leave from teaching

for the 2005/06 academic year was further facilitated by an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Faculty Career Enhancement Program Grant administered by Denison University. In spring of 2006 I was able to travel to India for three weeks of research in connection with the evolving manuscript courtesy of a grant from the Denison University Research Foundation.

In June 1990 I was driving with John Carman from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to the annual workshop of the Conference on Religion in South India (CRSI, subsequently renamed the Conference on the Study of Religion in India, or CSRI), which was held that year on the campus of Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Our conversation turned to the intersection of art and religion. I expressed discontent with the way that many scholars in the study of religion perceived an easy, even “natural,” connection between the two. I argued that the relationship between the two has often been a very problematic one in human religious history, and that for an adequate understanding of the relationship between them one must also study the many instances of intellectual and physical iconoclasm. Only if one understands why some people have been willing to commit violence and even kill to prevent or sever a connection between religion and art can one begin to understand why this relationship is viewed as so essential by others. This led to a series of conversations with John, and eventually to our co-teaching a seminar entitled “Icons and Iconoclasts” at Harvard in the spring of 1992. I have subsequently taught an incarnation of that course at Denison and Columbia Universities. Without the experience of teaching (and in the one special case co-teaching) those courses, and all that I learned from the students at three universities, I would not have been able to write this book.

I have also accumulated many other intellectual debts during the more than two decades of research that have fed into this book. The world of Jain Studies, both inside and outside of India, while being small, is marked by deep collegiality. My fellow students of the Jain traditions are also friends. As a result, this small field exhibits a degree of intellectual collaboration and sharing that is all too rare in the increasingly competitive and market-driven world of academia. I am sure that I am omitting some names, but I want to thank the following for advice, shared fieldwork, shared ideas and photographs, and some cases reading parts or all of this and related manuscripts: Naman Ahuja, Cathy Asher, Rick Asher, Alan Babb, Susan Bean, Jnanchand Biltiwala, Surendra Bothara, Richard Davis, M. A. Dhaky, Paul Dundas, Peter Flügel, Phyllis Granoff, John Guy, Steve Heim, Muni Jambuvijayji, Whitney Kelting, Jnanchand Khinduka, Hawon Ku Kim, Lalit Kumar, Janice Leoshko, Steven Markel, Michael Meister, Hampa Nagarajiah “Hampana,” Lisa Owen, Sonya Quintanilla, Jitendra B. Shah, Nagin J. Shah, K. C. Sogani, Doris Srinivasan,

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My most perceptive reader, and my most reliable fan, has always been my wife, Cynthia. This book would be poorer if it weren't for all that she has done for it and for me.

Finally, some debts can never be fully repaid. I dedicate this book to the memory of my parents: John S. Cort, Jr. (1913–1980) and Mary Y. Cort (1912–2007).

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# Note on Language, Transliteration, Names, and Mendicant Titles

This study makes extensive use of texts originally written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Gujarati, and Hindi. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from these languages are mine. The study is also based on fieldwork conducted in Hindi and Gujarati, with the two languages frequently mixed seamlessly with each other and English.

Indic languages include a range of consonants and vowels that cannot be represented adequately by the Roman alphabet. In response to this fact, scholars of South Asia often employ a standard system of transliteration, whereby the consonants and vowels of the Roman alphabet are inflected by additional symbols in order to represent the full range of the Indic languages. Readers of scholarship on South Asia are familiar with this transliteration, and so for them it presents no obstacle to comprehension. In fact, in many cases it is necessary for comprehension.

These additional symbols, however, can present an obstacle to an audience that is unfamiliar with them. I intend this book for an audience broader than the usual (and fairly small) readership of most scholarly monographs on South Asia. My intention has been to craft a study that places material on icons in South Asia into a broader comparative framework, so that readers familiar with similar issues in Asian and European contexts will find the book of interest. In order to invite these readers into my study, I have therefore eschewed the use of diacritical marks in the body of the text. I am sure that some of my

more orthodox Indological colleagues will be dissatisfied with this choice; at the same time, I hope that other readers benefit. I have, however, retained the use of the full set of diacritical marks in the endnotes and the bibliography. The endnotes are often aimed at a more specialist audience, for whom the diacritical marks are important. I hope that this philological compromise makes the book more accessible to both audiences.

The same words and names are pronounced (and therefore transliterated) slightly differently in classical and vernacular Indic languages. In particular, in many words the medial short “-a-” is not fully pronounced in Gujarati and Hindi, and in most words the short final “-a” is also omitted in these same languages. I have chosen in many cases in this book to employ the more classical spelling, even if the word is used in a more vernacular context. Thus I have throughout used the spelling Sthanakavasi for an important Shvetambara non-ionic sect, even though in Gujarati and Hindi it is pronounced (and therefore transliterated) Sthanakvasi. Similarly, I have used the classical spellings Digambara and Shvetambara, even when the context of the discussion might call for the vernacular transliterations of Digambar and Shvetambar.

The use of sources in Indic languages creates a further problem. I refer to upward of one hundred texts in the four languages. Having to deal with so many Indic titles can also be bewildering to an audience unfamiliar with the source languages. Even though scholarship on India usually retains the names of Indic texts in the original, I have chosen to translate titles throughout the book. Wherever possible I have simply borrowed the translations of other scholars, in particular Paul Dundas and Padmanabh S. Jaini. In other cases I have provided my own translation, trying as much as possible to be consistent in how I translate any individual word or name. I hope this strategy also enhances the accessibility of the book for nonspecialists. As I indicated, however, this practice goes against the standard practice of scholarship on South Asia, and readers familiar with Jain literature will want to know the original titles of all texts. I have therefore provided both the original and translated titles in an appendix.

Most of the authors of the texts were Jain monks. It is customary to refer to any monk by his full mendicant title, and so it will be helpful for the reader to have a simplified overview of the Jain mendicant hierarchy. At the top of that hierarchy is an *acharya*. When a monk in one of the Shvetambara Murtipujaka lineages becomes consecrated as an *acharya*, he also adds the title *-suri* to the end of his name. Next in order is an *upadhyaya*, who is authorized to teach and preach at an advanced level. Below this in the Murtipujaka lineages is a rank indicated by two terms: *pannyasa* (*pannyas* in Gujarati and Hindi; this is synonymous with the older term *pandita* or *pandit*) and *gani*, the latter being added

to the end of the mendicant's name. A monk at this level has authority over a discrete group of monks. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the undifferentiated monk, known as *muni* or *sadhu*.

The names of many mendicants also include a lineage indicator such as *-sagara* ("ocean"), *-sundara* ("beautiful"), *-vijaya* ("victory"), *-sena* ("warrior"), *-vimala* ("stainless"). These are essential parts of the mendicant's name, and so are always included. In Jain contexts, it is also the norm to find a number of honorifics attached to a mendicant's name as either prefixes or suffixes. These include *shri* ("blessed"), ૧૦૮ (an auspicious number of wholeness), *parama puja* ("supremely honorable"), *maharaja* ("great king"), *sahaba* ("master"), and the simple *-ji* ("respectful, sir"). Not to use the full array of these terms either when referring to or directly addressing a Jain mendicant in an Indian setting would be highly disrespectful. To use them throughout this book, however, would unnecessarily complicate matters for nonspecialist readers.

I am confident that I have not been fully consistent with the principles I have outlined in this note, for which I beg the indulgence of the reader.

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# Framing the Jina

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# Introduction: Icons, Idols, and Revolution

This is a book of and about narratives. These narratives tell stories of Jain images, the people who worship and venerate them as sacred icons (iconophiles), and the people who reject them as false and inanimate idols (iconoclasts). Let me start, then, with two narratives written by important, charismatic twentieth-century Jain monks about how either the rejection or acceptance of images—of idols or icons—changed the lives of people who have been foundational in the formation of subsequent Jain ritual and visual culture.

## Whose Revolution?

In 1939, the Sthanakavasi monk Muni Saubhagyachandra, better known by his nom de plume Santbal, published a biography of Lonka Shah, the fifteenth-century Jain layman who began the series of historical developments that resulted in the contemporary aniconic (and at times iconoclastic) Sthanakavasi and Terapanthi movements.<sup>1</sup> The title of his book, in which he narrated one version of Lonka Shah's life and also engaged in a broader historical study of mendicancy in the Shvetambara tradition, was simply *Lonka Shah, the Life-Breath of Religion (Dharmpran Lonkashah)*. This title indicates that in Santbal's opinion Lonka Shah breathed life back into Jainism, into a tradition and community that before him had become short of breath, and was

in a state of ill health and decay. An alternative title, *The Creator of the Era of Revolution (Krantino Yugsrishta)*, which Santbal retained as a subtitle, indicated a more forceful vision of who Lonka Shah was and what he had done. I will return to the implications of this alternative title.

Santbal's book was not history as strictly understood, for he based it as much on his normative interpretation of the past as on any adherence to the way trained historians treat facts. However, as a narrative it tells us much about how an important and representative twentieth-century Sthanakavasi intellectual understood the history of images (as idols) in Jain history.

Santbal introduced his hero by describing the state of Shvetambara Jain society in western India in the fifteenth century, the time when Lonka Shah was born. Santbal's description bears similarities to those of many other twentieth-century Jain authors, who wanted to paint the past as bleakly as possible in order to highlight their own reforms. Due to the inevitable corrupting affects of the decline of time, coupled with the corrupting influences of other religious traditions, the original pure teachings and practices of Mahavira had become obscured. Monks were monks in name only. Despite their vows of total nonpossession (*aparigraha*), according to which they should not "possess" even their robes and begging bowls, but only "borrow" them from the laity, they were deeply involved in the management of temples, which necessitated their handling of money and in other ways acting like worldly merchants. The pseudo-monks traveled in palanquins, the mode of transport of kings and wealthy men of the world, when they should travel only on foot as humble mendicants. They enjoyed public entertainments such as dramas, dances, and music, all designed to stir the senses and passions, when they should be training their minds in equanimity and dispassion. They wore expensive cloths—emblems of wealth, prestige, and egoism—when they should wear only the simple and anonymous white robes of world-renouncers. They sought public fame, when they should be indifferent to praise or censure.

Into this degraded and corrupt situation, a great revolutionary was born in 1426 in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat. Lonka Shah would illuminate the teachings of Mahavira and restore the community to the proper religious conduct. From early childhood he displayed great intellectual prowess, and mastered all the languages, classical and vernacular, needed to study Jainism. He also learned to write with a beautiful hand. As an adult he became a professional scribe. Due to his skill, a Jain monk asked him to make copies of some of the scriptures, a task that was normally done only by the monks themselves. As he copied the texts, Lonka Shah came to see just how great the gulf was between the ideals he read in the scriptures and the practices he saw all around him. Whereas the contemporary Jain ritual culture was one deeply enmeshed

in temples and in the worship of idols, he did not find a single reference to the worship of idols in the scriptures. Instead, the scriptures emphasized that true religion (dharma) is rooted in non-harm (*ahimsa*). The scriptures forbid even the slightest amount of harm to be committed in the pursuit of religion. This clearly meant that the subtle forms of harm involved in the worship of idols, through offering flowers and ointments, and burning lamps and incense were all wrong. The forms of worship around him all aimed at the attainment of worldly ends, and so were signs of wrong faith (*mithyatva*). They were not based on right faith (*samyaktva*), and so were not directed toward the supreme religious goal of liberation (*moksha*) from the suffering of rebirth.

Lonka Shah started discussing his new insights into true Jainism with other Jains in Ahmedabad. The powerful monks tried to forbid their followers from going to hear him preach, but were unsuccessful. In 1472, an influential layman named Lakhmshi Sheth who lived in Patan heard about the revolutionary teachings of Lonka Shah. Patan, which for many centuries had been the capital of medieval Gujarat, at that time was still an important Jain center, with thousands of temples and hundreds of monks. Lakhmshi came to Ahmedabad to debate Lonka Shah. Lonka showed him that the scriptures taught that the supreme religion is non-harm, and that accordingly the worship of idols contravenes the teachings of Mahavira. Real worship is not the external worship of a stone or a metal idol, but the inner worship of the virtues of one's own soul. Lakhmshi was convinced by Lonka, and he returned to Patan. He initiated a movement (*andolan*) to reform the way Jainism was practiced in the city. In this way, the revolutionary movement initiated by Lonka Shah spread throughout Gujarat and beyond. Out of this ferment eventually came the Sthanakavasi community of true monks, one of whom five centuries later was Santbal himself.<sup>2</sup>

Among the many monks who followed in Lonka Shah's footsteps was the Sthanakavasi monk Atmaram (1837–96). While for the latter part of his mendicant career he was a forceful leader of the Tapa Gaccha, the leading monastic lineage in the icon-worshipping Murtipujaka sect, and after being promoted to the post of *acharya* in 1887 as head of a group of reformist monks was known as Acharya Vijayanandsuri, he was always better known by his earlier Sthanakavasi name of Atmaram. He has been the subject of many biographies in the century following his death. The most important of these was written by his disciple and successor Acharya Vijay Vallabhsuri, and published posthumously in 1956.<sup>3</sup> If, according to Santbal, Lonka Shah had been the creator (*srishta*) of an age (*yug*) of revolution (*kranti*), then according to Vallabhsuri, Atmaram was, in the title of his biography, the *Builder of a New Era (Navyug Nirmata)*. Another short biography of Atmaram, published by a layman named

Baldev Raj Jain in 1986 in a monthly magazine dedicated to the affairs of the mendicant lineage (and its lay followers) that traces its origins back to Atmaram and Vallabhsuri, is even clearer in the parallelism with Santbalji's conception of Lonka Shah, when it designates Atmaram "A Revolutionary Jewel of a Saint" ("Krantikari Santratna").<sup>4</sup>

Atmaram was born into a Hindu family in the western part of the Punjab, in a village now in Pakistan, in 1837. He came from a martial family, and his father had been an officer in the army of Ranjit Singh. At that time the Jain community of the Punjab was split between icon-worshipping Murtipujakas and anti-icon Sthanakavasis, and there was much disagreement and public debate between the two groups. As a youth, he came into contact with some of the Sthanakavasi Jains who were very influential in the area, and took initiation as a Sthanakavasi monk in 1853.

Atmaram's guru Jivanram was an uneducated monk, so Atmaram started his serious study of the scriptures first with a Sthanakavasi layman, and then with a domesticated monk (*yati*) of the Vriddha Posaliya lineage of the Tapa Gaccha.<sup>5</sup> For the next several years he continued his studies with both laymen and Sthanakavasi monks in the Punjab, Rajasthan, and Ratlam, in the western part of what is now Madhya Pradesh. The traditional mode of scriptural study among Sthanakavasis at that time was to memorize the Prakrit root text, and study the meaning of the text through a vernacular gloss. Atmaram was not satisfied with this approach, and so began to study both grammar and Sanskrit, despite the public opposition to this break with tradition.

In 1863, he went to Agra to study a number of scriptures with Muni Ratnachand, who was widely known as one of the most intellectual Sthanakavasi monks of the time in north India. Ratnachand was obviously an independent-minded Sthanakavasi monk, for he told Atmaram that it was inadequate to study only the root Prakrit texts of the scriptures without the aid of the various layers of Prakrit and Sanskrit commentary. In fact, Ratnachand said that this Sthanakavasi hermeneutical procedure went against explicit injunctions in scriptures such as the *Blessed Scripture (Bhagavati Sutra)* and the *Scripture of Combinations (Samavayanga Sutra)*, according to which the commentaries were essential to grasp the full meaning of the scriptures. Further, when one studied the scriptures with the aid of the commentaries, it became clear that there were many references to the worship of icons. Through his textual studies, therefore, Atmaram became convinced that the traditional Sthanakavasi opposition to icons and temples contravened Jain scripture.

The following year Atmaram was in Delhi. The local Digambara community took out a procession in which icons were mounted on carts. When the procession passed in front of the house where Atmaram and some other

Sthanakavasi monks were studying, one of the other monks named Champalal, with whom Atmaram had already had several lengthy discussions concerning the appropriateness of icon worship, asked him what he thought of it. Atmaram said that the Digambaras and their icons were also part of the orthodox Jain tradition. Champalal countered that they were only worshipping inert stone, whereas he worshipped the immortal consciousness of the soul within himself. Champalal was joined in the argument by two other monks, Vishnachand and Hakamray. In the end, all three were convinced by the scriptural evidence that Atmaram was able to bring to bear on the question, and accepted that the worship of icons was proper.

For the next ten years Atmaram publicly preached throughout the Punjab that the worship of icons was a proper Jain practice. He also engaged in debates with preachers from the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu sect that eschewed the worship of icons.<sup>6</sup> Atmaram gained many converts. But he did not immediately abandon being a Sthanakavasi monk.<sup>7</sup> Finally in 1874 in the town of Hoshiarpur he publicly took off his *muhpatti*, the face mask that Sthanakavasi monks wear continually as a sign of their commitment to non-harm. Atmaram had been convinced for several years that this practice also contravened the scriptures. His preaching in favor of icons had angered many Sthanakavasis, but since monks do not worship icons by making physical offerings to them, his vocal, ideological stance did not significantly change his actual day-to-day practice. Taking off his *muhpatti*, however, marked an obvious visual break with his Sthanakavasi compatriots, and signaled a new social identity.

In 1875, Atmaram was invited to Ahmedabad by the Jain mayor (*nagarsheth*) and other leading members of the Murtipujaka congregation there. In Ahmedabad he met another former Sthanakavasi monk from the Punjab named Buteray, who had subsequently taken a new initiation as a Murtipujaka Tapa Gaccha monk with the name Buddhivijay.<sup>8</sup> Buteray reinitiated Atmaram as a Tapa Gaccha monk with the new name Anandvijay, along with fifteen other former Sthanakavasi monks. This was obviously a major public victory for the icon-worshipping Jains in the ongoing public debates within Jain society about temples and icons. Eleven years later Anandvijay was promoted to the post of *acharya*, with a changed name—Acharya Vijayanandsuri—in a grand celebration in the town of Palitana, at the base of Mount Shatrunjaya, the most important Murtipujaka pilgrimage shrine in western India. The event was attended by 35,000 people. Atmaram continued for the remainder of his life to be a powerful spokesperson for the worship of icons, writing books and engaging in public debates in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the Punjab. He also became the global public face of Jainism because of his extensive interaction with Western scholars, as a result of which he was invited to attend the World

Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He declined the offer in light of his strict adherence to his vow of non-harm, but trained the young English-speaking Jain lawyer Virchand Gandhi in the basics of Jain doctrine in order to attend the Parliament and give a keynote address.

We see from these two accounts how central Jina images, and their worship in temples, have been in the lives of some Jains. In neither case were images the only cause of the changes in their lives. In both cases scripture also played an important role, one that I will return to in this book. The proper mode of monastic conduct was also an important issue for both men; this is an issue I will touch on only in passing.

In the first case a layman who had been raised in the ritual culture of temples and icons came, through a study of scripture, to realize that this ritual culture was opposed to the fundamental Jain value of non-harm. As a result, he radically changed his life. He rejected the worship of images as idols and started a new sect within Jainism that formally eschewed temples and images.

In the second case, a man who had been so deeply influenced by this aniconic renunciant tradition that he abandoned his natal Hinduism and took initiation as a Sthanakavasi monk came, through his study of scripture and its commentaries, to realize that the aniconic ritual culture was opposed to the original teachings of Mahavira and his successors. As a result, he also radically changed his life. He actively preached that Jains should worship images as icons, and eventually abandoned the monastic tradition into which he had been initiated, took reinitiation into the icon-worshipping Murtipujaka tradition, and took on a new name.

The first story narrates events in the fifteenth century, whereas the second one narrates much more recent events, from the nineteenth century. Our narrators, however, framed their historical narratives in ways designed to emphasize their contemporary relevance. Santbal used the language of a “revolution” (*kranti*) and a “movement” (*andolan*). Both of these are distinctly modern terms in Jainism, and give evidence of Santbal’s living during a time of revolutionary change in India. It should come as no surprise that Santbal was, in the words of Kristi Wiley (2004: 191), “influenced by the Gandhian movement and engaged in various projects, including village education, cottage industries, and animal protection.” His abiding concern for social welfare led to his being expelled from the religiously conservative Sthanakavasi community of Gujarat, who believed that such social work was opposed to a proper monastic focus on world renunciation.

Vallabhsuri did not use the language of “revolution” to frame his narrative, as did the later layman Baldev Raj Jain. But he did use language that placed his subject within the discourse of modernity, with its associated

emphasis on social progress. Just as Lonka Shah, according to Santbal, had been the creator of a revolution, so Atmaram, according to Vallabhsuri, was the creator of a new era. This emphasis on the “new” was also a reflection of the influence of modernity on Vallabhsuri. Something being “new” (*nava*) or “innovative” (*navya*) is not, of course, new in India, or even in Jainism. As Paul Dundas (2007: 5) has pointed out, Devendrasuri in the thirteenth century characterized his exposition of karma theory as the *Innovative Karma Texts* (*Navya Karmagrantha*), Siddhicandra in the seventeenth century wrote in a poetic style that followed the contemporary “new” (*navina*) school of Sanskrit aesthetics, and in the seventeenth century Yashovijaya employed the fashionable “new logic” (*navya-nyaya*) to bolster his learned arguments. In Vallabhsuri’s usage “new” echoed the forward-looking optimism and language of change and progress that we find in modernist expressions throughout the world. Vallabhsuri probably would have agreed with the injunction of his slightly younger contemporary on the other side of the globe, the American and internationalist poet, essayist and “kulture-critic” Ezra Pound, to “make it new.” Like Santbal, Vallabhsuri also engaged in broader social issues. He helped found a number of schools, including the Mahavira Jain Vidyalaya in Bombay; he helped resettle refugees from Pakistani West Punjab after Partition; and he also was influenced by Gandhi, so much so that he himself wore only monastic robes of khadi: the handspun and handwoven cloth emblematic of the Gandhian movement.<sup>9</sup> Vallabhsuri also faced public criticism for his social activism, which many conservative monks and laymen of the Tapa Gaccha viewed as inappropriate to and even in violation of his monastic vows.

Both Santbal and Vallabhsuri used the term “era” (*yug*) in referring to their heroes. In doing so, both reframed the traditional Indic concept of temporal ages (*yuga*). Whereas traditional *yuga* theory in Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism views the present as a dark age near the end of a long descent of time, Santbal’s and Vallabhsuri’s use of the term resonates more with the emphasis on progress and improvement one finds in the language of modernity.<sup>10</sup>

## The Jina Image

At the center of this book is the image of the Jina, the enlightened and liberated teacher who is the “founder” of Jainism in the sense that each Jina reestablishes both the teachings (*shashana*) and the community (*tirtha*). Jainism understands time in this part of the universe to operate in a series of ascending and descending cycles. In the middle of each six-part cycle twenty-four Jinas are

born, attain enlightenment, teach, and then attain liberation from the world. Since time is beginning-less and endless, there is an infinite number of Jinas in this part of the universe. As we will see in chapter 2, Jinas also exist in other regions of the universe, so that their numbers are uncountable in terms of both time and space. Jainism is thus a polytheistic religion. At the same time, each Jina is identical in his existence as pure soul, dwelling in the four infinitudes of knowledge, perception, bliss, and power. Because it is impossible to differentiate one Jina from another, Jains speak of the Jinas in the singular. Jainism is thus also a monotheistic religion (Cort 2001b: 23).

Images of the Jinas, of the Jina, as worshipped and venerated in temples, have long been central to the Jain tradition. The images that are worshipped are mostly in stone or metal, with a small number in quartz and other precious stones. While there are some textual references to images of wood and plaster, and in chapter 4 I discuss the narrative of a sandalwood Jina icon, these materials have not been used much for images because of the practice of regular, and in many temples daily, ablution of the images with water and other liquids. Only stone and metal can stand up to the wear and tear of regular worship, and the smooth and even obliterated features of many extant medieval images give evidence that even these durable materials are not immune to the affects of worship. Jains have not worshipped two-dimensional images in temples, although one finds many two-dimensional images in various media used to narrate the lives of the Jinas. Images are only a part of a rich Jain material culture that includes temples, image and temple ornaments, diverse ritual implements, meditational aids, books, monastic robes, bowls, and staffs. Some of these other objects will appear in this book, but they are not the subject of my discussion. The object I will retain in the frame of this book is the three-dimensional image of the Jina.

### Icons and Iconoclasm in Jain History

According to Jain cosmology, Jainism is the eternal, unchanging truth of the universe, and so is uncreated. Jainism has always existed and always will. The Jains as a religious community, however, emerged into the light of history sometime around the middle of the first millennium BCE.<sup>11</sup> In the early centuries of the community, the Jains, in common with all or almost all other religious communities in ancient India, did not use three-dimensional images in their rituals.

In chapter 1, I review the scholarly evidence that shows clearly that Jains commissioned and worshipped images at least as early as the first century

BCE. Far from “borrowing” the practice from Buddhists or Hindus, the evidence indicates that the Jains may have been pioneers in developing a culture of images. While images were not part of “original Jainism,” the history of images and their worship is certainly an ancient one in Jainism.

Image or icon traditions often generate iconoclastic critiques. The history of Christianity, for example, has seen two long-lasting and virulent periods of iconoclasm, first with the Iconoclastic Controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries, and then with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Both these periods saw wholesale changes in Christian ritual, material, and visual culture.

Jainism also saw an iconoclastic reaction to the worship of images. In chapter 5, I discuss the Shvetambara iconoclastic movement initiated by Lonka Shah in the fifteenth century that eventually led to the contemporary Sthanakavasi tradition that intentionally eschews the worship of images. In the same century in central India, Taran Svami founded a Digambara Jain congregation that while not expressly iconoclastic, does not install and worship images in its temples (Cort 2006a). Jain iconoclasm has not been as violent as Christian iconoclasm—as far as we know, neither Jain iconoclastic movement has resulted in the death of a single person or the destruction of a single building, whereas Christian iconoclasm has been accompanied by much death and destruction. But the Jain movements represent important chapters in any global history of icons and iconoclasts.

There is no evidence of explicit iconoclasm in Jainism, or even explicit criticism of images, before the medieval period. Once we are attuned to the issues, however, we can see that there must have been Jain voices throughout the past two millennia that have at least questioned whether the use of material forms is appropriate in a religious tradition that sees the ultimate religious goal as the attainment of a state of thoroughly disembodied pure soul. We do not know who these critics and skeptics were, but the persistence with which image-worshipping Jains have articulated both the centrality of images to Jainism and the ubiquitousness of images in the universe tells us that they were there. This book is in large measure a study of the extended Jain responses to these unknown critics.<sup>12</sup>

## Images, Icons, and Idols

A word about language is appropriate here. As I have discussed elsewhere (Cort 2005b), most scholars choose to use the term “image” to refer to three-dimensional sculptures in ritual and devotional settings. The English word “icon” is often restricted to the two-dimensional paintings used in liturgical

settings in the Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions. Because the word so readily brings these paintings to mind, many scholars avoid using it for other sacred images in order to avoid confusion. The term “idol” is similarly restricted in its use, since it is so strongly connected in English with both the Biblical commandment prohibiting the worship of graven idols and the later Protestant critiques of the Catholic veneration of icons as idolatry.<sup>13</sup> For many English speakers, in other words, “icon” and “idol” bring with them too much intellectual and theological baggage to be useful in scholarly writing, and so the word of choice is the more theologically neutral “image.”

This is the choice I have made in most of my own earlier writings (Cort 2001b: 219–202). In this book, however, I have decided to use all three words, with the preference being determined by the Jain context. In most chapters I use “icon.” I want to indicate that for icon-worshipping Jains, a Jina image is just as much a sacred presence an image of Christ is in the icon-worshipping Christian traditions. When discussing the attitudes toward images of the aniconic and iconoclastic Sthanakavasis and Terapanthis, I use “idol,” for the negative connotations of this word are quite appropriate in these settings. I intentionally use the words “icon” and “idol,” recognizing that they are charged words in Christian theological settings, and therefore in English language settings, because I want to give the reader a fuller sense of the emotional power of the words and their referents in Jainism. Devout Christians and Jains have argued, fought, and in some Christian settings even died over sacred icons and false idols. “Images” do not stir up the same intensity of positive and negative emotions. The very neutrality of “image” that I have preferred in other writings is problematic in terms of the goals of this book. I do, however, use “image” in chapter 1, since in that chapter I present the scholarly history of Jain images according to archaeology and texts. Here, I want to avoid the sectarian readings of that history.<sup>14</sup>

## History and Narrative

Another term that I use in this book is “narrative.” This has been the subject of extensive theorizing in recent years, especially in the fields of history and literature, but also in other fields such as anthropology and folklore.<sup>15</sup> I do not intend this book as a contribution to these theoretical discussions. Instead, I use “narrative” simply as a cover term for a wide range of literary genres, in all of which Jains have sought to account for the presence of images (both as icons and idols) in their own ritual culture and in the world and universe at large. Many of the narratives that I relate in the pages to follow are recognizably within the genre of history (and the closely related genre of myth, or perhaps better,

mytho-history). They relate a sequence of events through which images were introduced into Jain practice. There are other genres that I also include here, and in so doing stretch the sense of narrative beyond what one might expect. In chapter 2, for example, I examine Jain cosmological and cosmographical texts. These do not relate a sequence of events, but rather the eternal and unchanging geographical layout of the cosmos. In chapter 6, I examine several modern Jain texts that might appear to fit more comfortably within the genres of theology or even psychology. All of them, however, are in my estimation directed at answering a common set of questions: Why do images exist? Why do people worship images? The range of genres employed by Jains to address these questions, a range that I combine under the broad characterization of “narrative,” is, I argue, another indication of how central images have been to the Jain tradition for millennia.

### Frames

A third term that I use in this book, and that has provided me with my title, is “frame.” In a 1991 essay, the art critics Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson outlined what they argued were the problems caused by the use of the word “context” in the analysis of art history. Their argument was repeated and extended in an essay by Bryson alone in the following year.

Bryson (1992: 19) observed that there are a number of assumptions in the word “context,” which are rarely perceived:

First, there is the implied opposition between context and work of art, context and visual text; these are taken as predestined antonyms, in that the text is something to be explained by the context: here lies the visual text, waiting for the context to come to order its uncertainties, and over there is the context, as that which shall act upon the text and transfer to the latter its own certainties and determinations. Context and text are thus established in the guise of a separation that is at the same time an evident hierarchy, for the expectation is that the context will *control* the text; once their opposition is staked out the terms taken together are made to form an economy in which context is active and the text or work of art passive.

In other words, only the text is in need of interpretation, and this is done by context. That context, however, “seems comfortably out of reach of the pervasive need for interpretation that affects all texts” (Bal and Bryson 1991: 180).

Bal and Bryson based their critique of context in part on the work of the literary critic Norman Culler, whom they quote immediately following the sentence I have quoted just above.<sup>16</sup> Culler (1988: xiv) wrote:

[T]he notion of context frequently oversimplifies rather than enriches discussion, since the opposition between an act and its context seems to presume that the context is given and determines the meaning of the act. We know, of course, that things are not so simple: context is not fundamentally different from what it contextualizes; context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events. Yet when we use the term *context* we slip back into the simple model it proposes.

Culler proposed in place of “context” that we use the term “frame,” both as a noun and a verb. Culler imported the term from legal theory: Think of the expressions “to frame” and “frame up,” in which one creates a false context so that the text is read in such a manner that an innocent person is perceived to be guilty. Culler argued that whereas “context” has a given quality, as something that is “natural” and therefore in no need of elucidation, the term “frame” keeps the action and intention of the framer more clearly in the picture. He said of “framing,”

framing . . . eludes the incipient positivism of “context” by alluding to the semiotic function of framing in art, where the frame is determining, setting off the object or event as art, and yet the frame itself may be nothing tangible, pure articulation. Although analysis can seldom live up to the complexities of framing and falls back into discussion of context, with its heuristically simplifying presumptions, let us at least keep before us the notion of framing.

Culler’s (and Bal and Bryson’s) point becomes clearer, if we pursue his reference to the use of “frame” in its primary artistic meaning. Art historians view their brief to be the interpretation of a work of art. In the case of a painting, this is understood to be the canvas (or wood, wall, or other flat surface). This is what is analyzed, and this is what appears in most reproductions. However, the painting does not stand alone, and so for a fuller analysis the critic turns to the context: the painter’s life, his or her influences, and contemporaries; the role

of the patron; and the technical details of the production of the painting. These are all naturalized, positive “facts” that explain the painting.

How does the incorporation of the frame change this? Our perception of a painting will alter significantly if it is framed in one instance in an ornate, gilt, rococo wooden frame, carved by a master craftsman, that almost overpowers the painting, and then in another instance in a simple silver- or gold-colored metal frame that was purchased at the local art supply store. Our perception—and therefore our interpretation and understanding—will change yet again if we substitute a 1960s Pop Art frame of brilliant orange and pink stripes, or a plain wooden frame covered with a lengthy inscription.

A fuller understanding therefore needs to take the context into consideration, and problematize it in the same way that the text or painting was problematized. But this is not as easy as it might seem. As Culler (1982: 123) has pointed out: “[T]otal context is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice. Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.” He continued (123–24): “[A]ny given context is open to further description. There is no limit in principle to what might be included in a given context, to what might be shown to be relevant.”

Having brought the immediate frame (context) into our analysis, we then need to expand our interpretive gaze. How does the meaning of the painting and its frame when we hang it in a museum or a temple, in a corporate board room or a library, in a drawing room or a lavatory? How does it change if we hang the painting on a tree in the woods, or blow it up onto a highway billboard? And how does it change when we place it in the seemingly decontextualized context, the unframed frame, of cyberspace? Context continues to recede, and every time we turn context into text we simply create another context. The concept of “frame” at least acknowledges the agency of the interpreter. It also allows us to bring to a standstill the process of endless recession, even if the point at which we decide to stop is an arbitrary one, chosen by the interpreter.

Once we see the role of the frame in shaping meaning, we can bring the framer into the picture, and see more clearly how interpretation is an active process of inclusion and exclusion. I raise this theoretical point because I want the reader to understand the extent to which I as a scholar of the Jains and comparative religion have determined the interpretive frames within which I locate the Jina image. Some of these frames might seem “natural”: history, scripture, and comparison with the images of contemporaneous South Asian religious traditions. Other frames, however, such as a Japanese Buddha icon, *mandalas*, or twentieth-century Minimalist art, will indicate more clearly my role as the

framer of this book. Through the use of these frames, I want to expand and deepen our understanding of the meanings of the image—the icon, the idol—of the Jina throughout Jain history. These frames allow us to see how Jain worship of icons and rejection of idols share many aspects with other religious traditions. They also allow us to see some of the ways that Jainism has been a religious tradition that has, to borrow a phrase from Richard Davis (2001: 108), “embraced the iconic.”

# I

## The Archaeology of Jina Images

The iconophilic narratives of the icon-worshipping Jains that are the focus of much of this book portray Jina icons as eternal and uncreated. Icons are a “natural” part of the cosmos, and therefore without a “history.” From an academic perspective, however, they do have a history. The full details of this history are still in certain elements indistinct, and key parts of it we will probably never know with any high degree of certainty. Much vital evidence is either lost forever in the soil of India, or in manuscript pages that have long since disintegrated into their elements. Nonetheless, it is clear that images—and here I shift from “icon” to “image,” to signal that I am speaking from the framework of the discipline of history with its claims to objectivity and sectarian neutrality—are not an eternal institution in Jainism. The evidence of both archaeology and philology point to a time in the early history of Jainism when there were neither images nor temples. These, therefore, have an origin (or multiple origins) in time and place.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that history never exists outside of ideological frameworks. How one chooses to narrate history, what facts one decides to include and omit, are products of the intellectual presuppositions with which one approaches the historical task. Academic history is based upon the presuppositions of the scientific method: The historian strives to present the data in accordance with the most recent and thorough investigations, and to interpret them in a manner that others, even if they disagree with the conclusions, see

as reasonable and adequate. But academic historians, concerned to understand better the history of images, art, and religion in South Asia, are not the only ones who have studied and interpreted the material I present in this chapter. The academic discourse of history has intersected in significant ways with Jain self-understandings in the last 200 years.<sup>1</sup> The data I present here in an academic framework have been subject to extensive interpretations by both iconophilic and iconoclastic Jain intellectuals, as we will see in chapters 5 and 6. The evidence that Jains did not worship images in the earliest years of the tradition has been seized upon by iconoclastic Sthanakavasi authors to buttress their insistence that images are not part of original and therefore “true” Jainism. The evidence that images are found at early (albeit not the earliest) layers of Jainism, and from locations seemingly throughout India, coupled with evidence of very early Jain (or Jain-like) images both in South Asia and other parts of the globe, has been taken by iconophilic Jain authors as proof of the universality of images and image worship. Authors from both sides would nod in approval of parts of this chapter, and stridently disagree with others.

To a significant extent the history of Jain images cannot be separated from the histories of images in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions.<sup>2</sup> The ritual and theological cultures of images developed more or less simultaneously in all three traditions, and quite possibly developed in a single region of north India, centered around the ancient city of Mathura.<sup>3</sup> Even though it is possible to develop a rough chronology of the use of images in the three traditions, the chronology does not allow us to posit a definitive pattern of images developing in one tradition first and then being borrowed by the others. We are missing too much information, and therefore must construct our understanding on too fragile a foundation to advance a conclusive argument about origin, diffusion, influence, and borrowing. As with many other developments in South Asian religions—yoga, bhakti, formal philosophy (*darshana*), and tantra come readily to mind—a more accurate model is to see the growth of the use of images as a religious, cultural, and artistic phenomenon that affected all three traditions at more or less the same time. Further, the available medieval and modern evidence concerning the carving and casting of images indicates that these technologies have operated on a cross-community basis; craftsmen in a single or neighboring workshops have produced images for a number of different religious communities. Interactions among religious communities are as likely to happen at the level of material culture as at the level of theological discourse. We therefore need to situate any discussion of the “origin” of the Jina image within a larger, pan-sectarian framework. A full study of this subject would require a book in itself, and would be a very different book from this one. I do not attempt a comprehensive history of the development of the use of three-dimensional

images in South Asia to depict and worship divinity. I bring into my interpretive framework evidence from other traditions and communities only sparingly.<sup>4</sup>

## The Jina Image

Before discussing the history of the Jina image, it will be useful for the reader to have a better understanding of what a Jina image is (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Early in their history the Jains developed a standard iconography by which they depict the figure of the enlightened and liberated teacher, the Jina, in three-dimensional form. The figures are always male, a point that is quite obvious in the case of naked Digambara images.<sup>5</sup> Jina images come in two poses. In one he is seated with the legs folded upon each other, and the hands one atop the other, palms facing upward, resting on the lap. In the other he stands erect, legs and feet parallel, and the arms hanging down at the side of the body with the palms facing inward. These depict the two bodily poses for Jain meditation. The body is in a stable position of rest, allowing for full attention to be turned away from the external sensory world of material form, and inward toward the ultimate reality of pure soul. There are differences between Digambara and Shvetambara images in details such as the direction of the eyes' gaze, whether



FIGURE 1.1. Seated Shvetambara icon of Adeshvara (Rishabhanatha), Shamlaji Parshvanatha temple, Patan. Photo: John E. Cort (1996).

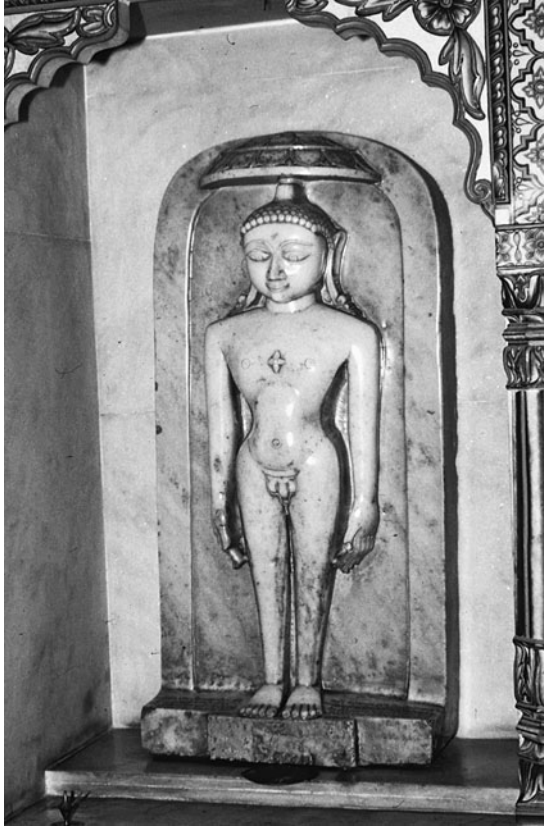


FIGURE I.2. Standing Digambara Jina icon, Neminatha temple, Amer.  
Photo: John E. Cort (1999).

the image depicts a naked or clothed body, and whether or not it is covered with temporary ornament. While these differences are very important for the different ritual cultures, I will not go into them here.<sup>6</sup> The basic geometry of the stone or metal image is largely the same in the two traditions.

In his *The Bud of Kalyan* (*Kalyan Kalika*; Kalyanvijay 1987: 256), a massive two-volume anthology and study of Jain temple architecture, iconography, and rituals, the twentieth-century Shvetambara Murtipujaka monk Kalyanvijaygani (to whom I return in chapter 6) quotes the following two verses from *The Compendium of Jaya* (*Jaya Samhita*), a medieval craft manual (*shilpa shastra*)<sup>7</sup>:

That which is formless is given a form (*rupa*). He is the form of the universe, the lord of the world. It is the embodiment (*murti*) of enlightenment (*kevala-jnana*), the one who has conquered all passions, the Jina lord.

He has two arms and just one head. He sits on a lotus. The embodiment of the Jina shows the teacher of the world as absorbed in the ultimate (*brahma*).

These two verses indicate the ideal that a Jina image is intended to depict: The enlightened being who has overcome all bodily attachments and passions and thereby become pure disembodied soul. In the words of Heinrich Zimmer (1951: 209), the Jina is a “perfected saint, completely detached from worldly bondage because absolutely purified of the elements of karma that color and deform our normal human lives.” A Jina image, he continues, “well suggests the sublime translucency of a body purified of the gross of tangible matter.”

In contrast to most Hindu images, as well as many later Buddhist images of bodhisattvas, cosmic Buddhas, and other Buddhist deities, the iconography of the enlightened and liberated Jina has remained that of a normal (albeit perfected) human being, with just two arms and a single head.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, while the Jains have insisted on a greater fidelity to a recognizable humanness in their images than Hindus and Buddhists, they have shared with the other two great iconic traditions of South Asia an understanding that the enlightened and liberated Jina is nonetheless in a profound sense trans-human. He is not just a person (*purusha*), he is a Great Person (*maha-purusha*). The Jains therefore shared with the other traditions an iconic intention to depict in an image someone who is more than human—someone who is divine.<sup>9</sup>

In the Buddhist setting, this involved depicting in the image some of the thirty-two marks (*lakshana*) of a Great Person. These included long, webbed fingers; a penis concealed in a sheath; long arms; thirty-four teeth that were straight and pure white; blue eyes; a tuft of hair between the eyebrows; and a protuberance from the top of the head.<sup>10</sup> These are all physical marks that could be depicted either in the sculpture itself or by means of the paint affixed to the image. These bodily signs played a significant role in the biography of the Buddha, for at his birth his father called in diviners to inspect the body of the newborn prince. They foretold that he would become either a world-conquering king or a world-conquering spiritual liberator.

The Jains have maintained that the body of a Jina is similarly distinguishable from that of an average human being, especially during the period after his enlightenment but before his total liberation from the karma that caused his soul to be entrapped in the body of a normal human. During this period he is known as a *kevalin*, one who has realized *kevala-jnana* or enlightenment (Dundas 1985). According to the Jains, there are thirty-four distinguishing characteristics (*atishaya*, literally “eminences”) of a *kevalin*, which should also be used as much as possible in the iconic depiction of a Jina. Slightly different

lists are given in Shvetambara and Digambara texts; my discussion here will address the former.<sup>11</sup>

The Jain *atishayas* differ significantly from the Buddhist *lakshanas* in that whereas the latter are all bodily marks, and therefore relatively easy to depict in two- or three-dimensional representation, many of the Jain marks are of a more abstract nature. In the latter category are *atishayas* such as his breath having the fragrance of a lotus; every living being that listens to the Jina understanding his preaching in his or her own language; disease, enmity, seasonal calamities, epidemics, excessive rain, drought, famine, and fear of government or enemies not existing in his proximity; and his always being accompanied by a pleasant breeze and good weather. But other marks can be depicted. That the Jina is beautiful calls on the sculptor to exercise all his skill. The other marks are not of his body, but are divinely created accompaniments that came to be included in the elaborate carved surrounds (*parikara*) of Jina images. Prominent among these are seven marks that are also found in a related list of eight miraculous attending features (*pratiharya*). The full set of eight are not found in the carved surrounds of images until the fourth or fifth century CE, but individual features are found in the surrounds from the early centuries CE (Shah 1975a: 53–58).<sup>12</sup> The seven that are in both the lists of *atishayas* and *pratiharyas* are an *ashoka* tree that towers over the preaching Jina, a shower of five-colored flowers, divine yak-tail fans, a lion-throne, a halo, the sound of divine drums (visually portrayed by divine drummers), and a triple parasol above him. The additional attending feature is divine music (visually portrayed by other divine musicians).

The eight attending features in the carved surround of an image, marks that indicate that the central figure is a Great Person worthy of veneration and worship, are where the sculptor could exhibit the greatest innovation. The figure of the Jina himself, however, was a preserve of divine simplicity and stability. The Jina, whether seated or standing, symbolized, as the verse quoted by Kalyanvijay indicated, an ideal being who was absorbed in spiritual equanimity.

The Jina image is also a model of symmetry, in particular a mirror or bilateral symmetry along its vertical axis. As István and Magdolna Hargittai (1994: 14) note, mirror or bilateral symmetry is often used in religious images to express a divine or spiritual harmony. The symmetry of the Jina image further conveys stability and perfection. The seated image of a Jina represents a firm triangle on both the vertical and horizontal planes, which is fitting for a being who has transcended the flux of the world and attained total equanimity. Hindu images depict deities who are still active in the world (as do Jain images of unliberated deities such as *yakshas* and *yakshis*). Their images, accordingly,

while depicting an overall balance that is appropriate for a being who is more powerful than the natural forces of the world, lacks the strong, simple symmetry of the Jina. With its multiple and differentiated arms, and a body that is often in the classical Indian “three-bend” (*tribhanga*) posture, Hindu images depict a deity still active in the world—and, from a Jain perspective, therefore still in the thralls of likes and dislikes, of all the passions. The Jina has conquered the passions and so is *vitaraḡa*, whereas Hindu deities are lesser and active because they are still passionate (*saraga*).

This emphasis on the depiction of the Jina as one who has overcome all volitional interaction with the world has resulted in a restricted iconography. Because Hindu deities and Buddhist bodhisattvas are active in the world, they can be depicted in multiple ways to correspond to their many stories and activities. The iconographies of these deities are accordingly quite complex, and a full “reading” of a Hindu or bodhisattva icon often requires a knowledge of the biographies of the deities on the part of both craftsmen and ritual viewers.

In some ways the lives of the Buddha and the Jina present a similar problem to the iconographer, as both biographies end with the attainment of a spiritual state that transcends any depiction in material form. This is seen clearly in the case of the Jina icon, as the Jina is always depicted in one of the two standard Jain meditative poses: seated in the full-lotus position, or standing in the position known as “abandonment of the body” (*kayotsarga*).

Both the Jina and the Buddha have biographies that include many events before the attainment of enlightenment and liberation. In the case of the Jina, these are summarized in the formula of the five *kalyanakas* or “beneficial events” in the life of the Jina: conception, birth, renunciation, embodied enlightenment, and disembodied liberation. These five moments provide the visual frame for most narrative paintings of the life of the Jina, notably in the Shvetambara illustrations of the *Kalpa Sutra* (*Scripture of Rules*; Cort 1992). With the single exception of the “Living Lord” icon of Mahavira, which is the subject of chapter 4, Jains have chosen not to depict this earlier biography in their ritual icons. The Jina is depicted at the moment of either the fourth *kalyanaka*, embodied enlightenment, when he is able to transmit the Jain teachings to the assembled multitude of humans, deities, and animals, or the fifth *kalyanaka*, disembodied liberation, when he has realized the ultimate goal of all Jains. This is clearly indicated in the multi-day ritual by which a Jina icon is consecrated. As part of the ritual, laypeople dramatically reenact the life of the Jina up to the moment of enlightenment. At this point a ritual specialist “opens the eye” of the icon. According to Shvetambaras, the icon is now ready for worship (Cort 2006b). Digambaras, however, choose to reenact dramatically the fifth *kalyanaka* as well, and so burn several pieces of sandalwood to symbolize