

Concepts of Power in the Jaina Tradition

Two different concepts of power are presented in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu scriptures: (a) the power of asceticism (*tapas*) to create ascetic power (*rddhi* or *śakti*), a form of energy or potential believed to be stored up in the ascetic body-mind complex and crystallized in its mortal remains, and (b) political power (*kṣatra*), originally constituted by force (*bala*). The paper argues that the classical Jain doctrine of *karman* can also be read as a material theory of power. According to classical Jain doctrine (Viy₁ 1.1.3), ascetic power is generated by specific exertions, whose effects are encoded and stored in distinct sets or 'species' of seed-like karmic particles (P. *kamma-pagaḍi*, S. *karma-prakṛti*) of varying purity which exist in *potentia* (*sattā*) until they come to fruition again, either naturally (*udaya*), in form of new actions within a karmically determined time period, or by being ripened prematurely (*udtraṇā*) through conscious instrumental action (*kaṛaṇa*) of the embodied soul by means of mind, speech and body. Although karmic particles encode specific potential to act, *karman* itself is not the source of karmic power. The specific potential stored in karmic particles is predicated on the innate infinite energy, *vīrya*, of the soul (*jīva*), which it is both perverting and channelling into specific forms. *Vīrya* is not conceived as an action itself, but as a homogenous meta-quality, presupposed by all actions. Power as a generalised potential to act is thus conceptualised in classical Jainism as a combination of universal and specific qualities, that is, the potential to act in general and in particular form. If one of the two principal components is removed, the potential to act disappears. Like all *karman* ascetic power is dual in nature: potential (*labdhi*) and activity (*yoga*). The potential can express itself in both positive and negative ways. In this respect, classical lists of *rddhi* demonstrate a sense of pragmatic realism, despite their apparent extravagance. The projection of the ability of issuing negative or positive sanctions, curses and blessings, and of the will to do so, represents a generalised threat or promise to others. For some commentators, this projection is incompatible with the renunciatory ethos of the soteriological core of Jain doctrine. Yet, successfully communicating the existence of the real not merely hypothetical *possibility* of executing negative and positive sanctions, blessings, is essential for the effective functioning of ascetic power as a socially recognised and hence politically influential potential. The relevance of these observations will become evident when we try to ascertain how Jain ascetic power can be transformed into social and political power.

Peter Flügel
Pf8@soas.ac.uk