SHARED CHARACTERS IN JAIN, BUDDHIST AND HINDU NARRATIVE

Gods, Kings and Other Heroes

NAOMI APPLETON

DIALOGUES IN SOUTH ASIAN TRADITIONS

RELIGION PHILOSOPHY LITERATURE AND HISTORY

ROUTLEDGE

Shared Characters in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu Narrative

Taking a comparative approach which considers characters that are shared across the narrative traditions of early Indian religions (Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism) *Shared Characters in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu Narrative* explores key religious and social ideals, as well as points of contact, dialogue and contention between different worldviews. The book focuses on three types of character – gods, heroes and kings – that are of particular importance to early South Asian narrative traditions because of their relevance to the concerns of the day, such as the role of deities, the qualities of a true hero or good ruler and the tension between worldly responsibilities and the pursuit of liberation. Characters (including character roles and lineages of characters) that are shared between traditions reveal both a common narrative heritage and important differences in worldview and ideology that are developed in interaction with other worldviews and ideologies of the day. As such, this study sheds light on an important period of Indian religious history, and will be essential reading for scholars and postgraduate students working on early South Asian religious or narrative traditions (Jain, Buddhist and Hindu) as well as being of interest more widely in the fields of Religious Studies, Classical Indology, Asian Studies and Literary Studies.

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Key texts

This book makes use of a range of Sanskrit, Prākrit and Pāli texts, from the Brahmanical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions, both in their original languages and in translations. Throughout the book, texts are referred to by their title in the source language. Translations are my own unless stated.

Provided below is a list and brief description of the main texts under study, as well as a note about the divisions of the text that are referred to in this book. The Bibliography provides full entries for editions and translations used.

As discussed in the Introduction, dating these texts with any precision is fraught with difficulties. I have nonetheless given approximate dates here, as a rough guide for the reader. These are to be taken as tentative approximations only, and are based on the best scholarly consensus available to me.

Texts are listed in English alphabetical order according to title in the original language.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

The 'Numerical Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, or 'Basket of Discourses'.
Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.
References are to book and *sutta* as in Bodhi's translation.

Avadānaśataka

A collection of 'One Hundred *Avadāna*s', or tales of past and future lives.
Buddhist, (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda, Sanskrit, second–fourth centuries CE.
References are to story number.

***Āvaśyaka/Āvassaya* literature**

A series of narrative-rich commentaries that have built up around a short text enumerating the six 'required duties' of Jains. The earliest commentarial layer is the Prākrit verse *nijjutti* (Sanskrit: *niryukti*), which contains references to many narratives, though the stories themselves are in the Prākrit verse *Āvassaya-cuṇṇi* (Sanskrit: *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi*) of Jinadāsa (sixth–seventh centuries CE) and Haribhadra's Prākrit and Sanskrit prose *ṭīkā* (eighth century CE) as well as later commentaries.

Āyāraṅga Sutta **(Sanskrit:** ***Ācārāṅga Sūtra*****)**

The first of the Jain *aṅga*s, and one of the oldest scriptures, containing a mix of doctrinal statements, monastic regulations and biographical materials. The first section is understood to be older than the second.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, fourth century BCE–first century CE.

References are to section and chapter.

Bhagavatī Sūtra**, see** ***Viyāha-pannatti***

Buddhacarita **of Aśvaghoṣa**

A 'Life of the Buddha' composed as *kāvya*.

Buddhist, Sanskrit, first–second centuries CE.

References are to canto and verse.

Dīgha Nikāya

The 'Long Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.

References are to *sutta* number.

Divyāvadāna

A collection of narratives with close links to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

Buddhist, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Sanskrit, second–fourth centuries CE.

References are to story number.

Jambuddīvapannatti **(Sanskrit:** ***Jambūdvīpaprajñapti*****)**

One of three *upāṅga*s to cover matters of cosmology, but includes biographical material especially relating to Ṛṣabha and his descendants.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, second–fourth centuries CE.

Referred to by chapter/section (1–7) as in Suttāgame edition.

Jātakamālā **of Āryaśūra**

Poetic rendering of thirty-four stories of the Buddha's past lives.

Buddhist, Sanskrit, fourth century CE.

References are to story number.

Jātakatthavaṇṇanā

A collection of over five hundred *jātaka*s in verse (included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*) and prose (commentarial).

Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, third century BCE–fifth century CE.

References are to story number.

Kappa Sutta **(Sanskrit:** ***Kalpa Sūtra*****) of Bhadrabāhu**

An early biography of the twenty-four *tīrthaṅkara*s (in Part I), along with lists of elders (Part 2) and instructions for correct conduct during the rainy season (Part 3).

Jain, Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, third–fifth centuries CE.

References are to section and *sūtra* as in Jacobi's edition and translation.

Mahābhārata

A long epic poem telling of the great battle between two sets of cousins, with numerous embedded narratives and teachings.

Brahmanical Hindu, Sanskrit, third century BCE–fourth century CE.

References are to book and verse in the Critical Edition unless stated.

***Mahāpurāṇa* of Jinasena and Guṇabhadra**

A 'Universal History' text, telling of the sixty-three illustrious beings of the time cycle. Jinasena's *Ādipurāṇa* tells of Ṛṣabha, while Guṇabhadra's *Uttarapurāṇa* completes the series.

Jain, Digambara, Sanskrit, ninth century CE.

Mahāvastu

A broadly biographical text about the Buddha's final and past lives, the lives of past *buddha*s and the activities of key Buddhist followers.

Buddhist, Mahāsāṅghika/Lokottaravāda, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, second century BCE–fourth century CE.

References are to volume and page of Senart's edition, as also preserved in Jones' translation and in the GRETIL edition.

Majjhima Nikāya

'Middle-length Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.

References are to *sutta* number.

***Nāyādhammakahāo* (Sanskrit: *Jñātādharmakathāḥ*)**

The first section contains nineteen stories on various themes, while the second section consists of formulaic tales of goddesses. The sixth *aṅga* of the scriptures.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, fourth century BCE–fourth century CE.

References are to section and chapter number.

***Paumacariya* of Vimalasūri**

An account of the life of Rāma, in response to Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Jain, Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, third–fifth centuries CE.

***Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki**

The classic epic story of Rāma and Sītā.

Brahmanical Hindu, Sanskrit, fifth century BCE–fourth century CE.

References are to book, chapter and verse as in the Critical Edition.

Saṃyutta Nikāya

The 'Connected Discourses' of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

Buddhist, Theravāda, Pāli, fourth–first centuries BCE.

References are to *saṃyutta* and *sutta* as in Bodhi's translation.

***Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* of Hemacandra**

Large 'Universal History' text, telling of the sixty-three illustrious persons of the current time cycle in twelve books.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Sanskrit, twelfth century BCE.

References are to book and chapter, or to volume and page of Johnson's translation.

***Upaniṣad*s**

Philosophical texts from the late Vedic period.

Hindu, Sanskrit, sixth century BCE onwards.

References are to titles and divisions as in Olivelle.

***Uttarajjhāyā* (Sanskrit: *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*)**

'Later Chapters', a collection of thirty-six chapters, mostly in verse, comprising one of the *Mūlasūtra*s of the Śvetāmbara scriptures. Topics vary, as the work appears to be a compilation, but there is a focus on the correct ascetic conduct and the workings of karma and rebirth.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, fourth century BCE–fourth century CE.

References are to chapter and verse as in Charpentier.

***Uvāsagadasāo* (Sanskrit: *Upāsakadaśāḥ*)**

Stories of ten laymen and their karmic rewards, comprising the seventh *aṅga* of the scriptures.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, second–fourth centuries CE.

References are to story number.

***Vasudevahiṇḍi* of Saṅghadāsagaṇi**

The adventures of Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa's father) on the model of the *Bṛhat Kathā*.

Jain, Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit, c. fifth century CE

References are to the edition of Caturvijay and Punyavijay.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa

One of the earliest *Purāṇa* texts, presenting Viṣṇu as the ultimate deity.

Hindu, Sanskrit, fifth–sixth centuries CE

References are to book, chapter and verse as in the Pathak edition on GRETIL, input by Peter Schreiner.

***Viyāha-pannatti* (Sanskrit: *Vyākhyā-prajñapti*)**

'Proclamation of Explanations', included as the fifth and largest *aṅga* of the Śvetāmbara scriptures. Also known as the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*.

Jain, Śvetāmbara, Ardhamāgadhī, first century BCE–fifth century CE

Referred to by book/section (*saya*, *śataka*) and chapter (*uddesa*, *uddeśaka*) following Deleu and Lalwani.

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This book has emerged from a three-year research project generously funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). I am grateful to the AHRC for supporting our project, and to my research collaborator James Hegarty (Cardiff University) for countless stimulating conversations. The project has allowed me to continue to develop my research agenda, moving on from comparisons between Buddhist and Jain narrative traditions to a three-way study that required familiarisation with a whole new set of sources.

I am grateful to colleagues at the University of Edinburgh, especially in the School of Divinity and the Asian Religions Network, for their conversation and support. Rebecca Zahn's companionship and encouragement, alongside John Lewis cheese scones, at our regular 'café writing retreats' also contributed significantly to the completion of this book.

I owe much to the audiences at the many presentations I have used to try out my material and analyses in the past three years. Indra has met with comment at the conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion (Liverpool, September 2013), and – along with Brahmā and Viṣṇu – at research seminars in Lancaster (May 2014) and Bristol (December 2014). Janaka and the other renouncing royals of Videha had a thorough outing at the Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions (Manchester, April 2014) and the discussion and comments there were particularly fruitful in the formation of Chapter 6. Preliminary thoughts on the mothers of heroes met with helpful comment at the Centre for South Asian Studies research seminar (Edinburgh, March 2015). My conclusions were tested out at a University of Edinburgh Asian Religions Network Work-In-Progress afternoon in November 2015, and comments there – especially from the ever-wise Joachim Gentz – much improved my final chapter as well as feeding back into my Introduction.

Several colleagues have generously read drafts of this book or its component parts. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for the press for comment on Chapters 1 and 6, to Nathan McGovern for reading Chapter 3, to Jonathan Geen for his feedback on Chapter 4 and to Reiko Ohnuma for her thoughts on Chapter 5. James Hegarty has read everything at least once over, and offered many helpful and encouraging comments. Brian Black kindly agreed to read a

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I am grateful to various colleagues and institutions for providing the images that punctuate this book. Their contributions are noted where the images occur.

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1 Introduction

Once upon a time there was a god called Indra ('King') or Śakra ('Mighty'). He was the king of the gods, though the frequent threats from rival gods, demons and ascetics made him wonder how long that might be the case. He liked to get involved in human life: He helped his son Arjuna win the great war recorded in the *Mahābhārata*, and he lent his chariot and divine charioteer to Rāma in his battle against the demon Rāvaṇa. He worked closely with the god Brahmā, assisting and honouring *buddha*s and *jina*s, but tended to be more suspicious of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, whom he saw as a threat. He conversed with great kings such as the famous renouncing royals of Videha, and with Jain, Buddhist and Hindu teachers. He tested the virtue and commitment of humans, and he offered rewards and protection to those he deemed worthy. Some considered him to be rather violent and a little too susceptible to the charms of women or the pleasures of intoxication, but many relied upon him for fertility and the rains.

Indra is a wonderfully complex character, who finds a home in Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical Hindu narrative, and who highlights some of the key concerns of early Indian religious communities, such as the nature of divinity and kingship, and the competing hierarchies of religious and social values. He is also an example of two key character roles – god and king – that feature so prominently in early Indian narrative. As such Indra is an appropriate entry point into this book, which seeks to explore Indian religious history through narrative characters who are shared across religious boundaries. Indeed, he will be the subject of his own chapter, but more than that he provides the linchpin for the book as a whole, in that he interacts with each of the other characters under consideration, whether these are human heroes, kings or fellow gods. In short, he is a god that is thoroughly integrated into the narrative universe shared by the Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical Hindu communities of early India (that is to say in the five or so centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Common Era).[1]

Indra is usually thought of as a 'Hindu' god, as indeed is Brahmā, yet both of these gods feature in Jain and Buddhist narrative too, as do the epic *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. Other characters link the different narrative traditions as well: While Buddhists and Jains told stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, Brahmanical narratives acknowledged the exemplary kingship of the renouncing royals celebrated in Buddhist and Jain tales, and incorporated *buddha*s and *jina*s into their cosmic

history. In addition to named characters such as these gods, heroes and kings, generic character roles are also often shared across religious boundaries. Thus the heroism of the Buddha or Mahāvīra is held up against the heroism of Rāma or the Pāṇḍavas. Even the mothers of heroes – whether these heroes be the semi-divine kings of the epics or the religious leaders who form the heroes of Jain and Buddhist traditions – are characterised using similar tropes in all three traditions, albeit with different emphases. This, then, is the shared narrative universe inhabited by the three dominant religious ideologies of early South Asia: Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

One of the main aims of this book, and of the wider research project within which it is situated, is to draw attention to the common features – characters, roles, motifs and even whole stories – that are shared across the religious traditions of South Asia, and to the benefits of their study as a means of better understanding how these traditions used stories to shape and communicate their ideologies in a dynamic and competitive religious landscape.[2] The primary research question that guides this book is as follows: How did early Hindus, Buddhists and Jains use shared characters and their associated narrative motifs to present, contest and explore ideas of self and other, of the nature of religious authority, and of the goals of life? In order to answer this question I will be exploring a selection of characters (including named individuals, generic character roles and lineages of characters) who are shared across religious boundaries, and whose characterisation is often used to help constitute or communicate those boundaries. However, before I turn to a detailed discussion of my approach, I would first like to demonstrate why we should be interested in the encounters and dialogues between the religious traditions of early India. Although often studied apart as three separate religious traditions, Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism emerged and developed in dialogue with one another, and much of their shared heritage is still poorly understood. It is my hope that this study of shared narrative characters will help to further illuminate a fascinating period in the early history of India's religions.

Historical and religious context

According to the latest scholarship, the Buddha probably lived in the fifth century BCE, and was a younger contemporary of Mahāvīra.[3] Although the historicity of Pārśva, the *jina* before Mahāvīra, is generally accepted, Jainism as we know it began with Mahāvīra, around the same time as the beginnings of Buddhism, and in the same region of Northeast India. The period of interaction between Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism thus begins in the fifth century BCE. As many scholars have pointed out, this is a really interesting moment in Indian history, not only because of the flourishing of new religious ideas and groups, but also because of the intense social and economic change that is taking place in the region. These two dimensions – religious and social – are of course interlinked in many ways, and both require our attention as we explore the context for the present study. We will begin with an outline of the

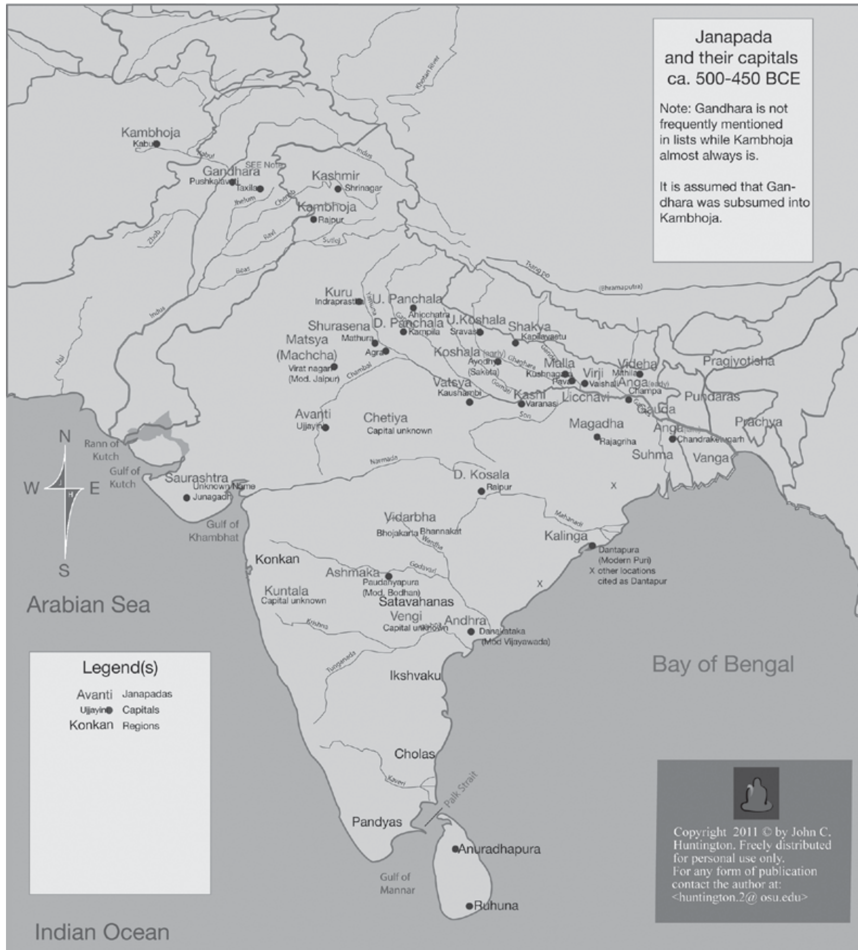

Figure 1.1 Map showing major early Indian kingdoms/realms and their capitals, c. 500–450 BCE.
Source: Reproduced by permission of John C. Huntington.

major social changes occurring in India immediately prior to the fifth century BCE, and then address how our religious traditions emerge out of this exciting historical backdrop, and how they relate to one another.

The first evidence of urban settlements in India is of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished in the northwest from around 2500 BCE to 1500 BCE, before going into decline and gradually being replaced by Aryan culture and its Vedic traditions. Around the sixth century BCE we see the beginnings of what therefore gets called India's 'second urbanisation', as a model of herding, subsistence agriculture and hunting makes way for more settled patterns of living.[4] It is not clear to what extent this urbanisation contributed to the

development of new religious traditions, though doubtless it played a part, providing opportunities for encounters and exchanges, as well as for significant patronage. Three important developments in this period are worth noting here: urban settlements, trade and coinage.

This period of urbanisation is called such because the sixth to fourth centuries BCE see the rise of cities in north India. Before this time societies appear to have been organised on the basis of clan assemblies, and indeed early Buddhist literature paints a picture of society transitioning from this model to one of cities and monarchs. The development of cities was linked to changes in agricultural practices and the rise in settled farming, which in turn led to surpluses. These surpluses led to trade, by sea, river or overland routes, as evidenced in this period by finds of precious stones, metals and pottery far from their places of origin. Such finds also testify to the rise in artisanal practice and the creation of luxury goods. In addition, as trade routes opened up and agricultural surpluses made it possible to exchange goods, coinage also developed. By the fifth or fourth century BCE, punch-marked silver coins were in circulation, a development probably influenced by the Achaemenids.[5] As well as providing a much more portable form of currency than earlier measures of wealth such as cows, coins demonstrate the rise in systematic trade and suggest powerful forms of centralised social control. Indeed, over the subsequent centuries we see the rise in empires, most notably the Mauryan Empire (c. 322–185 BCE), which makes extensive use of currency and trade, and develops an impressive network

Figure 1.2 Ashokan pillar, topped with an Asiatic lion, at Vaishali, Bihar.
Source: Photograph © James Hegarty.

of cities, as well as providing our first firm evidence of the use of an indigenous writing system in India.[6]

Against this backdrop of significant social change, the fifth century BCE marked an important moment in the religious landscape of north India. While Vedic tradition held influence in the northwest, and increasingly spread south and east, new traditions were forming in the northeast. These traditions, often referred to as *śramaṇa* ('striver') movements, advocated a life of renunciation and ascetic or meditative pursuits, in order to gain liberation from the ceaseless cycle of rebirth and redeath. Two of these movements – Jainism and Buddhism – have survived to the present day as vibrant religious traditions with a global presence. In the fifth century BCE they would have likely consisted of a charismatic teacher – Mahāvīra the Jina ('Conqueror') or Tīrthaṅkara ('Ford-Maker') and Gautama the Buddha ('Awakened One') – and a group of monks, nuns and lay supporters.

Growing out of the same cultural domain of Northeast India during a similar time period, Jainism and Buddhism share many common assumptions with one another.[7] Core amongst these is the idea that all living beings are stuck in an unending and unpleasant series of rebirths in various realms, including heavens, hells and the animal world (which in the Jain case includes plants and other single-sensed beings), and that they are propelled around this world by karma. In order to address this predicament, these traditions propose methods for escaping the cycle of rebirth altogether by achieving liberation (*mokṣa*). In both cases this requires renunciation of household and family responsibilities, in favour of the life of a monk or nun.[8] In the Jain case, karma is understood to be a physical problem, compared to dust clinging to the soul and obscuring its natural qualities of omniscience and bliss, weighing it down and preventing its rise to the *siddhaloka*, or realm of liberated souls. All actions cause harm to the beings around us, since beings inhabit even the air we breathe, and so all actions bind karma. The solution is severe ascetic practice, both to halt the influx of new karma and to burn off existing karma. In Buddhism, by contrast, both the problem and solution are conceived in psychological terms: actions bring karmic results when they have good or bad motivations behind them, and only intentional actions are karmicly significant. The root problem is thirst, craving or attachment, which keeps beings stuck in the realm of rebirth, and through ethical living and the mental training of meditation one can escape *saṃsāra* and reach the state of *nirvāṇa*.

Over the following centuries these traditions grew and developed formal institutions, regulations and scriptures. Encountering one another, as well as the Vedic and Brahmanical traditions that were spreading in from the northwest, they engaged in dialogue, debate and polemical attacks. Their narrative traditions bear witness to both their shared heritage and their individual understandings of the truth in relation to the key questions of the day, such as whether or not to renounce, the role of sacrifice and ritual, and the correct path to liberation.

By the time of this encounter between the different religious traditions, Vedic religion had already been around in some form for seven hundred years or

more, beginning most likely as a loose tribal tradition in the Punjab, then pushing eastwards and becoming a more formalised sacrifice-based religion in the Kuru-Pañcāla region.[9] The Vedic *Saṃhita*s and *Brāhmaṇa*s contain the framework for this sacrificial religion, in which aspects of ritual activities, carried out by specialist priests, are aligned to aspects of the cosmos through a series of *bandhu*s ('connections' or 'correspondences'). According to traditional textual chronologies, the earliest of the *Upaniṣad* texts would also have been composed before the advent of Buddhism, perhaps in the seventh or sixth centuries BCE, beginning to shift the focus onto discussions of the nature of the self, the possibility of liberation through knowledge of that self, and a rudimentary understanding of karma and rebirth. The *Upaniṣad*s are also called the *Vedānta*, or 'end of the *Veda*', as they are understood to be the last of the Vedic texts.

I propose a shift of terminology for the next phase of developments, though there is no sudden break with Vedic scriptures or rituals. For reasons which will become clear, I find it helpful to speak of 'Brahmanical' traditions following the Vedic ones. These Brahmanical traditions were formed and expressed through a new set of texts including the two great epics and a series of *Dharmasūtra* and *Dharmaśāstra* texts (composed perhaps from the fifth century BCE onwards).[10] Indeed the main focus of these traditions could be said to be *dharma*, or duty, particularly the *dharma* of a householder male, and often expressed through discussions of dutiful kings.[11] Meanwhile, the idea of liberation from karmic bondage first found in the *Upaniṣad*s also contributed to a range of ascetic and renouncer movements, some of which appeared to be contrary to the discourses around *dharma*. The early Jain and Buddhist movements contributed to this significant and tense debate between various traditions of renunciation on the one hand (often related to the pursuit of liberation from karma and rebirth) and the path of the responsible, dharmic, ritually observant householder on the other.

The relationship between Vedic or Brahmanical traditions and the *śramaṇa* movements of Buddhism and Jainism is the subject of ongoing scholarly debate. The traditional scholarly position has been to see Buddhism (and, by implication, Jainism[12]) as a reaction to a dominant Vedic Brahmanism. Buddhism has been characterised as a reform movement that rejected caste and ritual sacrifice, and reinterpreted or developed existing ideas about karma and rebirth, the self and liberation.[13] Such a scholarly position is supported by the pervasiveness of Vedic or Brahmanical characters, ideas and terminology in early Buddhist texts, as well as the presence of key ideas such as karma, rebirth and liberation in the early *Upaniṣad*s, which are usually understood to pre-date Buddhism. However, in recent years an alternative theory – that Jainism and Buddhism emerged from a distinctive culture that was not under Brahmanical influence – has prompted a re-examination of the evidence.

In his 2007 book *Greater Magadha*, Johannes Bronkhorst sets out evidence that at the time of the Buddha and Mahāvīra, the northeast of India (roughly the area around Magadha, hence 'Greater Magadha') was not a 'Brahminised' area. Rather it had its own rich culture, which is responsible for several important