



**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies impact report

An update on your support

September 2024



As the former Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, I am honoured to recognise and celebrate the impact of the Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies, generously funded by the US and UK Jain community. This initiative not only builds our academic landscape but also allows us to understand and appreciate Jain philosophy and culture. The recruitment of three crucial positions through this generous support highlights our commitment to encouraging diverse perspectives and advancing academic excellence. It has been a true pleasure to meet with the representatives of the Jain community here and abroad who have generously supported this cause and to witness firsthand the transformative power of their gifts.

Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea CBE DL

Former Chancellor of the University of Birmingham



Foreword from Professor Helen Abbott



Dear friends,

Jai Jinendra

As the Head of the College of Arts and Law at the University of Birmingham, it is with great gratitude that I extend our heartfelt thanks to you, our valued donors, for your generous support of the Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies at the University of Birmingham. Since its establishment in September 2023, this collection of excellent individuals has encouraged academic excellence and societal impact, enabling crucial dialogues on non-violence, interfaith understanding and the traditions of Jainism.

Your support enabled us to appoint three specialists, whose efforts have already made progress in advancing our joint objectives. From the classroom to the broader community, the teachings of Jainism and its philosophy of Ahimsa (non-violence) are resonating, influencing both academic circles and public engagement. Our students have been introduced to the principles of Jain thought, cultivating a deep awareness of the diverse traditions that shape our world.

The impact of this initiative extends far beyond the University. Through lectures, workshops and partnerships, our team has contributed to important societal discussions, from the House of Commons halls to Vatican interfaith dialogues. We are excited to promote this growing global conversation.

The donation of an important collection of Jain texts, along with the appointment of Professor Nalini Balbir as an Honorary Professor, has further built our academic environment. We are committed to expanding this legacy, ensuring that future generations continue to benefit from these resources.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the future of the Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies. The upcoming academic year promises even more opportunities to research further, enhance our curriculum and engage with the wider community. We are particularly looking forward to our forthcoming visit to Los Angeles, where we will share these achievements and our vision for the future with friends and supporters.

Your generosity has been critical to these successes. We are very grateful for your continued support and partnership in this journey. Together, we are not only advancing the study of Jainism but also contributing to a more compassionate and inclusive world.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Helen Abbott
Head of the College of Arts and Law

The Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies

The Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies at the University of Birmingham, launched in September 2023, represents a significant milestone in the academic study of Jainism and its contemporary relevance. This initiative, made possible through the generous support of Jain donors from the UK and the US, seeks to advance the understanding of Jain philosophy, particularly its principles of non-violence and interfaith dialogue.

The establishment of the Dharmanath Network comes at a crucial time, where the principles of non-violence, mutual respect and understanding across cultures are more important than ever.



It has been a delight to work with the outstanding team of scholars in Jain Studies and the Ethics of Non-Violence at Birmingham this year. The team delivered outstanding research and teaching and engaged with large numbers of students, fellow researchers and members of the Jain community. In addition, our close collaboration with our family of donors has deepened further. I am excited to continue to see the Dharmanath Network thrive, both in teaching and research and I look forward to offering a further update during my visit to Los Angeles in November of this year, kindly hosted by Dr Jasvant Modi and the LA Jain community. Jai Jinendra.

Professor Charlotte Hempel

Professor of Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism and former Head of the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion



Central to the success of this initiative are three key appointments:

- **Dr Marie-Hélène Gorisse**, Dharmanath Assistant Professor in Jain Studies: an expert in Jain philosophy, Marie-Hélène is leading the academic development of Jain studies at the University, ensuring that this ancient tradition is both preserved and brought into meaningful conversation with contemporary philosophical and ethical debates.
- **Dr Areti Theofilopoulou**, Assistant Professor in the Ethics of Non-Violence: with a focus on the application of non-violent principles to modern ethical challenges, Dr Theofilopoulou's work looks at Jain teachings and global issues such as climate change, social justice and human rights.
- **Dr Jinesh Sheth**, Post-Doctoral Researcher in Jain Studies: specialising in the study of Anekāntavāda (the doctrine of non-one-sidedness), Dr Sheth's research is pushing the boundaries of Jain philosophical thought, contributing to the global academic conversation on intellectual humility.

Teaching impact: integrating Jainism and non-violence at Birmingham

The School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion is committed to a global approach in its teachings, with a particular focus on interreligious dialogue, the philosophy of religion and ethics. The curriculum is designed around co-taught modules that address the pressing questions of our time. This structure has enabled the School to embed the teachings of Jainism and the principle of non-violence across various levels of the School's academic offerings.

Teaching Jainism and non-violence this year at Birmingham has provided an opportunity to engage directly with current societal issues. Throughout the year, the UK has experienced significant social turmoil, with conflicts arising over immigration and the broader negotiation of living in a 'local yet global' society. In this context, the values of inclusivity and mutual respect are more critical than ever. As educators, the School believes it is our collective responsibility to contribute to this dialogue by encouraging a nuanced understanding of different traditions, including Jainism.

The impact of teaching Jainism and non-violence at Birmingham has been multi-faceted. Students in classes have been introduced to a tradition that many had never encountered before, broadening their understanding of the diverse ways of life present globally and particularly those of diaspora communities in the UK. This exposure also highlighted how government institutions accommodate the specific needs of these communities, such as in care systems and end-of-life processes.

Jainism, with its emphasis on self-mastery, careful behaviour and the constant awareness of all forms of life, challenges students to reconsider their perspectives on what it means to live ethically. The principle of 'non-violence is the highest religion' (ahimsā paramo dharmah) lies at the heart of Jain practices and underscores the importance of avoiding harm, recognising the worth of all living beings, community and solidarity.

Enhancing resources and research

The University of Birmingham has received a donation of a world-leading collection of books in Jain Studies from the late Paul Dundas. This collection is a significant resource for both students and researchers, attracting scholars globally.

Professor Nalini Balbir, a renowned scholar in Jain Studies, has joined Birmingham as an Honorary Professor. Her involvement is crucial as we develop the School's database on Jain Studies, bolstered by this and future donations.



Course offerings and student engagement

First-year modules:

- Introduction to the Study of Religions: this course began with a reflection on the parable of the elephant and the seven blind men, followed by a visit from Samani Rijuprajna and Samani Shreyas Pragya (32 students).
- Introduction to Philosophy: a survey course that focussed on Ahimsa to explore moral rightness and justice (148 students).

Second-year modules:

- Moral Judgments in Law and Policy: this specialised module delved into the ethical implications of harming and the role of moral judgments in legal and policy-making processes to avoid it (113 students).
- Dharmic Religions and Traditions: an in-depth exploration of Jainism and its practices (15 students).

Master's modules:

- Global Bioethics: addressed ethical issues from a global perspective, including non-violence and ecological concerns (48 students).
- Metaphysical Background of Indian Traditions: covered Jainism within the broader context of Indian religious traditions (3 students).

PhD supervision on sustainability and Jainism:

- Areti Theofilopoulou supervised a PhD on 'Climate Change, Migration and Corrective Duties: Thinking Beyond Sinking Islands'.
- Marie-Hélène Gorisse co-supervises a PhD in 'Buddhist Economics and Sustainable Business Strategies' with the Department of Management.
- Leonardo Stockler: a visiting PhD student working on interactions between ascetics and householders within the Jain tradition (Sep 2024 – Feb 2025).

New modules for next year:

- The Ancient Roots of Yoga and Meditation: a third-year module focusing on prekṣa dhyāna.
- Buddhism and Jainism: a third-year module exploring the relationship between these two traditions.

Student initiatives:

- The University of Birmingham Jain Society, founded by Veer Sheth, is a student association that brings together Jain and non-Jain students for activities centred around Jain practices.



The classes gave me in-depth insight into a religion I hadn't ever learnt about before. The opportunity to learn about Jainism was something I gratefully seized! It cemented the views I hold outside the classroom, including my own opinions about the treatment of animals.

Lorna McBain

Final year BA Philosophy, Religion and Ethics student



Elevating Jainism in public conversation

In the 2023-24 academic year, the University of Birmingham and the Institute of Jainology made significant strides in enhancing the societal impact of Jainism through continuous engagement with political, cultural and religious institutions. Their efforts have increased the visibility of Jain philosophy and its contributions to societal issues.

Public lectures and media outreach

- Marie-Hélène Gorisse delivered a lecture titled 'Isolated or Co-responsible? Perfected Souls in Jainism' at King's College, engaging approximately 3,000 students.
- She also presented 'The Contemporary Relevance of Jain Philosophy' to the Jain Student Association at the University of Birmingham.
- At Shri Chandana Vidyapeeth in South London, Gorisse led a lecture and discussion on 'Anekāntavāda,' exploring the multifaceted nature of Jain philosophical thought.
- A podcast by Gorisse, 'À la découverte du jainisme' aired on Ludovic Fontaine's YouTube channel 'Méditation, Éveil, Non-Dualité,' achieving over 1,000 views as of August 2024. [Listen here.](#)
- Jinesh Sheth contributed a lecture on 'Can an Anekāntavādin Disagree?' to the Dialogues in European Jain Lecture Series, hosted online on 5 February 2024.

High-level discussions and future collaborations

- Representatives from Jain teaching at Birmingham were invited to 10 Downing Street in April 2024, underscoring the importance of Jain perspectives in national discussions.
- Interfaith engagement with the Vatican has also been a key area of focus. Gorisse published a paper titled 'Jainism: From Karma Binding to Mutual Aid, Ecological Awareness and Multifaith Dialogue' for the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue in September 2023. She looks forward to further discussions on Jainism's contribution to inclusivity at an interfaith dialogue titled 'Christian-Jain: On How to Build a Better Future' in November 2024.
- Gorisse plans to continue exploring the role of religions in women's status by offering classes on women and Jainism and participating in events organised by the Edward Cadbury Centre on women and religion worldwide.

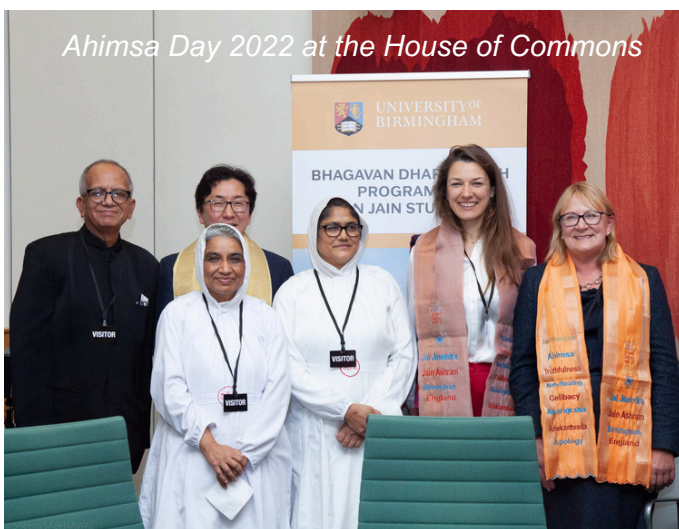
These initiatives reflect Birmingham's commitment to elevating the profile of Jainism, fostering interfaith dialogue and contributing to societal understanding and inclusivity.



Dr Marie-Hélène Gorisse at the Birmingham Jain Ashram

Institutional engagements and celebrations:

- Ahimsa Day at the House of Commons: in November 2022, we announced the world-leading initiative in Jainism and non-violence at Birmingham. This year, November 2023, saw the celebration of the Ahimsa Prize awarded to Dr Jasvant Modi for his pivotal role in establishing Jain Studies chairs globally, including at Birmingham.
- Campus visit: donors and supporters gathered to celebrate the University's commitment to research and teaching in Jainism in October 2023 with Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Adam Tickell. The event highlighted Birmingham's dedication to the study of the ancient religion and its continued partnership with the local and global Jain community.
- Mahaveer Jayanti at the House of Commons: in April 2024, the Wellcome Collection pledged to return its collection of 2,000 rare Jain manuscripts to the Jain community, represented by the Institute of Jainology (IoJ). The IoJ has chosen to loan these manuscripts to the University, where they will be stored and made publicly accessible, including through exhibitions in the city centre.



Research in Jainism: advancing Jain philosophy and interdisciplinary engagement

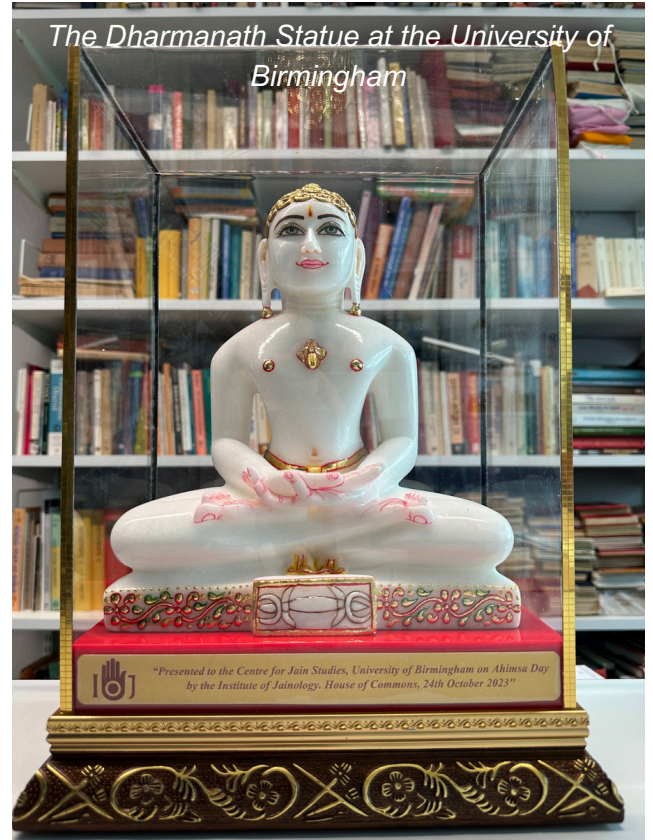
In the 2023-24 academic year, the Jain Philosophy Research Group, co-founded by Marie-Hélène Gorisse, Ana Bajželj, Anil Mundra and Lynna Dhanani, made Birmingham one of the key centres making significant strides in expanding the academic exploration of Jain philosophy. Their research initiatives have highlighted the need for a more comprehensive study of Jain doctrines and their broader intellectual context.

Key findings and focus areas

- Expanding the scope of Jain philosophy: the Jain Philosophy Research Group's work underscores the premise that Jain philosophy encompasses a vast ocean of knowledge, necessitating further investigation through proper editions, translations and commentaries. While much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on theories of knowledge, it is crucial to also examine theories of karma, cosmology, meditation techniques and community practices.
- Broadening intellectual context: the group emphasise the importance of studying Jain philosophy within its broader intellectual environment and engaging with contemporary philosophical discourses to address modern issues.
- Historical and doctrinal diversity: the group's initial focus has been on the doctrine of "anekāntavāda," which posits that reality is multi-faceted. We aim to present the diverse theories related to this doctrine and their historical development, moving beyond the commonly oversimplified view of "anekāntavāda" as a single doctrine.

Research activities and events

- As part of the activities of The Jain Philosophy Research Group, the symposium 'Knowing Through Perspectives in Jain Philosophy: Historical Approaches' was co-organised by UC Riverside, the University of Ljubljana and the University of Birmingham. This event will lead to a special issue of the Journal of Indian Philosophy titled 'Anekāntavāda: Sources and Varieties,' co-edited by Marie-Hélène Gorisse and Anil Mundra.
- Immediately following this symposium, the workshop on 'Reading Samantabhadra's Āptamīmāṃsā and Akalaṅka's Aṣṭaśatī' led to continued collaborations on translating Akalaṅka and reflecting on his position, vis-à-vis his non-Jain interlocutors. The outcome of these collaborations will be presented at the American Academy of Religion in November 2024 and the World Sanskrit Conference in June 2025.
- Gorisse co-organised the lecture series 'Dialogues in European Jain Studies', a collaboration between Birmingham, Ghent University and the Arihant Institute, featuring seven sessions with three speakers each, attracting approximately 50 participants per session.



Additional research contributions

- Jinesh Sheth delivered a lecture at Worcester College, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies in May 2024 and contributed a paper titled 'Jaina Perspective on Theism and Atheism' for the 'God and Consciousness in Indian Traditions' project funded by the Templeton Foundation. He also spoke at the Global Forum for Young Philosophers on May 27, 2024.
- Areti Theofilopoulou participated in the MANCEPT Workshops on Justice and the Family and Theories of Public Reason at the University of Manchester in September 2023.
- BRIDGE Grant: the Jain Philosophy Research Group secured a BRIDGE grant (£6,380) for the period September 2024 to September 2025, developing a collaboration between Birmingham and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This grant will support joint efforts to enhance Jain Studies, non-violence and interreligious engagement, with a focus on engaging relevant local communities.

These activities reflect the University's commitment to advancing the study of Jain philosophy, exploring its diverse aspects and fostering interdisciplinary and international collaborations.



I was excited to join the Dharmanath Network in Jain Studies as it was a full-time post-doc position in Jain studies, at an institute like the University of Birmingham and with two more colleagues working in similar areas – a perfect opportunity suitable to my interests! Since I joined in April 2024, I have presented a paper at a conference at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies on a Jain perspective on the Theism-Atheism debate.

In the next academic year(s), I am looking forward to completing a major portion of a monograph on *anekāntavāda* (non-one-sidedness), one of the core principles of Jain philosophy. The monograph will build upon my research during the PhD and throw light on some of its unexplored dimensions. I am hoping that it will serve as a standard introduction to the topic for those interested in (South Asian) Philosophy, particularly to students and scholars of Jain studies. Also, such a monograph is expected as not much has come to light since Matilal's book, 'The Central Philosophy of Jainism', which was published in 1981. This is not to say that there has been no progress at all.

I am also planning to organise a symposium on a related topic which would be helpful to my ongoing research and to the further advancement of the field of Jain studies.

Dr Jinesh Sheth
Post-Doctoral Researcher in Jain Studies



Selected publications

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. 'Jainism: From karma binding to mutual aid, ecological awareness and multifaith dialogue', in *Inclusion and Solidarity: Understanding Synodality from the Viewpoint of the Other Believers*. Special Issue of *Pro Dialogo*, Discatery for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City.

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. *Death and Immortality*, Special Issue of *Religious Studies* (Cambridge University Press) edited by Gorisse, in which Jainism is brought to an interfaith dialogue with other traditions.

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. 'Jainisme : Prabhacandra' In *La philosophie Indienne*, Vrin.

Sheth, Jinesh. Report of 'A Critical Study of Anekāntavāda: Investigating Some Unexplored Dimensions' in the *Newsletter of the Centre of Jaina Studies*, March 2024, Issue 19, pp. 26-28.

Submitted (not yet published) papers

Sheth, Jinesh. 'Niścaya-Vyavahāra Nayas and Anekāntavāda' in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Special issue on 'Anekāntavāda: Sources and Varieties' (Gorisse&Mundra, 2025)

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. 'The path of the unattached ones: exploring the renunciation paradigm' in *Engaging Philosophies of Religion: Across Global Boundaries* (Loewen, Bloomsbury, 2025)

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. 'Transformative knowledge in Jainism. The practical dimension of philosophy of religion' in *Rethinking the topics, questions and categories of Philosophy of Religion* (Knepper & Dolinsek, Expanding Philosophy of Religion Series, Bloomsbury, 2025)

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. 'The sun that makes the lotus of the object of knowledge blossom' in *The Global Philosophy Sourcebook* (Ruston, Global Philosophy Series, Equinox, 2026)

Gorisse, Marie-Hélène. 'Is Rāvaṇa the Universal Emperor? Questions of Reference in Prabhācandra's Semantic Viewpoint' in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Special issue on 'Anekāntavāda: Sources and Varieties' (Gorisse & Mundra, 2025)

Theofilopoulou, Areti. 'Frustration at Work? The Case for Subsidizing Career Changes' (with Tom Parr), *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics*

Theofilopoulou, Areti. 'Automation, Inequality, and the Future of Work' (with Tom Parr), prepared for Julian David Jonker & Grant J. Rozeboom (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Work*



Thank you



We sincerely thank our supporters and everyone who contributed to the Dharmanath network. Your dedication has been instrumental in supporting our initiatives throughout the 2023-24 academic year and advancing the study and societal impact of Jain philosophy.

Our teaching efforts have increased students' understanding of Jainism and non-violence, creating a deeper awareness of inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives. Our outreach activities' societal impact has significantly raised Jainism's profile and highlighted its relevance to contemporary issues.

In research, we contributed to cross-cultural dialogue by representing a lesser-known tradition within mainstream debates. We notably participated in the activities of the Jain Philosophy Research Group, which has made significant strides in expanding the academic exploration of Jain doctrines, emphasising the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive study. We also ensured to support early career scholars working in the field. We are particularly grateful for the support in organising symposia, workshops and securing grants that will further enhance our collaborative efforts and engagement with global communities.

Thank you to all our partners, colleagues and students for your continued commitment and support. Together, we are making meaningful contributions to the field of Jain Studies and beyond.

Dr Marie-Hélène Gorisse

Dharmanath Assistant Professor in Jain Studies



On behalf of the UK Jain community, I warmly congratulate the team at the University of Birmingham for a successful first year and an excellent Jain studies initiative. The Jain community has appreciated the participation of the Birmingham team in various community activities throughout the year, making them household names. Education and knowledge are at the heart of Jainism and we are keen to see the University develop into a significant teaching and research centre for Jain studies outside India.

Mehool Sanghrajka MBE

Chairman of the Institute of Jainology

