

The first Jain jam: starting a dialogue

In March 2015, Rajiv Rathod and Sweta Daga from Project Anveshan and Manish and Vidhi Jain from Shikshantar hosted a small gathering of Jains in Udaipur, Rajasthan. The participants held a collective dialogue concerning Jainism's relevance in the world, especially in relation to social change. Project Anveshan is creating a feature length documentary exploring Jainism, thus this meeting also provided valuable insights and opinions for the Anveshan team.



Rajiv Rathod and Manish Jain

Members of the Jain community from different parts of India attended the three-day meeting held at Shikshantar and Tapovan Ashram. It was an inter-generational group, with diverse backgrounds and interests. We shared a common goal of using Jain principles to engage with the challenges we face as a

community.



Kapil Jain and Manish Jain

On the first day, participants met at Shikshantar where Manish Jain opened the session, setting context for the Jam. He asked, “We’ve all been given the gift of Jainism, but now we have to decide how to connect Jainism with larger social issues.”

Kapil Jain, who works with an NGO called Sankalp, said he’s never had the chance to connect with Jains on larger social issues, but these are just as important as the rituals.

Rajiv explained Project Anveshan and the film. He also spoke about his thoughts on the main principles of Jainism, *anekantavada*, *aparigraha*, *ahinsa*, etc. and how the film will focus on the relevance of Jainism in the context of contemporary social issues.

We then had an opening circle dialogue where we asked each other the following broad questions:

What is the one thing that is worrying you the most about the world we're living in?

What are the big challenges facing the world today?



Sheetal Sanghvi and Sampat Bapna

We began to discuss all the different rules and rituals associated with Jainism, and how the next generation isn't interested in learning them. Vandana Mehta, a scholar from Ladnun answered several questions on this topic. From the questions, it seemed to us that many people adhere to the rituals or even the ethics because they are fearful of bad *karma*.

Sheetal Sanghvi, from [Urban Ashram](#), noted that "Religion is similar to people following a map, while spirituality is similar to people walking and making their own path."

Sampat Bapna, the founder of [Sukoon India](#), asks people to donate household items they no longer use to those who need them. He noticed that the Jain community has access to

material resources, but that these resources aren't distributed as well.

The second day was held at Tapovan Ashram, which was started by Dr. R.C. Mehta, who is the retired Dean of the Rajasthan Agriculture College. He promoted pesticides and chemical farming for many years. He eventually realized that accumulation of wealth does not bring happiness, and took responsibility for his work; to him, the damage he was doing through work stopped making sense. He became an organic farmer. Mehta Uncle, as he is endearingly called, gave us a tour of Tapovan. Here, he has spent twenty years rejuvenating the land and creating a new space for people to connect with nature.

Manish Jain put forward his view of things today. "The game being played is destroying everything in the name of progress. We shouldn't look to make incremental fixes. We should alter it completely, not make minor changes. The Jain way of life might offer an alternate way to live on this planet. Let's explore those possibilities," he said.



Rohit Jain

Rohit Jain explained his work at [Banyan Roots](#), which works in the area of organic farming. He says, “Conventional farming is usually tainted with violence and that is a significant aspect to consider when we contemplate humanity’s relationship with the world.”



Rajesh Shah and Neha Jain

Rajesh Shah, who has worked on water issues for decades, pointed out how today we do not think of consequences. We drive our cars faster, waste resources, and pollute all without any apparent consequence. We have been taught to ignore consequence, he observed.



World Café session

We then had two rounds of an activity called World Café, where we broke into two small groups, and had longer conversations around the following questions:

For round one: What challenges do we personally face trying to live with Jainism?

For round two: What about Jainism inspires you in your work or personal life?

Some learnings were:

Living a Jain lifestyle is difficult when family and friends have other demands. For example, a Jain lifestyle is simple, and without many material possessions. Today, however, success often means having access to money, a home, a car and other things.

People didn't realize that Jainism was part of their work until later in life.



Prabhakant Jain, Sweta Daga, Rohit Jain and Ranjana Sukhlecha

On the last day, we gathered at Shikshantar in the morning and started by sharing more of our work in a group circle. We then answered the following questions:

How does the Jain community catalyze into a larger social movement for the well-being of the planet?

How do we deepen our visions and projects as Jains and bring these into the wider Jain community?

Lastly, we discussed our own individual dream projects, but also how we would like to work together toward systemic change. We came up with one collective project to focus on: how to move toward organic food.

After three days of great collaboration and exchange, we look forward to our next steps, and engaging further with more of the Jain community.

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Text: Sweta Daga

Photographs: Harsh W