

Abstract: The Jaina philosopher Bhāvasena, and a paradigm for the science of religion  
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Bhāvasena, a Jaina philosopher of the thirteenth century, has left a few works, which reflect not only the state of south Indian Digambara thought in his time but also summarize the Jaina attitude towards contemporary rival schools of thought. From his discussion of those other schools in his *Viśvatattvaprakāśa*, it is possible to distil the principles of what may be called a Jaina philosophy of religion, one that may also serve today as a conceptual basis for the science of religion, not only where the study of Indian religions is concerned, but of religions in general.

The Indian religious and philosophical landscape is known to be highly diverse, and due to the small number of non-Indian researchers in these fields of study, only a small number among the many schools of Indian thought have been studied in any appreciable depth outside India. Although the study of Indian religions has played an important role in the modern development of the science of religion, the potential contribution of India is considerably greater and remains untapped due to this still limited familiarity with the Indian diversity.

Because Jaina philosophy is essentially atheistic, religious 'truth' does not depend upon revelations from a hypothetical supreme divine being (as in the case of the great religions of West Asia and of certain later Indian theistic traditions) but is a matter of research and discovery in which (at least in theory) literally any person can participate. Due to this philosophical attitude towards religious truth, rival religious traditions have been examined by Bhāvasena and other Jaina authors on the basis of rational principles that are open to impartial investigation, focussing on topics of inquiry that were relevant in Indian debates. The discussions that are found in the *Viśvatattvaprakāśa* are not only of value for determining the Jaina view of other traditions: they also shed light on what evidently were considered topics of religious interest in the dialogues between various religions. Thus the study of Bhāvasena's discussions is also of interest for the present-day scholar of religion in general.

The proposed paper will highlight some examples of how Bhāvasena discusses other systems of thought and how his discussions may offer new cues to the contemporary science of religion.