



Globalized Guru, Nationalized Icon: The Shrimad Rajchandra Mission and the Birth of “Globalized Jainism”

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12:00PM – 1:00PM
RSVP for Online Access

In November 2017, the Shrimad Rajchandra Mission of Dharampur, Gujarat (SRMD) unveiled a 34-foot bronze statue of Śrīmad Rājacandra (1866-1901), a Jain layman and spiritual leader who is best known for his correspondence with a young Mahatma Gandhi. Over the previous decade, the SRMD’s founder, Rakeshbhai Jhavery (b. 1966), has developed a sizable following, in part by creating and publicly worshipping images of the Mission’s eponymous “inspiration.” In this talk, Dr. Steven Vose analyzes the visual aesthetics of the images of Rājacandra to show that a semantic shift has allowed the emaciated body of Rājacandra to be read as a new model of ascetic perfection and modern Jain spirituality. Vose argues that these images enabled the creation and growth of a “Globalized Jainism” specifically marketed to middle- and upper-class Indian and diaspora Jains that allows them to connect to their religious and national heritage in new ways. An examination of the cultural and religious implications of India’s turn toward neoliberalism, this talk argues that the appeal of the SRMD’s Globalized Jainism lies partly in its ability to connect modern, “philosophical” aspects of Jainism with nationalist spectacle through these images in ways that replicate traditional, ritual-based displays of piety while circumventing the structures of power that have historically linked Jain monastic orders to specific caste communities in western India.

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Dr. Steven M. Vose is the Bhagwan Mahavir Assistant Professor of Jain Studies at Florida International University in Miami. He holds a doctorate in South Asia Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and an MTS from Harvard Divinity School. His research interests focus on the formation of Jain communities and articulations of Jain identity from the late medieval period to today. His forthcoming book, *Reimagining Jainism in Islamic India: Jain Intellectual Culture in the Delhi Sultanate* (Routledge), which examines the role of Jain monks’ intellectual and literary production in normalizing relations between the Jain community and the first Islamic empire in South Asia, is the winner of the 2020 American Institute of Indian Studies’ (AIIS) Edward C. Dimock, Jr. Book Prize in the Indian Humanities. His current research examines the roles of colonialism, post-coloniality, globalization and neoliberalism on articulations of Jain identity. His teaching and research interests also include the social history of “tantra” and devotion (bhakti) in South Asia; gender, caste, and identity; religious visual culture and temple building practices.