The Virtue of Giving:
Traditional Indian Stories of Charity in Times of Disaster

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This paper examines traditional Indian understandings of the causes and remedies of disasters, specifically drought and famine. The focus is on medieval stories from Jainism and Buddhism. Jain stories in particular stress the role of generous donors in alleviating human suffering. The paper concludes with a discussion of an unusual text, an eye-witness account written by a Jain monk about one of the most devastating famines in pre-modern India, the famine that caused widespread destruction in the Deccan and Gujarat in 1630 C.E.

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