

#MagicMantras

Bhaktamar Mantra Healing between Jainism and the Spiritual Marketplace

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Abstract

This article addresses Bhaktamar Mantra Healing (BMH), a healing practice based on a popular Jain *stotra*. After a preliminary discussion of Tantra and Tantric elements in Jainism, BMH is introduced as the most recent layer in a complex tradition that grew around the *Bhaktāmar Stotra*, and conceptualized as a *Tantric reconfiguration*: a relatively recent creative blending of Jain devotional and Tantric elements with some new influences resulting in a systematized, democratized, and to an extent commodified brand of spiritual healing available on the spiritual marketplace. The article then proceeds to examine BMH's significant digital media presence to demonstrate how information provided on the effectiveness and mechanics of *mantra* healing reveals a complex interplay of shifting religious, spiritual, and scientific narratives, and how functional differences between different digital media forms impact upon the prevalence of these different narratives. Ultimately, this article will argue that approaching BMH as a *Tantric reconfiguration* emerging from an encounter of a Jain practice with consumer culture is helpful to make sense of what sets BMH apart from other uses of Jain *mantras*, and of the importance of the digital space BMH has made for itself.

Keywords

Tantra, Digital Religion, Jainism, *mantra*, spiritual healing, *Bhaktāmar Stotra*

Declarations

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Most digital materials used in this study are publicly available. Data derived from ethnographic work are not.

This article will discuss a spiritual healing system called Bhaktamar Mantra Healing (henceforth referred to as BMH). This system – or as one healer likes to refer to it, this technology – is based on a popular devotional poem called the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* and combines the hymn’s verses with *mantras* and *yantras* to effect this-worldly health and other benefits. BMH is an example of a recently developed practice that combines Tantric elements into a more or less transactional system without being directly rooted in any existing historical Tantric tradition. As such, this article will refer to it as a *Tantric reconfiguration*. In the past decade, BMH’s developers and healers have actively instrumentalized digital media to introduce, propagate, and put into practice this form of spiritual healing. This article will examine this online presence in order to gain a better understanding of this relatively new mode of spiritual healing, its relation to Jainism, and its use of different narratives and digital media forms to engage with various audiences.

These methods and queries situate this article within the realm the study of digital religion, which, according to Heidi Campbell “does not simply refer to religion as it is performed and articulated online, but points to how digital media and spaces are shaping and being shaped by religious practice” (Campbell 2013: 1). This simple definition conveys both the mutual influencing of social reality and digital media practices (also seen in mediatization theory, e.g. Lundby 2009; Couldry and Hepp 2013) and the bifurcation between the Internet as a source of religious information (religion online) and cyberspace as a new space for religious praxis (online religion) (Helland 2000, 2005; Hadden and Cowan 2000: 8-9). The analysis presented here pertains to both online and offline BMH environments and combines digital with more traditional research methods (Campbell 2013; Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour 2016; Snee et al. 2016; Tsuria et al. 2017). Whereas a functional and discourse analysis of BMH’s digital and digitized sources is at the basis of the analysis presented in this article, this material is supplemented with data drawn from a more broad analysis of Jain

websites, and ethnographic fieldwork in Belgium, London, and India between 2015 and 2019, including interviews and participation in offline and online BMH related activities.

The first section will present an elaborate introduction which seeks to inform the reader about the tenuous relationship between Jainism and Tantrism, and place this tenuousness in contrast with the relative prevalence of multifunctional Tantric elements in Jain religious practice. Section two of this article proceeds to describe how BMH became a system of spiritual healing and discusses its presence in digital media. It does this by bringing together existing research on different phases of the development of the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* with new insights derived from an examination of the interconnected network of websites and social media devoted to BMH. In section three, discourse analysis is applied to a selection of born-digital and digitized materials from websites and social media accounts to learn how BMH is presented and discussed using (combinations of) different narratives. The last section of this article will focus on what sets BMH apart from other instances of *mantra* use in Jain praxis. To this end, Andrea Jain's work on encounters between religious practices and consumer culture (Jain 2014) provides a helpful perspective to make sense of BMH, its variety of explanatory narratives, and its prolific digital presence. Relatedly, this last section will assess how and why BMH inhabits the digital space it does.

Jainism and Tantra

The middle of the first millennium saw the emergence of a new set of religious methods in South and East Asian religious traditions. Just like the devotional turn described in South Asian traditions from the 8th century onwards, this wave of religious innovation – referred to in South Asian religious studies as the Tantric turn - was not limited to any specific tradition. It swept through large parts of the South and East Asian religious sphere, influencing Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, but also Asian Islam, Daoism, and Shinto (White 2000: 6-7). As will become clear in the discussion on Jainism and Tantra below, this Tantric current

manifested itself differently depending on the soteriological and philosophical soil it took root in.

Although there is a broad consensus on the historical occurrence of the Tantric turn, the term Tantra continues to defy definition. The earliest etic descriptions of Tantra were informed to a varying extent by British – at times missionary - moral sensibilities, undercurrents of orientalism, and colonial aspirations, and emphasised Tantra's transgressional and sexual character. This dramatization in turn elicited a strong rejection of the term in many South Asian traditions and, in recent times, its appropriation by sensationalist spiritual and sexual entrepreneurs (White 2000: 4; Urban 2010: 11). Reiterating an approach proposed by Douglas Brooks (1990), recent scholarship tends to forego the sensationalist colonial representations of Tantra and the various monothetic reactions they elicit in favour of a more suitable polythetic approach, which allows for differences in practice and experience – both between traditions and over time - under the Tantric umbrella (White 2000: 4-5; Urban 2001: 7-8). Such a polythetic approach enables a shift of focus from broad theoretical discussions on Tantra to specific contextualized practices involving 'Tantric elements' - such as *mantras* (verbal spells), *yantras* (diagrams), *mudras* (hand movements), specific rituals, body practices, secret esoteric knowledge, etc. - that have a putative impact on either the advancement of the Tantric practitioner on the path to liberation or the mundane circumstances in which the practitioner finds themselves.

Such an approach is better suited to researching Jain religious practices and discourses, as it largely bypasses the term Tantra – a term that has been used in a variety of meanings in historical Jain literature (Gough 2020c: 567), but is now so laden with negative connotations it is seldom used. The dislike for the term Tantra in emic discussions on Jainism is illustrated by contemporary online discourses: whereas terms denoting Tantric elements - mainly *mantra* and to a lesser extent *yantra* - are in frequent use online in both emic and etic

discussions on Jainism, the term ‘Tantra’ tends to appear in academic discourse on Jainism (e.g. JAINpedia¹), rather than in emic narratives.²

*Tantra without Tantrism*³

Regardless of the contemporary absence of Tantra in emic discourses, Jainism has developed different practices that make use of Tantric elements between the Tantric turn in the 5th century and today. In fact, comparative textual research has revealed that Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu medieval Tantric manuals largely presented the same range of practices (Sanderson; Slouber)⁴. However, unlike Buddhist and Hindu traditions, Jainism did not recognize Tantric practices as a primary mode of advancement on the path towards *mokṣa* (liberation). The tradition’s soteriology and focus on individual karma rendered Tantric interventions in a practitioner’s spiritual progress problematic. Some scholars argue that such Tantric short-cuts on the individuals path to liberation were entirely unacceptable (Bhattacharyya 2009: 241-242; Cort 2000b: 417; Qvarnström 2000: 597).⁵ Others suggest that some sources indicate there is limited room for the use of *mantras* to advance on the path towards liberation after all (Gough 2020a: 582; Kapashi 2007: 118-119). The tentative consensus is that, in Jainism, Tantric practices are primarily a method to establish a degree of control and power over mundane matters, rather than a vehicle towards *mokṣa*. Such practices can effectuate a transference of power to the practitioner directly (e.g., after meditating upon a *mantra*, he can now control his enemies), or they can benefit the practitioner by summoning a non-liberated

¹ The JAINpedia project (jainpedia.org) is a co-production by the London-based Institute of Jainology and Prof. Nalini Balbir (Sorbonne, Paris). It consists of an encyclopaedia-like platform on all things Jain, with reference to academic research and other relevant websites and digital resources where available.

² This anecdotal evidence is based on a simple Google search on ‘Jainism’ and ‘Tantra.’

³ This title is borrowed from a lecture by Paul Dundas at the Jaina Studies Workshop on Jainism and Tantra at SOAS in 2015, and indicates that although a fully developed Tantric path did not emerge in Jainism, Tantric elements and methods did.

⁴ Both Michael Slouber and Alexis Sanderson have presented on their research during the Jaina Studies Workshop at SOAS in 2015. I know of no published papers or books on this matter (Abstracts: CoJS Newsletter 2015: 6-9; Conference Proceedings: Vekemans 2016: 11-15).

⁵ This limited scope of Tantra in explains why most general definitions of Tantra (such as Biardeau and Padoux – but also the broadened definition by White (White 2000: 8-9)), which are tenuous at the best of times, seem utterly foreign within a Jain context.

deity that intervenes on the practitioner's behalf (e.g., compelled by the correct execution of a ritual, the goddess defeats his enemies).

The medieval period saw the development of different types of Tantric methods and actors within Jainism. Ritual cults developed around goddesses such as Jvālāmālīnī, Padmāvatī, and of Sarasvatī as Vāgīśvarī (Wiley 2006: 209; Cort 1987), and to a lesser extent around male figures such as Gautama, Ghaṇṭākarṇa Mahāvīra and Nākoḍā Bhairava (Cort 2000b: 417; Dundas 1998). As these figures do not fit into the Jain soteriological path, Paul Dundas has argued that “they represent through their ability to grant requests and offer protection, an infusion of worldly values and a willingness on the part of Jainism to make some concessions to the more mundane aspirations of lay-followers and potential converts alike” (Dundas 2002: 213). Tantra manuals such as the tenth century *Jvālāmālīnī Kalpa* describe exactly how to use rituals to harness the power of these deities, for example for the purposes of healing (Gough 2020c: 573-574; Granoff 1998: 218). In addition to Tantric practices involving rituals and *mantras*, meditative practices using visualization or diagrams (*yantra* or *maṇḍala*) were developed which were said to have the power to impact the individual practitioner's karma (Gough 2020c: 571-572).

The Tantric turn in Jainism was not limited to lay audiences but included the ascetic community in different ways (Qvarnström 2000: 597). Medieval Jain miracle narratives ascribe powers to ascetics' bodies through direct touch or indirect contact – for example ascribing healing powers to water that was used to wash a monk's feet (Granoff 1998: 225-230). Although Tantra's this-worldly aims can seem at odds with the soteriological focus of Jainism, Jain monks are also described as actively participating in mantric culture, and their ability to overcome human or divine opponents by using magic spells became an important indicator of their overall status (Dundas 2000: 232). Certain *mantras* which were believed to encapsulate powers, and the rituals through which these powers could be activated at times

became a form of restricted knowledge, passed along exclusively between initiated members within Jain ascetics lineages (e.g. *sūrimantra* (Dundas 1998 and 2000: 233; Gough 2017: 273-274), *vardhamānavidyā* (Gough 2020a: 582)).

Tantric elements in contemporary Jainism

It is, of course, difficult to gauge to which extent the methods described in Tantra manuals and narrative literature reflected actual practices of their time. Today, the most salient features and practices we see described in the medieval sources briefly discussed above have disappeared. What is left are Tantric elements; *mantras* being the most common Tantric element in contemporary Jainism (see Gough 2020a). However, such Tantric elements are for a large part subjugated and integrated into orthodox, mainstream Jain practices; embedded in devotional rituals and contemplative practices without any overt claims regarding their potential transformative powers. For example, the *pañcanamaskāra mantra* is most prolifically used in all sorts of settings, but is most commonly explained as a prayer to pay homage to teachers on the different levels of the path to liberation, or a formula to be repeated in order to help the practitioner concentrate. *Mantras* are also abundantly used in devotional rituals. When these rituals are focussed on a *Tīrthāṅkara*, who has obtained liberation and is now no longer present in the world, they cannot effect intervention in worldly affairs on behalf of the worshipper. However, when rituals are directed at non-liberated (protector) deities, it is possible – but by no means certain – that such an intervention is sought by the devotee. Some contemporary Jains indeed seek intervention by non-liberated gods and goddesses through rituals including *mantras* and *yantras*, to ask for a wide range of blessings -- success in studies, fertility, robust health, success in business, and so forth. However, few would consider these practices as central to the Jain tradition. These developments are reflected in the digital realm. Whereas historical Tantric practices, such as goddess cults and their Tantra manuals discussed above, are absent in emic – and indeed any non-academic -

online discourse on Jainism, Tantric elements such as *mantras* have very much become a part of Jainism's digital realm. As in off line religious praxis, these elements are most often integrated into online narratives or practices of a devotional, ritual, or contemplative nature, that do not indicate any overt *transactionality* that would qualify them as Tantric.

Occasionally, however, we find *mantras* and *yantras*, but also references to the Tantric body, *kuṇḍalinī*, and *cakra* being used, talked about, and combined in new ways.⁶ Although such narratives or practices are not altogether new, as they make use of terminologies, methods, and practices that have been developed through centuries, they are also not straightforward continuations of an existing Tantric tradition. Bhaktamar Mantra Healing (BMH) is one example of such a *Tantric reconfiguration*.

The *Bhaktāmar Stotra* and its consecutive functional transformations

BMH is the newest layer in a complex textual and devotional tradition which grew from a sixth century devotional poem, *the Bhaktāmar Stotra*. This highly popular text was composed as a devotional hymn to the first *Tīrthaṅkara* Rṣabhabadeva (alternatively called Ādinātha), and is attributed to the author Mānatuṅga, who is claimed by both *Śvētāmbara* and *Digambara* Jains (Balbir: Jainpedia⁷). Not much is known for certain regarding the author or the context within which he worked, but a recent study in Hindi by Dhanki and Shah identifies Mānatuṅga as a presumably *Śvētāmbara* Jain author who lived in the second half of the 6th century CE, and proposes that the original text probably consisted of 44 verses, to which four verses were added in a later *Digambara* version (Dhanki and Shah 1999; Cort

⁶ One such example of a recent practice that synthesises a selection of Tantric concepts is *prekṣā dhyāna*. Samaṇī Pratibhāprajñā has talked about Tantric influences in *prekṣā dhyāna*, a system of contemplation developed by Ācārya Mahāprajñā at the Jaina Studies Workshop on Jainism and Tantra at SOAS in 2015 (Abstract CoJS Newsletter 2015: 8; Report Vekemans 2016: 13). This system is also discussed in Andrea Jain's 2014 book 'Selling Yoga' as an example of a modern system of yoga which appropriated biomedical discourse (Jain 2014: 57-65).

⁷ <http://jainpedia.org/themes/principles/sacred-writings/highlights-of%20-jainpedia/bhaktamara-stotra>

2000a, 2005: 94; for an overview of other attempts to put a date to the compilation of the *stotra*, see Kapashi 2007: 79). The German Indologist Hermann Jacobi was the first to publish a scholarly edition of the text with a translation in 1876, and different editions and translations have since followed.⁸

This devotional hymn spawned a number of commentaries from the 14th century onwards (see Cort 2001: 189 for an overview). The earliest surviving commentary by Guṇākara (1370), transposes the figurative language of each of the original verses into longer miracle narratives, and adds a *mantra* to each verse (Balbir: Jainpedia)⁹. The stories relate how the goddess Cakra (or Cakreśvarī) uses her powers to enable devotees who meditate upon the verses of *Bhaktāmar Stotra* to overcome their problems (Kapashi 2007: 105). These narratives thus translate the aesthetic poem of spiritual devotion into a more mundane transactional process, that touches upon the Tantric (Lefebvre, R. 1995: 426-427; Granoff 1998: 219). In addition to these miracle narratives found in the commentary texts, each of the *śloka* became connected to its own *mantra* and *yantra*. In a further transformation, the text itself became a focus of devotion, with temples being devoted to it (e.g. in Sangner and Bharuch), and a ritual being designed around it (Balbir¹⁰, Cort 2005: 107-108; for a detailed description of *Bhaktāmar pūjā*, see Kapashi 2007: 153-155).

⁸ The 2012 edition, which includes an older Hindi translation by Nathuram Premi, and an English translation by Manish Modi, is very useful (Bhaktamar Stotra 2012). Vinod Kapashi's book on the nine sacred recitations also includes a serviceable translation and some commentary (Kapashi 2007).

⁹ <http://www.jainpedia.org/themes/principles/sacred-writings/highlights-of-jainpedia/bhaktamara-stotra/contentpage/2/index.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.jainpedia.org/themes/principles/sacred-writings/highlights-of-jainpedia/bhaktamara-stotra/contentpage/4.html>



Figure 1: Layers of the Bhaktāmar Stotra development

Figure one presents the different historical and functional strata of the *Bhaktāmar* tradition from its inception to present day. They show that the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* has become both a means and an object of devotion and has developed Tantric associations. Today, this hymn occupies a unique place in *stotra* literature and Jainism in general, due to its immense popularity (Kapashi 2007: 3). Perhaps due to the historical emphasis on ascetic and doctrinal aspects of Jainism, this primarily devotional text has long remained relatively understudied in academia. Apart from Jacobi's edition, and Lefebvre's work on the commentary, Whitney Kelting (2001), Vinod Kapashi (2007), Phyllis Granoff (2010), and John Cort (2001, 2005) have noted and discussed the importance of this text in contemporary devotional practices in Jainism. Cort (2005), Kapashi (2007), and Balbir¹¹ also mention the ritual reincarnations and Tantric aspects of the text's multimedial tradition.¹²

¹¹ <http://www.jainpedia.org/themes/principles/sacred-writings/highlights-of-jainpedia/bhaktamara-stotra/index.html>

¹² Both Ellen Gough (Emory University, Atlanta) and Aashi Jain (Florida International University) have worked on aspects of BMH, but to my knowledge, no publications have emerged.

Bhaktamar Mantra Healing as a Tantric reconfiguration

Although the historical context above as well as the example below illustrate how the BMH system of today is one layer in a multi-layered textual tradition that goes back centuries and incorporates devotional, ritual, and Tantric aspects, it is important to stress that in many ways, BMH is essentially new. I argue that the difference between previous practices that ascribed the power to influence worldly affairs to the verses of the *Bhaktāmar Stotra*, and BMH as a *Tantric reconfiguration* lies in the latter's systematized, democratized, and – to an extent – commodified nature. These three aspects of BMH are reminiscent of Hugh Urban's three transformations of an esoteric tradition. Urban discusses how part of the Bengali *Kartābhajā* sect undergoes a progressive process of *exotericization* and institutionalization (2001: 204), resulting in a popularized, “deodorized”, and commercialized version (2001: 9). As a *Tantric reconfiguration* rather than a Tantric tradition, BMH does not subject to a process of *exotericization*. However, as the next sections of this article will illustrate, the configuration of the healing system and the way it is presented do reflect the same preoccupations and goals which form the driving force of the process as discussed by Urban; i.e. the intention to be inclusive and accessible (viz. popularization), the avoidance of specific references to Tantra and religion in general in favour of more general spiritual and scientific discourses (viz. deodorization), and the introduction of an economic perspective of goods and services (viz. commercialization).

First, BMH brings together elements of different functional strata of the textual tradition, reconfigures them, and presents them in a new systematized way. Arguably, the process towards systemization was started early on with the attribution of different *mantras* and *yantras* in the commentaries, but it has now come to fruition, with a clear exhaustive list of uses for each verse and succinct instructions for the use of its associated *mantra*, *riddhi* (shorter version of the *mantra*), and *yantra*. Although devotion remains a vital component, the

BMH system puts less emphasis on Jain soteriology and instead focusses on practical solutions for this-worldly health and wellbeing¹³. The publication of instructions in the form of manuals and cards further establishes and to an extent fixates the system. To illustrate some of the different layers of this transformative text, and illustrate how BMH presents it in a systematized way, we will look at an example in the table below.

Sloka 23	त्वामामनन्ति मुनयः परमं पुमांस। मादित्यवर्णममलं तमसः परस्तात् ॥ त्वामेव सम्यगुपलभ्य जयंति मृत्युं। नान्यः शिवः शिवपदस्य मुनीन्द्र! पन्थाः ॥२३॥	
Translation	Oh Lord, sages consider believe that you are the supreme being, You have the bright colour of the sun, you are spotless, and you are beyond the realms of darkness. One conquers death by only following your path. O Lord of Ascetics, there is no better path leading to salvation. 23 ¹⁴	
Commentary Gunakara 14 th century	Once, there was a great sage who meditated upon the <i>mantra</i> derived from this <i>śloka</i> . The goddess Cakreśvarī was pleased, and decided to grant him the power to defeat wicked gods. He ends up pacifying the goddess Durgā. (Summary based on Lefeber 1995)	
BMH Manual	Manju Jain (2016)	Priya Jain (2017)
<i>Mantra</i>	Om namo bhagwatī jayāwati mama samīhitārtham. Moksha Saukhyam kuru kuru swāhā. Om hrīm shrīm klīm sarwa siddhāya shrīm namah	
<i>Riddhi</i>	Om hrīm arham namo āsi-visānam (Jhraum Jhraum namah swāhā)	
<i>Yantra</i>	The associated <i>yantra</i> is provided in the BMH manuals.	
Use	Safety of the body from evil spirits (and to win in court cases)	
Procedure	After purification, at an auspicious occasion, being clothed in white, facing to the north and keeping the mantra there, an auspicious pitcher may be placed, and a candle kindled. The yantra is worshipped and then the riddhi and mantra syllables are adored 4000 times with white rosary for evincing the mantra.	

Table 1: Bhaktamar Mantra Healing, Śloka 23

Second, the BMH system is democratic, both in the sense that it is not an elitist movement, but clearly wants to appeal and be accessible to common people, and in the sense that its healers aspire to reach a broad, global audience. BMH does away with any secret

¹³ Andrea Jain (2014) describes a similar shift in focus when she discusses the dissemination of *prekṣā dhyāna* to large audiences. When prescribed to ascetics and advances practitioners, this system is presented in a greater complexity, with the goal of spiritual progress and purification. However, the focus shifts to health and fitness when this same system is presented and seeks to appeal to larger, global audiences (Jain 2014: 72-75).

¹⁴ The translation provided here is by Vinod Kapashi (Kapashi 2007: 97), which is based upon a selection of translations and commentaries (Kapashi 2007: 90-91).

knowledge or any prerequisites of higher understanding or spiritual advancement on the part of the prospective patient/devotee. Whereas the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* as a devotional text is well-known and disseminated by Jain monks and nuns, who may also derive powers from its repeated recitation (*Bhaktāmara-siddhi*, see Kapashi 2007: 148), the spiritual healing system that emerged from the text is very much a lay affair. The impetus behind BMH in its current form is a small group of spiritual entrepreneurs - self-proclaimed spiritual healers. This group consists exclusively of lay Jains and is growing as more healers are trained. They cater to a clientele of mainly lay-Jains and offer their services at home, in clinics, and healing centres, but also increasingly online. Although the system has been disseminated by a small group of spiritual entrepreneurs, and the necessity of guidance by a guru for any first attempt at putting *mantra* healing into practice is emphasized¹⁵, the free availability of downloadable manuals in multiple languages as well as of online and offline chanting courses clearly illustrate the accessible nature of this knowledge.

Millions of people on Mother Earth are suffering from sicknesses in the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical bodies. Millions of people have limited or no access to healthcare. They want solutions...¹⁶

The excerpt from *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* above suggests BMH can be more easily accessible than conventional healthcare. The use of ‘people on Mother Earth’ indicates a potential global audience for this form of spiritual healing. Different sources and practices suggest that BMH’s healers aspire to reach broader audiences worldwide, within and outside the Jain community (indicated for example by publications in multiple languages, and the textual and visual European and American healers, professionals, and scholars in some sources (e.g., Jain 2016: l-m, 350-359)).

¹⁵ Bhaktamar – Introduction. On bhaktamarmantrahealing.com [consulted on 17/11/2020]

¹⁶ <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/ebook-english/>

Thirdly, the systematization and democratization discussed above are in a sense both prerequisite to and part of BMH's commodification and branding. BMH has become a commodified product, integrated in and available on the marketplace of spiritual wellness and healing. This marketplace is made up out of different systems offering similar outcomes and, often, similar services (Jain 2014: 91-92). To function in this setting, BMH needs to be visible and enticing to potential consumers. Those that feel attracted to BHM, be it after an encounter with their online sources, a referral by a friend, or an introduction by a spiritual healer, can book services, attend virtual and on-site workshops, download or buy books, mantra cards, copper *yantras*, etc. Although not all healers ask for remuneration for their services, some do, whereas others earn money from book and *yantra* sales. Even when no money seemingly changes hands (cf. Jain 2014: 92), the marketing of their services and products to a wider audience is thus not only a question of compassion, but also of good entrepreneurship. However, for different reasons including language dependence, the commodification and branding of BMH has not reached the levels described in discussion of New Age spiritual practices and modern yoga (Roy 2010; Jain 2014). These three traits of BMH also explain why it has developed a considerable digital presence, whereas healing powers and *mantras* ascribed to other (Jain) hymns are much less visible online.

Bhaktamar Healing and its digital presence

Jains (in India, but also markedly in the diaspora) have been actively developing a variety of Jainism-related materials since the mid-1990s (Vekemans 2020). Jain religious websites tend to focus either on practical applications of Jainism (aimed primarily at a Jain audience), or on providing a general introduction to the Jain tradition (aimed at a mixed audience of Jains and non-Jains), and therefore often end up disseminating standard orthodox or neo-orthodox¹⁷ interpretations of Jainism. In these, *mantras* and hymns – if discussed at all – are most often

¹⁷ For an elaboration on orthodox and neo-orthodox currents in (diasporic) Jainism, see Banks 1992: 200-217.

presented as prayers and relegated to the devotional or contemplative spheres. Associations with (healing) powers and – more specifically – references to BMH are rare¹⁸. However, a more specific search for (re)sources on BMH reveals a network of interconnected digital sources. I will briefly give an outline of the most important exponents within this network below. This outline is not meant to be an exhaustive list but aims to locate BMH in the digital realm. The objective is to give the reader some background on the sources used for the analysis this article presents. Although the list below discusses each form of digital source or material separately, it must be noted that they are of course overlapping and interconnected, linked by hyperlinks, and embedded into each other, with the same content appearing on multiple platforms.

Websites - Dr. Manju Jain published the first manual on BMH (Jain 2016 – first published in 2011) and she is still considered to be the central authority on BMH today. It was this original spiritual entrepreneur who also devoted the first webpages to BMH. Whereas some older websites are now defunct¹⁹, her website *drmanujain25.com* is one of two likely entry points for anyone looking for information on BMH online. The second website that provides a wealth of information on different aspects of BMH is *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com*. This website is connected to Annant world, “the world’s first Bhaktamar clinic” in Delhi, run by Pradeep and Priya Jain. Priya Jain is the author of a second manual on BMH (Jain 2017), which clearly takes over the system laid out in Manju Jain’s manual, but provides a different contextualization. These two websites are at the nexus of BMH’s digital network, guiding visitors to other sources and resources, online (e.g., apps, social media accounts, digitized editions) as well as offline (e.g., contact details of healers,

¹⁸ As BMH workshops are organized in cooperation with Jain organizations in India and the diaspora, any references to BMH on these websites is usually found in the (past) events section, and does not discuss BMH as a part of the Jain tradition.

¹⁹ Older websites by Manju Jain include jainismbasics.blogspot.com and www.drmanujain.com.

yantras and maṇḍalas to order). *Bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* contains significant amounts of information on *Bhaktāmar* and spiritual healing, *Bhaktāmar* and faith, the mechanisms behind the putative effects of *mantra* chanting, the use of copper *yantras* to increase the efficiency of BMH, etc. *Drmanujain25.com* provides less detailed information about the mechanisms behind the healing process on the website itself, but has a large number of embedded videos offering all kinds of information, and links to a very active WhatsApp group, as well as a *Bhaktāmar* app. Both websites also contain a digitized material that can be accessed or downloaded.

Digitized (downloadable) materials - The most elaborate and information rich digitized sources available through these two websites are the two BMH manuals. The first is Manju Jain's book *The Jain Method of Curing*²⁰, available as e-book from *drmanujain25.com* in English and Hindi, and adapted into French as *La method curative Jaina* by Lisa Silvestre in 2015. The second is Priya Jain's more recent 2017 rendition *Faith based Healing: Bhaktamar Stotra*, downloadable from *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com*, in both the English and the Hindi version. The system described in both books is very similar, as the second one is based upon the first. In addition to the manual, *drmanujain25.com* presents an online version of her published decks of mantra cards (mantra-cards in English and Hindi, and yantra-cards), as well as a downloadable list of audio-files (also used on the mobile application she refers to on her website).

Facebook - Both websites discussed above have their own Facebook pages. Annant World, to which *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* belongs, manages a page called "Bhaktamar Mantra Healing"²¹, which had close to 6000 followers at the time of writing. This appears to

²⁰ The *Jaina Method of Curing* was first published in 2011. The most recent version, which is the one referred to in this article, was published in 2016.

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/bhaktamar.m.healing> (6000+ followers at the time of writing)

be their most active page. A second page with the same name²², seemingly run by the same organization (it refers to the same website) has not seen much activity in the past two years. Dr. Manju Jain has three pages on Facebook. Her personal account is titled “Manju Jain - Spiritual Healer working on 48 magical tools of Bhaktamar for manifestation”²³. Although not all posts pertain to BMH, she often posts multiple updates a day, and a significant number do in fact touch upon spirituality. The second account is titled “Dr. Manju Jain, Director, International School for Jain Studies, Nagpur”²⁴. Most posts here relate to spirituality and BMH, and the introductory paragraph announces that International School for Jain Studies, Delhi signed MOU with Integrated Healing Forum to run courses on Drugless Therapy certified by Kulguru Kalidas Uni. The last account linked to Manju Jain is labelled “Spiritual healing centre · Community organisation”²⁵, and links to a sparse website²⁶ that seems to be under construction. This page is exclusively used to post content on spirituality and healing.

In addition to these pages linked to the websites discussed above, there is a variety of other pages and groups related to BMH or dedicated to the healing powers of the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* more generally. Most of these are very limited in size and activity, but some such as Bhaktamar Healing Pariwar²⁷, are more active. In turn, a scroll through these Facebook pages reveals pages of other healers, located in India, but also in the UK and the US, that offer BMH services, often as one form of healing among others. For example, Pooja Shah at World of Energy Healing (labelled Alternative & holistic health service) offers a range of paying services, including “*Jain Anusthan [ritual], Astrology, Meditation, Shree Navkar Mantra*

²² <https://www.facebook.com/Bhaktamar-Mantra-Healing-253432968689966> (just under 800 followers at the time of writing)

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/sundeepmanju> (5600+ friends at the time of writing)

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalJainStudies> (4200+ followers at the time of writing)

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/drmanjujain250368> (just under 1000 followers at the time of writing)

²⁶ <https://www.bhaktamarhealing.com/>

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bhaktamarhealingpariwar> (2700 members at the time of writing)

Healing, Chakra Healing, Shree Bhaktamar Mahastotra Healing, and Reiki-Angel-Crystal-Pranic Healing”.²⁸

YouTube - The channel connected to *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* is aptly called Bhaktamar Mantra Healing²⁹, and had 118000 subscribers as of 19 November 2020. Manju Jain has a personal channel titled Dr Manju Jain³⁰, which had 14100 subscribers as of that same date. The typical content of these channels is chanting, lectures and events, and testimonials by patients. The recent surge in virtual events (see below) has made YouTube a more important repository of BMH-related resources. Whereas the channels discussed in this section already existed before the Covid-19 pandemic, the amount of content made available has risen drastically as recordings of virtual events (conducted on YouTube, Facebook, or ZOOM) are made available for asynchronous viewing.

In addition to the materials on these channels, the websites and Facebook pages discussed above contain many shared or embedded YouTube videos. *Drmanujain25.com* contains different recordings of *śloka*, *mantra*, and *riddhi* recitation, with varying degrees of elaboration on the meaning and specific area of effect of the *śloka*. Some videos show the healer chanting, others accompany the audio with animations, while still others show the mantra cards while *śloka*, *mantra*, and *riddhi* are chanted in the background.

Mobile Applications - Compared to websites, mobile applications tend to be focussed on a single function and give relatively little context. The website *drmanujain25.com* refers to the Bhaktamar Stotra App (Wishcraft Apps 2020³¹). This Android app is relatively simple and straightforward. Visually, it presents a mobile version of the mantra cards, flanked by traditional devotional elements, a temple bell and a conch shell, which make their respective

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/JainHealerPoojaShah/> (2500+ followers at the time of writing)

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/c/BhaktamarMantraHealing>

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/user/sundeepmanju>

³¹ This application had 5000+ downloads at the time of writing.

sounds when tapped. The user can choose the number of repetitions of the *śloka*, *mantra*, and *riddhi*, and can select one of two voices. In the about us section of the app, the developer shares how the return to health of a family member inspired the development of the app, they also briefly present the story of Mānatuṅga. The app does not contain any further contextualization or elaboration on the putative healing powers of the *stotra*.

To examine whether more mobile applications dedicated to BMH exist, a search using the search-term *bhaktamar* in the Google app store was conducted (for more on Jain mobile applications, see Vekemans 2019). Unsurprisingly for such a popular text, this revealed some twenty apps that deal exclusively with the *Bhaktāmar Stotra*. Of these, only two mention the potential healing effects of each *śloka* (Tarun and Paras Jain 2020; NPR 2019), and one makes a general comment that healing effects have been ascribed to each *śloka*, and proceeds to give some examples (Rishabh and Jalpa Parekh 2015). Most other apps engaging with the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* do so by providing the text – with or without commentary, and/or audio of the *stotra* being chanted. The *mantra* and *riddhi* are most often not included. The images of *Tīrthaṅkara* Ādinātha that in many cases appear on screen when the audio plays, together with a temple bell and conch shell, emphasize the devotional usage of the *stotra* (e.g. Caliber Apps 2020).

Digital events - Whereas digital media such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp have enabled individuals seeking help or advice to contact healers regardless of geographic location for years now, collective endeavours such as workshops, *Bhaktāmar pūjā*, and lectures remained largely off-line affairs, organized at different locations in India and the Jain diaspora, and only occasionally recorded and disseminated online after the event. However, in the past two years, first a trickle and then a flood of digital events has been visible: as the Covid-19 crisis caused a surge of digital competence in both audience and organizers, and a necessity to move events to the virtual realm for safety, the number of virtual events increased

exponentially. *Drmanjujain25.com* provides links to participate in daily chanting session on Zoom (with Indian and US timings), classes for adults and children (using Zoom and a WhatsApp group), and collective healing sessions (Global Bhaktamar Helpline, regional groups on Zoom). A selection of these sessions and other virtual lectures on *Bhaktāmar* are made available for asynchronous viewing on Facebook and YouTube.

Explaining the magic behind the mantra

The previous section provided a first contextualization of BMH within the broader *Bhaktāmar* tradition and discussed some of the ways BMH is present in different digital media forms. In this section, a closer look at the digital presence described above enables a more in-depth understanding of the mechanics behind BMH and illustrates how different media platforms present different perspectives on these mechanics. To facilitate this closer look, the sources described in the previous section were examined and some of the most prevalent explanatory narratives were identified and further analysed. Textual materials were looked at through the lens of critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2009), images and videos without (much) text were coded for content, and apps were coded for content and function. This exercise revealed how various seemingly competing explanatory narratives are presented, often in an intricately intertwined way. This section will identify and discuss some of the main discursive strands, connect them to different types of digital platforms and environments, and attempt to explain what can be deduced by the interconnections and distribution of the different discourses within BMH.

Discourses of Magic, Religion, and Spirituality

A first immediately visible layer of discourse on both websites denotes the power of the *mantras* as magic (using words like miraculous, miracle, magic, magical, and on some of *Bhaktamarmantrahealing.com*'s Hindi pages, जादू [*jādū*]). *Drmanjujain25.com* refers to the

hymn as “48 magical mantras”. *The Jaina Method of Curing* manual also speaks of the “miraculous benefits of chanting” the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* (Jain 2016).

Bhaktamarmantrahealing.com presents the system as “48 Magical Solutions for all your problems”. This is followed by a more specific listing of the potential benefits of the healing system:

Experience the delight of Bhaktamar Mantra Healing and enjoy fantastic health, abundant wealth, harmonious relationships and professional success. Bhaktamar Mantra Healing is the magical gateway to cure so-called incurable diseases like cancers, kidney problems, heart and lung diseases, chronic skin problems, mental illness and addictions, and much more. Bhaktamar Mantra Healing solves your financial crisis and legal problems and makes your life peaceful and productive.³²

Such claims seem to illustrate an approach to the *stotra* that has moved beyond the purely devotional, and hints at the Tantric. However, this discursive layer is superficial. References to magic are mainly found in titles or in introductory paragraphs, indicating that magic may be used as a placeholder for more complex explanatory narratives. Indeed, reading further into the more detailed descriptions of the healing system, these magical powers are explained in a myriad of ways, and the placeholder terms such as “magic” make way for a melange of religious, devotional, spiritual, and biomedical narratives.

The introductory discussion on Tantra in Jainism offers two possible intra-doctrinal explanations for the power of *mantras* to effect this-worldly change: the *mantra* invokes a non-liberated deity who will then intervene on the devotee’s behalf, or the *mantra* effects a change in an individual’s karmic balance which in turn impacts upon any negative karmic

³² <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/>

effects in the devotees current and future lives. Looking at sources dealing with BMH online, these intra-doctrinal explanations are rare. Interventions of non-liberated deities are only present when medieval miracle narratives are referred to. Priya Jain does refer to Jainism's soteriological categories and karma theory in the following iteration of mantric power.

God is stated as the state of pure soul in Jainism. Hence the devotion in Jainism is for those who have attained their pure soul state. [...] By reciting their virtues or meditating upon them, the devotee invokes his own pure soul energies to heal his physical/mental ailments. [...] However, Arhantas and siddhas in Jainism cannot do anything for the devotee. By their devotion, the result is accumulating a lot of auspicious karmas (punya) by the devotee that helps in healing also.” (Jain 2017: 37-38)

Although the reasoning behind this paragraph is simple, it uses terminology and concepts that are specifically Jain to explain the healing process. Whereas the emphasis placed on devotion as the means with which the healing process is activated is common in all iterations of BMH, the use of tradition-specific concepts is uncommon on websites and in manuals, which tend to use a broader, non-sectarian discourse focussed on spirituality (discussed in detail below), and thus eclipse specifically Jain soteriological and philosophical concepts which may be contentious (e.g., sectarian) or difficult to understand or accept for non-Jains.

This tendency towards a less specific, more universal discourse does not mean Jainism is entirely absent from digital sources on BMH. Firstly, the Jain tradition is recognized as the source of the healing system. The story of the composition of the *stotra* by Mānatuṅga is often retold (e.g., on the Bhaktamar Stotra App), as are some of the miracle narratives that have been developed in the commentary literature. Within these retellings, religious figures of

different soteriological categories are presented. Secondly, at least some of the healers pay explicit homage to Jain teachers that have inspired them, thus including Jain ascetics into the (margins of) BMH (e.g., Dr. Manju Jain opens her manual by paying homage to *Digambara Ācārya* Sri Vidyasagar Maharaj, see Jain 2016). Lastly, the Jain code of conduct is commonly – though not always explicitly – referred to as a lifestyle inspired by the Jain rules of conduct is considered to be beneficial for general health and wellbeing, and a healer who limits his or herself to a vegetarian diet with no alcohol is presumed to be able to effect more successful healing.³³ Although Jain religious influences are thus present in the margins of the BMH discourse – the contextualization, the healer’s background, testimonies, lifestyle requirements –, specific categories, figures, and concepts tend to be absent in sources explaining the mechanics behind BMH. Compared to the digitized manuals and websites that informed the analysis above, social media contain more overt references to Jain religious figures and practices, although these seldom amount to a full explanatory narrative. Especially when not only the spiritual entrepreneurs, but also Jain lay devotees who have engaged with BMH are allowed to post content, the number of devotional images and invocations of *Tīrthaṅkaras* and ascetic leaders increases exponentially.

By using general language, rather than specific Jain or Jain sectarian terms, and by emphasizing the importance of ‘faith’ in an unspecified God as well as faith in the healing system itself, rather than explicating any karmic transactions that may be at work in the background, the discourse on different digital media moves from the religious to the spiritual, defined as the common experience behind different religious traditions (Manju Jain 2016: 296). This universalization is clearly illustrated by the following short slogan from one of Manju Jain’s websites:

³³ <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/what-is-bhaktamar-stotra/>

For receiving the Divine Energy, Firm faith in God is MUST.³⁴

Whereas the excerpt from Priya Jain's manual in the previous subsection linked mantric power to devotion and good karma, this more spiritual discourse replaces the reference to the specific and complicated karmic system with the more general and unspecified divine energy.

This hymn develops spiritual power. But it is absolutely necessary to have reverence or conviction for its practice.[...] If we have no reverence for the mantra, if there is no attraction to it, no belief, there will be no result, even if it is correctly applied and properly pronounced.³⁵

Through this discursive universalization, BMH connects with other spiritual practices, either because they share some methods, or because spiritual entrepreneurs tend to offer a range of healing services. *Bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* refers to a.o., astrology, *kuṇḍalinī*, *cakras*, colours, *reiki*, and *pranic* healing. The *Global Bhaktamar Group* WhatsApp group reiterates these connections, by also presenting events and activities regarding a.o., numerology and face reading (WhatsApp). *The Jaina Method of Curing* has six pages devoted to *reiki*-practices (Manju Jain 2016: 302-307). The list of healers on *drmanjujain25.com* includes references to a large number of spiritual practices and specializations beyond BMH, such as *vaastu*, *fengshui*, energy dynamics, Ayurveda, astrology, numerology, aura scanning, and tarot reading using mantra cards.³⁶

Through this discourse of spirituality, BMH is profiled less as a part of Jain religious praxis, and more as a spiritual healing system that happens to have roots in Jainism. The

³⁴ <http://jainismbasics.blogspot.com>

³⁵ <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/bhaktamar-faith/> 'bhaktamar aur vishwas ki shakti'. [Translated from Hindi by the author].

³⁶ <http://www.drmanjujain25.com/healers.html>

explicit references to other spiritual practices discussed above indicate the importance of this embedding for the spiritual entrepreneurs. This embedding in the field of spiritual wellness is reinforced by the participation of BMH's healers in national and international conferences on holistic, integrated, and spiritual healing, which is prolifically advertised on websites, in manuals, and on social media platforms thus emphasizing the place of BMH in a list of - often better known – spiritual practices.

Discourses marrying belief and science

In line with other spiritual practices, scientific terminology and links with different branches of conventional science are plentiful on BMH's websites and in its manuals. These discourses connected to science range from references to and supposed quotes from international scientists, over crossovers into physics, and the appropriation of scientific and biomedical discourses. On *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com*, a page on the power of *Bhaktāmar* and faith starts with the following statement:

Scientists also accept that it is not possible to achieve success even in a secular work without any religious belief.³⁷

It then proceeds to present the opinions of different American scientists about the power of prayer and belief. While some of the people discussed are said to be (medical) doctors, others are active in other branches of service and science. Such explicit references attributing scientific status to spiritual and religious practices further universalize BMH's discourse. That most scientists quoted are American or European can be read as an attempt to engage with Western audiences. The excerpt cited above also indicates that science cannot solve everything, positing BMH not in opposition to science, but rather beyond it. This complex stance, i.e. accepting science and scientific discourse while at the same time positing that

³⁷ <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/bhaktamar-faith/> [Translated from Hindi by the author].

“Western” science with its reductionism and matter-spirit dualism is of limited use in fully explaining spiritual healing, resonates ideas developed by Meera Nanda (Nanda 2003: 98; 2016).

When the specific therapeutic powers of *mantras* and *yantras* are discussed, the discourse often moves between the spiritual/devotional and the scientific. Soundwaves and vibrations provide a link between effective *mantra* recitation and physics. Although links to sound vibration therapy and emphasis on the importance of correct pronunciation of *mantras* can be found in both manuals as well as on social media, *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* devotes much attention to the power of sound, referring to and occasionally combining both traditional analysis of *mantras* (*mantraśāstra*) and modern scientific study of sound.

When we chant a mantra whole heartedly, it unifies us with our mind, body and soul. The vibrations of Mantra reach our nervous system and percolate to the various organs through motor nerves and the whole system give a feed back to the brain through sensory nerves that the body is rejuvenating. Each cell feels the vibration of mantra and thus mantra healing becomes effective.³⁸

When discussing the power of *yantra*, the chemical properties of copper offer a link to biochemistry. Discussing how copper *Bhaktāmar yantras* help in healing, *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* explains:

Copper and gold are considered as good source of positive energy. Using Yantras while chanting and using the sacred water will lead to the absorption of pure water in the pores in the skin as the body consists of 70% water therefore attracting the liquid particles and the bacterial cells will get

³⁸ <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/faq/>

eliminated putting a halt to their growth and regeneration [sic] of active new cells within the body with the help of yantra holy water. Also it results in efficient utilization of iron, proper enzymatic reactions, as well as improved health of connective tissues, hair, and eyes.³⁹

The combination of biomedical and religio-spiritual terminology illustrated by both excerpts is typical for manuals and websites on BMH. However, some sources aspire to a closer connection to conventional medicine than others. Such aspiration is most obvious in the work of Manju Jain, and comes to the fore mostly in her healing manual and website. *The Jaina Method of Curing* (2016), and the website *drmanjujain25.com* include material describing the author's experimental research in palliative care, with cancer patients, and with schoolchildren. The healer's scientific credentials are further emphasised by mention of her work with different medical clinics and practitioners (from skincare to cancer)⁴⁰, her presence at psycho-oncology conferences, and her doctorate (in alternative medicine) from Zoroastrian College. The webpages and chapters that present this material not only use scientific terminology but also a degree of scientific methodology, which places BMH in a closer relation to conventional biomedicine. Within this framework, the putative effects of BMH are explained in a different, more subdued way, echoing academic medical literature on the potential salutogenic effects of spiritual healing (e.g. Levin 2009, Alling 2015), but stopping short of overtly equating BMH's power with a placebo effect. This approach is illustrated by this excerpt from the abstract of a paper Manju Jain presented at the 2016 World Congress of

³⁹ <https://bhaktamarmantrahealing.com/healing-benefits-of-copper/>

⁴⁰ The ethical issues relating to the integration of faith-healing practices in modern medical practice are topic of debate. Those institutions and medical practitioners that allow integrated faith healing tend to foreground the autonomy and wishes of the patient, the potential benefits (in the form of personalized attention and possible placebo effect), or at least the absence of negative effects. However, those less inclined to allow faith healing within the framework of modern medicine point out possible negative health-effects (e.g. of prolonged fasting) and warn that faith healings admission in the medical setting may inadvertently have a legitimizing effect (Sarkar et al. 2014). Recently, an attempt to ban the Jain ritual of *sallekhanā* (fasting to death) reignited similar discussions about the place of religious health and bodily practices in modern medicine (Braun 2008).

Psycho-oncology (which was published as a supplement of Psycho-Oncology Volume 25, Supplement 3, October 2016)

It is expected that the positive approach through mantra chanting will reduce anxiety and tension in breast cancer patients, thereby enhancing the effects of the prescribed treatment.

References to divine energy here make way to references to relaxation and mind-set. Other explanations of the potential therapeutic effect of BMH furthered in this context include a positive psychological impact by mobilizing the patients' positive mind-set, sense of agency, and social support system (Jain 2016: 283).

Distribution of discourses across platforms

When one looks closely at any of the digital and digitalized sources discussed previously, the different discourses described above tend to alternate, converge, and mingle within one page, website, manual, or channel. References to magic, religion, spirituality, and science seem to exist quite comfortably within the same source. However, not all types of discourse are equally prevalent in different types of media. Whereas social media and apps tend to include more specific religious elements – imagery, invocations of the *Tīrthaṅkaras*, connections to devotional practices, rituals, and holy places, etc. – websites and manuals tend to foreground more general, spiritual, and (pseudo)scientific discourses. True to its genre, the Bhaktamar Stotra App has very little room for any discourse, and just provides access to BMH core practice: chanting of the hymn's verses, *mantras*, and *riddhis*.

The differences in focus between different sources can in part be explained by differences in preferences and background of the authors. For example, whereas Manju Jain is keen to engage and experiment with biomedicine, the Annant World spiritual healing centre behind *bhaktamarmantrahealing.com* seems to put more emphasis on integrating BMH within the broader field of spiritual wellness practices. However, the difference in function

between different digital media and digital platforms also impact the content. In this way, the content in manuals and websites is to a large extent fixed and tends to have an informative and introductory function. Although the potential for inclusion of audio-visual elements on websites has greatly increased since the beginnings of the Internet, the content is mainly textual. Such longer texts of a somewhat fixed nature are usually premeditated and edited before appearing online. Social media platforms such as Facebook and to a lesser extent YouTube are updated and added to much more frequently. Audio-visual elements are much more important, and the amount of textual information is decreased. As posts on Facebook or on WhatsApp, and comments on YouTube and Facebook, are shorter and often constitute part of an ongoing conversation, these texts are much less premeditated and quasi unedited. Lastly, mobile applications tend to focus on providing a specific functionality to already informed users, and as a rule provides the least elaborate contextual information (Campbell et al. 2014).

Arguably, this functional differentiation has its bearing on how the difference in prevailing discourses in different media should be interpreted. The dominant discourses on websites and in manuals illustrate the aspirations of the authors, how they want the healing system to be seen, and from this, we can extrapolate the prospective audiences with which they wish to engage. Social media, on the other hand, are more illustrative of the daily applications of BMH, the profile of its current users, and their interpretations of the *stotra*'s powers.

BMH between Jainism and the spiritual marketplace

In section two BMH was conceptualized as a *Tantric reconfiguration* which stands out from other *stotras* with related Tantric elements which are said to be able to affect health outcomes by its systematization, democratization, and commodification. Section three of this article revealed how different explanatory discourses co-occur on websites and in manuals, indicating that spiritual and scientific narratives were consistently stronger than Jain religious

ones. Whereas the use of scientific discourse can be interpreted as indicative of a preoccupation with science as a locus of authority and at the same time a limited explanatory system that can be transcended (Nanda 2003), the emphasis on broader, less religion-specific narratives also evidences the intent of healer-authors to profile BMH as a spiritual practice that can be engaged with by a broad, global, audience. To further a better understanding of the forces might be influencing the course BMH has charted, and the processes it needs to navigate, Andrea Jain's discussion of modern yoga and consumer culture in *Selling Yoga* (2014) provides an interesting comparison. Even more so because it includes a discussion of a Jain yoga system – *prekṣā dhyāna*, which Jain describes as an “attempt to join the newly emerging competitive yoga market, where yoga had become a transnational product for improving everyday life, and sometimes for soteriological aims” (Jain 2014: 70). Jain further describes how “postural yoga proponents market postural yoga as a universal and scientific system that anyone can adopt as part of his or her larger worldview and practice” (Jain 2014: 76). These universal and scientific aspirations of postural yoga proponents were in part realized by removing any (overly) esoteric or religion-specific elements. Rather than deodorizing practices by removing practices considered uncouth, the yoga schools she discusses remove practices or theories that are difficult to grasp for lay, non-Hindu, or non-Indian, audiences. Rather than deodorization, this implies a degree of *deterritorialization*, *detraditionalization* (Heelas 1996), or even *deculturalization* (Roy 2010). Although BMH has not been separated from its cultural and textual roots to the same extent as some of the modern brands of yoga described by Andrea Jain, the emphasis on general devotional and spiritual elements as opposed to specific Jain religious elements that emerges from the discourse analysis discussed above can be seen as indicative of the same processes. By placing the emphasis on the importance of spirituality and devotion, rather than on Jain soteriology and phrasing the prerequisites for the system to be effective in a general way, i.e.,

placing one's faith in an unspecified god and in the healing system itself, it can appeal to Jains of any sect, and to spiritually inclined non-Jains, provided they believe in a divine force that can fit the role of 'God'.

The universal and scientific aspirations of the yoga entrepreneurs in Andrea Jain's discussion are further advanced by the appropriation of dominant fitness and biomedical discourses. A similar process of appropriation of scientific and biomedical discourses is also clearly visible in the discourses about BMH on websites and in digitized materials, reinforcing a view of Jainism as a scientific religion has taken root in the preceding decades (see Aukland 2016). Together with the *deterritorializing* and *detraditionalizing* process discussed above, this appropriation supported an interpretation of yoga as a therapeutic practice that was not exclusively linked to any one religion and did not require in-depth study or initiation on the part of the practitioner, making it consistent with the "consumer-oriented approach to worldviews and practices as individuals chose from a variety of such to construct individual lifestyles. Postural yoga became one choice among many." (Jain 2014: 44). I argue that the spiritual entrepreneurs behind BMH are relying on the same techniques to work towards a similar goal, i.e. turning a devotional/Tantric reconfiguration with deep and complex roots in Jainism into a standardized system of spiritual healing that can vie with other spiritual practices on offer in the spiritual marketplace, and appeal to and be practiced by people from very different places and backgrounds – including lay Jains, Jains in the diaspora, and perhaps even non-Jains. The way different explanatory discourses exist side-by-side in manuals and on websites even indicates that the consumer in the spiritual marketplace can not only choose BMH as an item from a menu, but that they can then proceed in choosing what interpretative focus works best for them within BMH itself.

Compared to postural yoga and different brands of meditation, BMH's fundamental reliance on 'untranslatable' textual materials of which the linguistic, territorial and cultural

roots are more immediately visible has limited the extent to which the system can be generalized and universalized. As such the universalization and *scientization* (Aukland 2016: 192) of BMH is incomplete at best. This is for example illustrated by the return to religious discourse seen on social media.

BMH and digital media

Although still territorialized to an extent by language use, time zones, and differences in digital practices, the digital realm has been described as the ultimate *detrterritorialization*. A well-established digital presence thus reinforces the universalizing processes described above, helps validate BMH's claims to a place in the spiritual marketplace, and enables engagement with broader, global audiences. The way this digital presence is designed, the languages and imagery that are used, the (re)sources and other actors that are presented, hyperlinked, or referred to, all illustrate a degree of universalization – exemplified by a clear embedding within the spiritual marketplace rather than within Jain religious realm. This is reflected by BMH's position online: BMH is at best liminal – but mostly absent – on websites on Jainism, but has its own separate digital presence, partly overlapping with other forms of spiritual practices.

The global audiences BMH's spiritual entrepreneurs aspire to have to an extent emerged – though mostly in the form of Jains living in the diaspora: non-Jain practitioners remain exceptional. Different forms of social media have been vital to stay connected and organize. As the world incorporated Zoom in its regular activities during the Covid-19 crisis from 2020 onwards, healing practices came to the digital realm in a new and big way. The combination of conference calls and social media (WhatsApp groups, Facebook) have made things like distance healing, the *Bhaktāmar* helpline, and virtual training for children and adults possible. These virtual events, often retrievable on YouTube after being conducted

through Zoom or YouTube Live, further enhance the visibility of BMH, and make it accessible to new audiences.

Concluding thoughts

As indicated in the description of the *Bhaktāmar Stotra* tradition, BMH has received very little scholarly attention. This article has been an attempt to break new ground and add BMH as a new element to ongoing discussions on Jainism, spiritual healing, contemporary mantric practices, etc. It has put forward the concepts of *Tantric reconfiguration* and *spiritual consumer culture* (after Andrea Jain 2014), suggesting they can be helpful in conceptualizing and understanding BMH as both an exponent of a centuries old living tradition and an essentially new technology; both a devotional practice and an entrepreneurial one.

A discourse analysis of a selection of digital materials on BMH revealed a juxtaposition of very different explanatory narratives, which is especially striking within BMH's main websites and manuals. This multiplicity raises questions on the precise nature of this mantric practice. However confusing it may seem, this multiplicity also serves a purpose, underscoring this relatively new practice's connections to other, more established institutions, practices, and fields on the one hand, and offering different perspectives for a wide variety of potential practitioners to connect to on the other.

Research into transformations and motivations in other relatively recent developments in Tantric traditions (e.g. the *Kartābhajā* sect, Urban 2001) and Tantric reconfigurations (e.g. *prekṣā dhyāna*, Jain 2014) has revealed processes of popularization and a preoccupation with accessibility. In an attempt to reach broader audiences, actions are taken to remove elements that may be considered objectionable (*deodorization*), potentially divisive, or too specific (*deterritorialization, detraditionalization, deculturalization*). In the case of BMH, the emphasis on general spirituality rather than Jain soteriology illustrates such a process of universalization, as well as its limits: the importance of Sanskrit, and the popularity of

Bhaktāmar Stotra as a Jain devotional poem. The co-optation of scientific and bio-medical discourses serve a similar goal.

Once the goal of reaching out to global audiences has been set, a degree of commercialization or commodification follows. Although many healers and teachers are not out to make a profit, the development of resources (e.g., books, mobile applications, manuals), the organization of classes and events, and the offering of services on a large scale requires funds and an entrepreneurial spirit, and indicates that practices such as BMH, but also e.g., *prekṣā dhyāna*, have entered the spiritual marketplace. Such commercialization brings with it its own logic, which requires entrepreneurs to profile their system as one among many similar practices (as illustrated by the myriad of references to other spiritual practices on BMH websites discussed above), while at the same time trying to stand out as unique, and necessitates offline, but increasingly also online visibility, engagement, and communication.

That is why this article used digital media as primary source of data, rather than conducting a traditional ethnography of BMH's spiritual entrepreneurs and (prospective) devotees/patients, or analysing BMH's published texts. This is a methodologically well-considered choice, informed by the importance of digital media for the dissemination and practice of BMH discussed above, the diversity of information and activity on different media platforms which allows for a sensitive analysis including both the aspirations of the spiritual entrepreneurs and the lived experience of patients/devotees, and the subsumption of digitized versions of not born-digital publications in BMH's digital sphere. Arguably, a *Tantric reconfiguration* with a global appeal such as BMH cannot be understood without taking into account its digital presence.

Further research using different methods and approaches may reveal diverging interpretations and yet other aspects of BMH than the ones identified here. Whereas this article touched upon many aspects of BMH, it is clear that this form of spiritual healing rooted

in one of the most popular textual/devotional traditions in Jainism deserves considerably more scholarly attention as aspects of the locus of authority, the role of the diaspora, the experience of BMH patients, etc. are yet to be fully explored.

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