

Gender And Salvation: Jaina Debates On The Spiritual Liberation Of Women



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GENDER AND SALVATION: JAINA DEBATES ON THE SPIRITUAL LIBERATION OF WOMEN



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Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1992. Hardcover. Book Condition: New. First. Among the living religious traditions of India, only that of the Jains includes a substantial number of women in the community of religious aspirants who renounce the household life and take the vows of mendicancy. This phenomenon might suggest that Jaina women enjoy a status of religious and spiritual equality unparalleled elsewhere on the subcontinent, but even within the Jaina tradition there exists a deep schism concerning that status. In this volume, Professor Jaini brings to light heretofore untranslated texts evidencing a centuries-old debate between the two principal Jaina sects, the Digambaras and the Svetambaras, on the critical issue of whether or not women can attain spiritual liberation (moksa). The debate focuses on the question of whether total renunciation of clothing is a prerequisite to moksa. For the Digambaras, the example of total nudity set by Mahavira (599-527 B.C.), the central spiritual figure of Jainism, mandates an identical practice for all who aspire to the highest levels of religious attainment; Digambara monks therefore go about naked. For the Svetambaras, the renunciation necessary for such attainment is neither affected nor confirmed by the absence of clothes; Svetambara monks therefore go about clad in cotton robes. Both sects agree, however, that nudity is not permitted for women under any circumstances. This necessitates the conclusion that for the Digambaras a woman cannot attain moksa, while for the Svetambaras she can. From this conclusion follows a heated debate on a question of fundamental importance, namely, the manner in which gender-based differences of biology and life experience may condition or limit an individual's ability to accomplish the ultimate religious goal. In addressing that question, the Jaina thinkers whose words are here translated demonstrate through logical analysis a level of insight into the...



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