RLST 2610
Jainism
Lecture outline

1. The trends we've looked at so far in the Indian subcontinent:
   • Tantra,
   • asceticism,
   • bhakti to some degree,

   apply not just to Hinduism, but to other South Asian religious movements,
   • i.e., to Jainism
   • and Buddhism as well
   • (and to some others such as Sikhism, for instance).

2. Jains do give a different philosophical explanation of their rituals like puja:
   • for them it's not about connecting with a deity, but only about how remembrance and imitation of great persons helps us to become better people.

3. Jain ascetics do tend to be more ascetic than other groups.

4. Jainism and Buddhism both denounce vedic sacrifice and animal sacrifice, in favor of philosophical understanding and meditation.
5. Jainism is atheistic-- doesn't believe in an all powerful God to whom one must give homage or allegiance.

6. One must rely on one's own efforts to get free (liberation, kaivalya). To do this:
   • one tries to rid oneself of current karma by the practice of austerities.

7. In Jain philosophy, karma is a very much a substance that sticks to you and weighs down your soul.
   • If one performs certain austerities,
     • pull out one's hair,
     • and fasting,
   then the load of attached karma gets lightened.
   • One tries not to make any new karma, by not harming other beings. This is called ahimsa.
     • (the first thing one does to not harm other creatures is: don't eat them).

8. Jains are the biggest proponents of vegetarianism in India.
   • And they've done probably the most towards making vegetarianism widespread.

9. Jains are a small group, but they've had an inordinate influence.
   • Gandhi also took many of his ideas, especially the idea of ahimsa from Jainism.

10. Compassion is a very BIG thing in Jainism.
• compassion is also a means for gaining merit,
• and doesn't add any new karma in the process.

11. People who attained the highest state conceived of in Jainism, called Kaivalya, have existed in the past.
• The highest beings also have taught the truth about this state.
• There have been 24 such high persons, called Tirthankaras, "ford-makers" (i.e., people who show the way across the river of birth and death).
• The last was Mahavira the Jina (i.e. "one who conquers")
• hence the name "Jains" derived from Jina),
• Mahavira lived in the 6th cent. BCE.
• Before him was Parshvanath who lived in Benares in the 9th cent. BCE.
• The 19th Tirthankara, Mallinatha, some say was a woman.

12. sallekhana:
• considered the best way to die in Jainism,
• basically a very old person fasts to death

13. Jains fall into two main groups :
• Svetambaras ("white clothed ones") who wear white,
• and Digambaras, ("sky-clad") who go naked.
• The Digambaras are more strict in austerities,
• and historically argued that women can't attain a high status because they can't go naked
• The Svetambaras disagreed about the necessity for nakedness in the practice of austerities.