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## **Exploring a obliterate Jaina Temple Site and ‘Stray’ Sculptures from Purulia District of West Bengal**

**Shubha Majumder<sup>1</sup>**

The archaeological potential of District Purulia is underlined by consistent archaeological discoveries from time to time. Jainism, along with Buddhism and Brahmanism, survived in the different terrains of this region from the later part of the early historic period. However, Jainism appears to have been stronger in profile, as the explored archaeological records suggest. The present survey resulted in the discovery of some new along with hitherto improperly studied sculptural remains from a micro region within the larger area. This study brings forth detailed iconographic features of Jaina sculptural remains reported from the site of Anai Jambad. The antiquity of Anai-Jambad has already been studied by some scholars (Mitra 1983: 67-77; Chakrabarti 1993: 128-9; Dutta 2004: 92-93, Chattopadhyay & Acharya 2010: 10-11; Majumder 2017), however, the recent exploration brought to light some new sculptural remains which have not been still reported so far. Among these sculptural remains some are presently displayed in the local museum (Haripada Sahitya Mandir of Purulia) of this district. In the present paper the author has attempted to represent the complete archaeological profile of Anai-Jambad by highlighting the iconoplastic art tradition of the region.

The site encompasses the twin settlements of Anai and Jambad. The former, also the oldest, possess an abandoned Jaina religious complex confirmed by the presence of fragmented architectural members and sculptural pieces strewn over the site. A sizable proportion of these specimens have now been shifted to the modern settlement–Jambad. The present site is popularly known as Mahadev-Beda and is situated at a distance of approximately 17km. from Purulia town along the Purulia -Hura road.

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1. Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Mumbai Circle

Presently, there is a modern temple constructed by the Sri Sarak Jaina Samiti of Kharkhari, Dhanbad standing over the ruins of the old temple at Anai (**Plate 1**). Inside this temple, six images of Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras (two each of R̥ṣabhanātha, Candraprabha and Pārśvanātha) are placed on a high cement platform and cemented into the wall (**Plate 2**). According to local villagers, these images were unearthed from the heaps of the ruined temple. As evident, the old temple was affiliated to Jainism which flourished during the early medieval period. During the course of the present exploration, several architectural members which belonged to the old temple were also documented. These include *amlakas*, door jambs, lintels etc. (**Plate 3, 4 & 5**). The Haripada Sahitya Mandir of Purulia town also has some Tīrthaṅkara images which were discovered from this site. In addition to the Jaina images, some Brahmanical images were also reported from this site. The yield of several Jaina images indicates that this was once a flourishing Jaina site during the early medieval period. Despite currently thriving as a Brahmanical settlement, the site and its Jaina religious ethos are still breathing under the active control/ patronage of the existing Jaina religious community and by their regular worship of the said transferred specimens from the site of Anai. The site also possesses few stray occurrences of Hero stones.

District Purulia including the present study area was one of the most active zones of Jainism during the early medieval period. A series of recent discoveries and extensive field work have helped us to postulate that from the eight-nine century onwards Jainism progressed and reached its zenith in the plateau region of early Bengal (Rāḍha area). The Jaina Nirgranth has lived a comparatively quiet life in the remote, isolated and inaccessible regions of Bengal, of which the Rāḍha provided perhaps the most congenial climate for their existence. Jainism strongly survived in the western and south-western parts of early Bengal (Rāḍha region) up to the thirteenth century CE. This region has a long cultural sequence from the prehistoric times to the early/late medieval period, though its cultural heritage received special momentum (with the radiation of sites, construction activities of temples, installation of icons etc.) with the arrival of political lineages and religious ideologies during the early medieval period. This monumental feature of settlement structure is categorically envisaged by the enormous wealth of archaeological relics in the form of abandoned temple complexes, architectural members and sculptural remains of this region. In all probability, the said database is the best signifier of its early medieval socio-cultural milieu. It is rightly believed that the western sectors of Bengal were devoid of the literate tradition that almost generally characterized the social life of people in the other sub-regions of Bengal in the early medieval period. The general lack of epigraphic material directly associated with Jaina archaeological



remains of western Bengal is probably explained in terms of this lack of tradition. However, a critical study of some lesser known epigraphical and art historical material from the region might throw light on certain hitherto improperly investigated aspects social and political formations in the region.

In the recent past, discoveries of figures of *ācāryas* and monks in the Tīrthaṅkara images from Purulia and Bankura (Majumder 2017:1-6) indicate that in and around these regions Jain monastic system had also developed and Jainism had strongly penetrated the local levels of the society. Discovery of Jain votive stūpas and Jain memorial pillars also indicates the popularity of the Jainism and the involvement of the Jain *ācāryas* and monks towards the expansion of this religious ideology. In absence of epigraphic records, it is very difficult to identify the patrons of these Jain images. However, it is probable to understand from the iconoplastic art of these Jain images that these images were free from the popular royal art style of the then period, i.e. the Pāla - Sena art style.

In the present paper I have attempted to discuss the iconographic details of the six Jain Tīrthaṅkara images from Anai-Jambad (among these six, five images are already reported however, the last one was discovered recently and remains unpublished) and also the other Tīrthaṅkara images which were discovered from this site but are presently displayed in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir museum of Purulia town. The study also highlights the iconoplastic art style of these images and its association with other images.

For the ease of study, I have divided the Jain images of Anai-Jambad into two segments i.e., **A.** Tīrthaṅkara images kept in the modern temple of the village and **B.** Tīrthaṅkara images and other fragmented remains kept in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia.

## **A. Tīrthaṅkara Images kept in the Modern Temple of the Village:**

### **1. Tīrthaṅkara Rṣabhanātha:**

I have documented two images of Rṣabhanātha from Anai-Jambad. Of these two, one is already reported and depicts eight planetary deities on the back-slab (Mitra 1983: 68; Mevissen 2000: 348; Dutta 2004: 93; Majumder 2017). In this image the Jina (**Plate 6**) stands in *kāyotsarga* posture on a double-petalled lotus placed on a *tri-ratha* pedestal. The bull *lāñchana* of the *mūla-nāyaka*, is neatly carved in the centre of the pedestal (the bull occupies the entire central projection) and is placed between two crouching lions (on the adjoining projections). On the left facet of the pedestal is depicted a pair of devotees with their arms joined in adoration, while on the right are votive offerings. The savior is nude; the hair is



dressed in a tall elegant *jaṭājuṭa*. The *keśa-vallarī* of the Jina is falls down the sides of the head and over the shoulders. The Jina is flanked on both sides by stout and partially damaged male *caurī*-bearers. They wear deeply incised loin cloths and elaborate jewellery. Obviously, the modulation of surfaces apparent from the drapery and jewellery are restricted to these *parikara* elements. These *caurī*-bearers stand in *ābhṅga* pose and hold a fly-whisk in their right hands and their left hands are in *kaṭyāvalambita* posture. The back throne of the image consists of posts decorated with mouldings and criss-cross scratched pilasters, supporting a horizontal cross-bar with lightly incised square rhizomes at its ends, above which there are triangular fleurons. On the projected part of the back-slab there are eight planets arranged in a vertical row of four on either side of the Jina. Their depictions are considerably eroded. Those on the right side of the Jina appear to be Sūrya, Maṅgal, Bṛhaspati and Śani; while those on the left side are Soma, Budha, Śukra and Rāhu. All these figures are seated (except Rāhu) and show individual iconographic features. The image measures 67 x 29 x 10 cm.

The second image measures 69 x 32 x 11.5 cm and has not been reported so far. The image is made of chlorite stone (**Plate 7**). The lower portion of rectangular back slab of the Rṣabhanātha image was decorated with two stiff and robust looking *caurī*-bearers, who are the attendants of the *mūla-nāyaka*, with their outer hands in *kaṭyāvalambita* posture and their inner hands holding *cāmaras*, wearing short, almost transparent lower garments and simple ornaments. In the middle portion of the slab were depicted four miniature Tīrthaṅkaras, two on either side of the *mūla-nāyaka*, with their respective *lāñchanas* carved against the double-petalled lotus pedestals. The central portion of the top of the slab is crowned by a triple parasol, flanked on both sides by disembodied hands playing on drums. Two vidyādhara hover in clouds, holding long garlands. The finely carved Jina bears a svelte figure and alucid expression. The *mūla-nāyaka* has elongated ear-lobes and wears an elegant *jaṭājuṭa* with *keśa-vallarī* falling down the sides of the head and over the shoulders. An almost circular *śiraścakra* decorated with intricate patterns of beads and flame tongued border devices adorns the head of the savior. The centre of the *tri-ratha* pedestal has a bull, the *lāñchana* of the *mūla-nāyaka*, placed between two crouching lions with their tails folded and turned upwards. Unfortunately, this image was stolen in the last month of 2023.

## 2. Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha:

Two images of Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha are kept in the modern temple of Anai-Jambad. Of them, one is iconographically very important and it measures 44 cm x 24 cm x

7cm. In this case the Jina is depicted seated in *padmāsana* (Mitra 1983: 68; Dutta 2004: 92; Majumder 2017) with his hands in *dhyāna-mudrā* on a full blown *mahambujapīṭha* having a base comprising of five squat supports on which are carved indistinct objects (**Plate 8**). One of the few seated icons of Tīrthaṅkara so far discovered from Purulia district, the present one was found in damaged condition and subsequently restored. The crescent, i.e. the *lāñchana* of the Jina is depicted on the centre of the lotus seat. The back of the throne is cut roughly along the torso of the central figure and consists of vertical panels topped by horizontal mouldings relieved with short pilasters. On the either side of the Tīrthaṅkara, stand male *caurī*-bearers wearing short lower garments and plain jewellery. The Jina sits under a projected trilinear *catra* slightly damaged at the front. He has elongated ear-lobes and his hair is arranged in schematic curls with as *uṣṇiṣa*. A semi-circular *śiraścakra* gracefully rimmed with rows of leaves and pear like beads surrounds his head. The *prabhāvalī* is generously decorated with floral scrolls and creepers. The *śiraścakra* is flanked on both sides by disembodied hands playing on drums and a vidyādhara holding long garlands and hovering in the clouds.

The second one is a miniature type and it measures 35 cm x 18 cm. This Jaina image (**Plate 9**) is strikingly bare, devoid of embellishments and almost certainly left unfinished (Mitra 1983: 69-70; Dutta 2004: 92; Majumder 2017). The *mūla-nāyaka* stands in *kāyotsarga* posture on a double-petalled lotus seat placed on a *tri-ratha* pedestal under a multi-tiered *chatra*. In the centre of the pedestal the crescent, the *lāñchana* of Candraprabha, is depicted. The Tīrthaṅkara is carved on a recessed portion of the back-slab. He has elongated ears and his hair is arranged in stylized curls with an *uṣṇiṣa*. The back-slab reveals male *caūrī*-bearers, flanking the Jina at the lower corners, and twin vidyādharas at the upper-all four carved on a raised background.

### 3. Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha:

Among the two images of Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha one is a *pañca-tīrthika* type image (**Plate 10**) and measures 75 cm x 34 cm x 10 cm. The *mūla-nāyaka* stands in *kāyotsarga* on a double-petalled lotus under the usual canopy of a seven-hooded serpent (Mitra 1983: 69; Dutta 2004: 93; Majumder 2017). He wears curly hair with *uṣṇiṣa* and is accompanied on either side by gracefully adorned *caūrī*-bearers. Nāga couple with their tails entwined, the male with arms folded in *namaskāra-mudrā* and the female holding a musical instrument, is shown beside the attendants of the Jina. On the back-slab are carved

four images of Tīrthaṅkaras in *kāyotsarga* two in each side of the *mūla-nāyaka* with their respective *lāñchanas* depicted on a slightly raised pedestal below them. From their cognizance's these Tīrthaṅkaras can be identified as Vāsupūjya and Padmaprabha to the right of the *mūla-nāyaka*, and Neminātha and Mahāvīra to his left. The upper part of the stele contains the usual vidyādhara couple, the *prātihāryas* of heavenly hands playing on musical instruments and a projected three-tiered *catra* surmounting the snake hoods. The face and the torso of the Jina are slightly abraded. The *tri-ratha* pedestal reveals crouching lions, a female devotee and offerings.

The remaining one is the *caubisi* type of image (Mitra 1983: 68-9; Dutta 2004: 93; Majumder 2017) and among all these images the present one is largest (136 x 65 x 12 cm.) and the most graceful sculpture among the group. The Jina (**Plate 11**) stands in *kāyotsarga* under a seven-hooded snake, which is surmounted by a tri-linear *chatra*. Nāga couple with their hands folded and tails inter-coiled springs gracefully and rhythmically from the central protection of a *tri-ratha* pedestal to just beside the feet of the savior. A pair of kneeling devotees with their hands joined in *añjali-mudrā* is seen on the plane of the pedestal, which bears the representation of crouching lions on the remaining facets. The Jina is flanked by two male *caūri*-bearers standing in graceful *ābhanga* pose wearing lower garments and bedecked with jewellery. On the edge of the rectangular back-slab are the twenty four Tīrthaṅkaras arranged in pairs, one above the other. The *lāñchanas* of the Jinās are carved on their pedestals and quite a number of them are recognizable. Flying vidyādhara couple holding garlands is seen high up on the back-slab.

## **B. Tīrthaṅkara Images and other fragments kept in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia:**

### **1. Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhanātha:**

A *Pañca-tīrthika* type of Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhanātha image (**Plate 12**) discovered from the present site is presently displayed in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia. The museum specimen, which is partially damaged (head of the image is missing), measures 84 x 40 x 20cm and iconographically is very similar to the Ṛṣabhanātha image from the same site. The image has an elongated *prabhā* which is embellished with beaded and flame-tongued border devices and has a flowering twig on the either side. The image is carved out of quartzite schist. Two partially damaged vidyādharas holding long garlands are depicted on the extreme top most corners of the rectangular back slab. The depictions of the clouds are

noteworthy. The representation of the heavenly hands playing a drum is present. The *mūla-nāyaka* is flanked by two male *caurī*-bearers standing in *ābhṅga* posture and their left hands are in *kaṭyāvalambita* posture and the right hands hold the fly-whisk. The back throne of the image consists of posts decorated with mouldings and criss-cross scratched pilasters, supporting a horizontal cross-bar with lightly incised square rhizomes at its ends, above which there are triangular fleurons. On the projected part of the back-slab are depicted four miniature Jinas standing in *kāyotsarga* posture on double-petalled pedestals, two on either side of the *mūla-nāyaka*. Due to regular worship, the iconographic details of the image are not well delineated. Interestingly, tiny figures of two devotees is depicted, in *namaskāra-mudrā* (folded hands), on the left side of the *caurī*-bearer just above the *pañca-ratha* pedestal. The bull is flanked by two crouching lions facing opposite directions on either end of the pedestal and the remaining portion is left blank.

## 2. Tīrthaṅkara Śāntinātha:

A beautiful image of Tīrthaṅkara Śāntinātha (80 x 40 x 15 cm) is also display in the said museum that was discovered from the present study area. The Jina (**Plate 13**) is in *kāyotsarga* and *samapādasthānaka* postures and stands on a full blown lotus placed on a *sapta-ratha* pedestal. The arms of the Jina hang down vertically along the slender torso and the finger tips touch the thigh on either side. The *sapta-ratha* pedestal of the image is very simple and the central *ratha* is adorned with the *lāñchana* of the Tīrthaṅkara i.e., deer, which is flanked by two crouching lions, facing opposite directions. The remaining *rathas* of the pedestal are completely blank. A very simple almost oval *śiraścakra* adorns the head of the savior. Above the *śiraścakra* and just below the top border of the back slab is a centrally placed tri-linear *catra* flanked by a drum and a pair of cymbals struck by disembodied hands. Two vidyādhara or garland-bearers are depicted on both corner sides at the top of the back-slab. The *mūla-nāyaka* is flanked by two male *caurī*-bearers standing in *ābhṅga* posture and their left hands are in *kaṭyāvalambita* posture and the right hands hold the fly-whisk. Both of them are highly bejeweled and have a small halo behind their heads.

On the edge of the back-slab are eight planets arranged in a vertical row of four on either side of the Jina. Those on the dexter side appear to be Sūrya, Maṅgal, Bṛhaspati and Śani; while those on the left side are Soma, Budha, Śukra and Rāhu. All these planetary deities are seated in usual posture on double-petalled lotus and holding their respective attributes. The back of the throne consists of jeweled posts supporting a cross-bar on which are triangular foliated plaques.

In addition to the above mentioned two Tīrthaṅkara images, there are some other fragmented sculptural remains associated with Jainism that had been collected from the various locality of the present site and are currently on display in the museum. The details of these specimens are given below:

Sl. No.	Details of the Fragmented Sculptural Remains	Measurements
1.	A broken palm of a sculpture, probably the part of the main deity.	11.5 x 5 cm
2.	Fragmented part of a back-slab of a Jaina image, depicting a small miniature Tīrthaṅkara probably Rṣabhanātha due to the elegant <i>jaṭājuta</i> over head.	10.5 x 6 cm
3.	Torso of a Jaina Tīrthaṅkara collected from the ruins of the temple at Anai-Jambad.	10.4 x 4.5 cm.
4.	Torso of a Jaina Tīrthaṅkara having hair arranged in small curls.	7.5 x 4 cm
5.	Torso of a Jaina Tīrthaṅkara	7.2 x 4.3 cm
6.	Torso of a Jaina Tīrthaṅkara. Both the hands of the Jina are also damaged	8 x 4.5 cm
7.	A torso of an attendant of Jaina Tīrthaṅkara, holding a <i>cauri</i> in his right hand.	12 x 7 cm
8.	A three tiered umbrella depicting lotus petals. This was found from the ruins of the temple.	6 x 11 cm
9.	Torso of a <i>caurī</i> -bearer of a Jaina Tīrthaṅkara. The <i>caurī</i> -bearer wears a <i>dhoti</i> and other ornaments. This figure was detached from the main image.	13 x 7 cm
10.	A five-linear decorated parasol most probably part of a Jaina image.	13 x 5 cm
11.	A middle portion of a male image. Most probably part of an attendant of Tīrthaṅkara images.	10 x 5.6 cm
12.	A flying figure of an image holding garland in his right hand.	15 x 8 cm

### Observation:

In the foregoing pages I have analyzed the explored data to attain a comprehensible picture of an archaeological site and their sculptural remains. It is quite clear from the above data that these evidences, ascribable to the Jaina pantheon, are well connected with the growth of Jainism and the spread of Jaina settlements, rituals and their relationship with the sculptural art of the said region. It is quite obvious that such concentration of Jaina heritage is not restricted to this particular site. The site has extended connection with the other Jaina site in the Rāḍha region of early Bengal.

It is also worth mentioning here that though the Jaina sculptural heritage of the present site was discussed by some scholars earlier, however, they failed to provide the complete picture about the sculptural wealth of this site. In the present paper I have summarized all the Jaina sculptural remains which are at present displayed in the site itself as well as the Jaina sculptural and architectural remains housed in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir museum of Purulia district. It shows that the present site Anai-Jambad was one of the important Jaina centers in this region during the early medieval times. Sculptural and the architectural remains like door-jams, *amlaka*, *kalasa* and others found from the site point towards the existence of temple/affiliated to Jainism but after the gradual decline of Jainism these were abandoned and slowly collapsed. As a result of this, now we can get only the Jaina images from the present site and scholars generally mistake to reconstruct the actual context of these Jaina images. Though these six Jaina Tīrthaṅkara images are at present placed in a modern temple and the present Jaina community regularly worships them, however, these images are a strong example to prove that the present site was a flourishing Jaina center during 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century CE and probably served as one of the important pilgrimage center of Jainism in that time.

The Jaina sculptures elaborately described and discussed above on stylistic and iconographic grounds may be assigned to the period between the 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (except the small image of Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha (**Plate 9**), which probably belong to the late medieval period). Among them, the *caubisi* type of Pārśvanātha image is largest one and most probably this image was the object of principal worship in the temple of Anai-Jambad. P.M. Mitra in his paper (1983: 70) mentioned that this Pārśvanātha image was ‘most finished and accomplished example’ among the five images from this site. However, it is worth mentioning here that the pedestal of the present image is not comparatively decorated like the other Pārśvanātha images in this district specially the Pārśvanātha images from Pakbirra and

Suisa (Majumder 2017). The representation of a nāga couple with their tails inter-coiled is gracefully depicted in most of the Pārśvanātha images from the Rāḍha region, however, in the present image very miniature figures of nāga couple, with a snake canopy over their heads, is depicted and their inter-coiled not elegantly presented. Overall the figure of the *mūla-nāyaka* is also bulky in nature. Though the nāga canopy of the image and the coils of the snake are stylishly executed this type of representation is not commonly found in the Rāḍha region.

All the Jaina Tīrthaṅkara images which are discussed here in general do not exhibit the work of high quality of craftsmanship except the Śāntinātha image which is presently displayed in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir museum of Purulia. In most of the images the pedestal is not elaborately decorated only the cognizance of the Jina is placed at the center of the pedestal. The body proportions of the *mūla-nāyaka* are not perfectly maintained when compared with other Jaina images of this district. The back-slab and the *caurī*-bearers are not highly ornamented. The smallest image in the collection i.e. the image of Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha shows that Jainism was survived in the present study area upto the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE. This was a portable image and most probably worshipped in a house of a devotee of Jain ideology.

The Jaina sculptural remains found from different parts of this district as well as other parts of the Rāḍha region of Bengal were products created by the fusion of the art idioms of neighboring areas of the Chhotanagpur plateau region and were laid in an essentially local matrix from which came out this distinct school of a regional tradition. The present sculptural remains exhibit that among this regional art tradition there are some micro level variations. As a result of these micro level art traditions, the distinct centre of art in the Rāḍha region strengthen its popularity over the so called classical tradition art style in the other parts of eastern Indian is concerned. The regional traditions were guided by powerful local ateliers which were not driven necessarily by the ideas of the plastic art exhibited in the mainstream ‘Pāla-Sena’ idiom of expression. The modeling appears to be softened by the artists in a way that result into, in the sculptural productions of the Rāḍha region, great strength and vigor.

The work thus shows, in the form of a case study, that firstly among the western sectors of West Bengal there are some variations from area to area which deserve more careful archaeological investigation in order to understand the nature and pattern of distribution of early medieval sites and for locating the regional artistic as well as stylistic identities; secondly, it indicates that such micro-regional case studies are expected to throw new light on the nature of the art styles which were evolved during the early medieval period in the



Chhotanagpur plateau region with involvement of the local tradition and also represent a complete picture about an archaeological site during the early medieval period.

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**Plate 6.** Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhanātha from Ani-Jambad.

**Plate 7.** Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhanātha from Ani-Jambad.

**Plate 8.** Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha from Ani-Jambad.

**Plate 9.** Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha from Ani-Jambad.

**Plate 10.** Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha from Ani-Jambad.

**Plate 11.** Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha from Ani-Jambad.

**Plate 12.** Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhanātha image from Ani-Jambad and displayed in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia.

**Plate 13.** Tīrthaṅkara Śāntinātha image from Ani-Jambad and displayed in the, Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia.



**Plate 1. Modern Jaina temple at Anai-Jambad**



**Plate 2.** Six Jain Tirthankara images are kept inside the modern Jain temple at Anai-Jambad





**Plate 3.** Amlaka of the ancient temple is kept outside the modern Jain temple at Anai-Jambad



**Plate 4.** Door-lintel of ancient temple is kept outside the modern Jain temple at Anai-Jambad.





**Plate 5.** Different architectural fragments of ancient temple are kept outside the modern Jain temple at Anai-Jambad



**Plate 6.** Tīrthāṅkara Rṣabhanātha from Ani-Jambad.





**Plate 7.** Tīrthaṅkara Rṣabhanātha from Ani-Jambad.



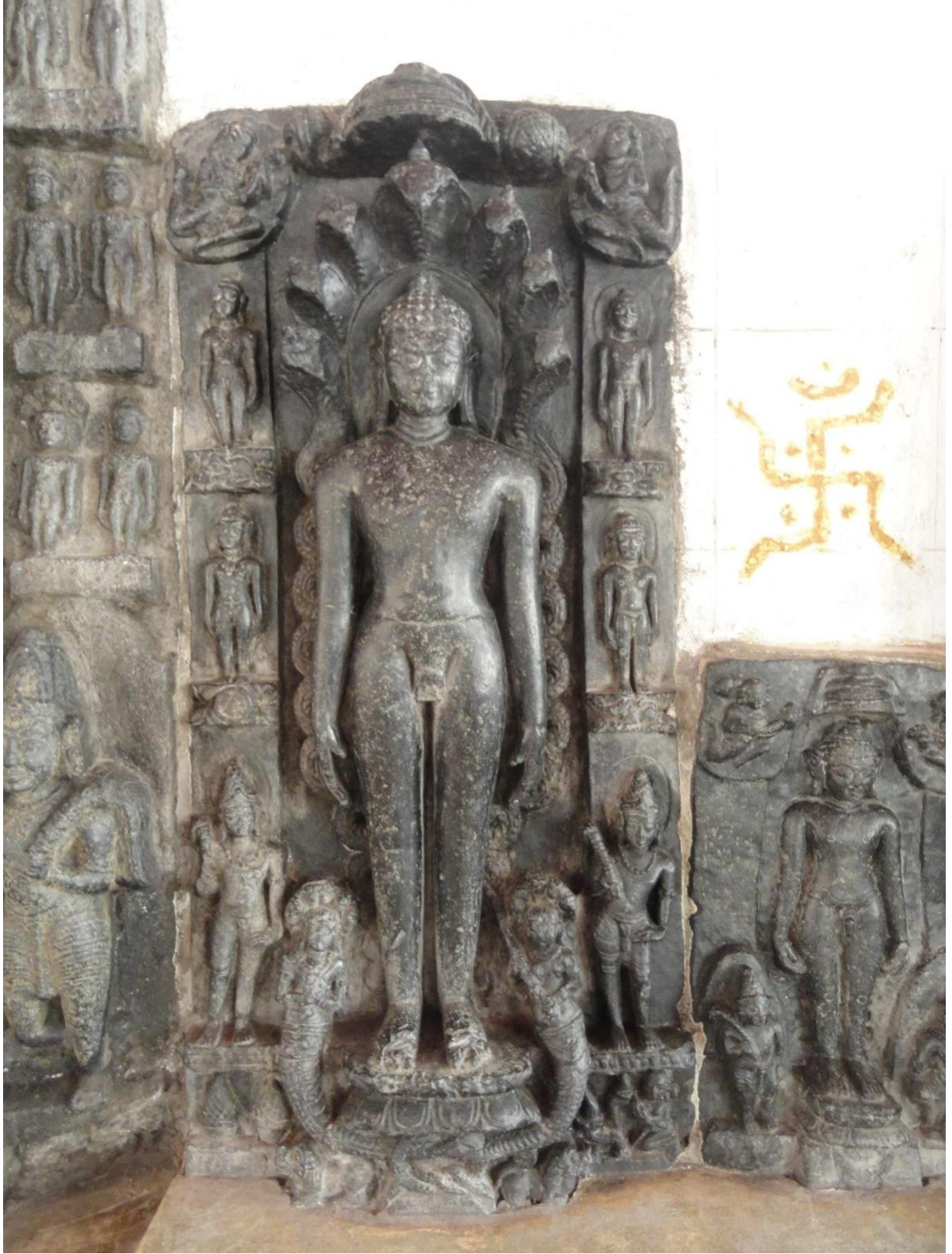
**Plate 8.** Tīrthankara Candraprabha from Ani-Jambad.





**Plate 9.** Tīrthankara Candraprabha from Ani-Jambad.





**Plate 10.** Tīrthāṅkara Pārśvanātha from Ani-Jambad.



**Plate 11.** Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha from Ani-Jambad.





**Plate 12.** Tīrthāṅkara Rṣabhanātha image from Ani-Jambad and displayed in the Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia.



**Plate 13.** Tīrthaṅkara Śāntinātha image from Ani-Jambad and displayed in the, Haripada Sahitya Mandir, Purulia.

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## The Jain remnants in Bangladesh: the possibility of the discovery of a long Jain past and its legacy in the East Bengal

Muhammad Tanim Nowshad<sup>1</sup>

### [Abstract]

From the successive excavations in the Northwestern region of Bangladesh a significant number of the Jain artifacts and the ruins of the Jain temples have been discovered. The Bengal's glorious past cannot be comprehended without recognizing its rich Jain heritage. But in many cases Jain vestiges of Bangladesh are intermingled with the Buddhist artifacts. The discovered artifacts remind us that we are not serious enough in our archeological studies and investigations, otherwise we might have found many more Jain artifacts and the remnants of the Jain temples. Some proper and meticulous investigations may unveil a forgotten and lost Jain era of the East Bengal. The incumbent essay wants to delve into the Jain artifacts and temples and reconsider the possibility of the discovery of a rich Jain legacy in the East Bengal of the undivided India (i.e. the present Bangladesh), if we continue our scientific researches and archeological investigations.

### Introduction

*Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra* (c. 599 BCE - c. 527 BCE/425 BCE) was a contemporary of *Gautam Buddha* (c. 563/420 BCE-c. 483 BCE/400 BCE), the founder of Buddhist faith and the Magadha was their abode and the breeding ground of the both Jainism and Buddhism. Both fall within the ambit of the *Śramanic movement*. The West Bengal and the present Bangladesh are not far away from their abode because the ancient Magadha is now geographically located in Bihar of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India. A considerable number of Artifacts and the relics of Jain temples have been found in the West Bengal. Even the place *Bardhaman* a city and municipality in the state of West Bengal, is ascribed to *Vardhamāna*,

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a name of the 24<sup>th</sup> Tīrthaṅkara i.e. Mahāvīra. It means that in the ancient Bengal Jainism flourished and burgeoned excessively. Mahāvīra spent some times in *Astikagrama*, according to the Jain scripture of Kalpa Sūtra. This place was situated in the present-day's West Bengal.

The possibility of a lost Jain civilization yet to be discovered, which had proliferated in the ancient East Bengal

The present Bangladesh was a part of the undivided Bengal, which is called the East Bengal even today. Therefore, it is highly possible that the Jain ideology was propagated here excessively and in order to practice Jainism a lot of Jain temples (*Jinalaya* or *Jain Mandirs*) and monasteries were built here for the Jain teachers and preachers, theology students and the Jain pilgrims (*Vihāra*). Even a Jain settlement might have been here, we cannot abort this speculation. Still today we can trace out the vestiges of the Jain legacy, when we dig out a lot of Jain artifacts and the ruins of the Jain temples in both the East and the West Bengals. The remnants that the archeologists have excavated from underneath and have been excavating off and on, support our speculations. Anupam Jash has written on the Bengal brand of Jainism evincing that even the vestiges of Jain civilization in Bengal are present in *Kalpa Sūtra*. Hence the greater Bengal includes also the present Bangladesh:

“According to *Kalpa Sutra*, Godasa, a disciple of Bhadrabahu, founded a school named after himself as *Godasa-gana*. In course of time it had four branches which were known as Tamraliptiya, Kotivarsiya, *Pundravardhaniya* and *Kharvatika* named after three very well-known places in ancient Bengal, currently known as, Tamluk (*Tamralipta* in western Bengal ), Dinajpur (*Kotivarsiya* in north bengal), Rajshahi ( *Pundravardhaniya*, now in north Bangladesh) and Champa (*Kharvatika* in south-western part of ancient Bengal) respectively. It appears from such evidence that Jainism had deep roots in Bengal, especially in northern, western and southern part of Bengal.” (Jash: 2017: 99)

Anupam Jash has also cited from *Epigraphica Indica* and insinuated the existence of a Jain civilization in the East Bengal i.e. largely in today's Bangladesh (*Epigraphica.Indica.*, XX, pp. 59ff.):

“A definite piece of evidence of the presence of Jainism in Bengal is furnished by a copper-plate, dated year 159 of the Gupta era (around 479 A.D.) found in Paharpur in North Bengal, now in the Rajshahi district, Bangladesh, famous for the big Buddhist *Stūpa* and monastery of the Pala period. The copper-plate records the gift of land by a Brahmin couple, for the construction of a temple and worship of the divine *Arhat* image at the *Vihara* of Vata

Gohala which was presided over by the disciples of the *Nirghantha Sramanacarya* (Jaina preceptor) Guhanandin, belonging to the *Pancastupa* section (*Nikāya*) of Kasi (Varanasi). This record proves the existence of Jainism in Bengal during the Gupta period. This shows that even those who were not professed Jainas, including the Brahmins, had great reverence for the Jaina *Arhats* and were quite liberal in outlook and accommodative in regard to the adherence of other religions. ” (Jash: 2017: 102)

The areas of Bangladesh, where Jain artifacts and remnants of the Jain temples have been discovered

**a) Mahasthangarh**

Mahastangarh is located in Bogura in the Rajshahi division of Bangladesh. This place is historically very important as the remnants of a huge Buddhist monastery have been discovered here. As the Buddhist and Jain faiths were born and developed contemporarily, the archaeologists were almost sure that they might discover something of the Jain traditions. In 1879 Alexander Cunningham found some Jain idols and he handed over those to Varendra Research Museum of Rajshahi.

**b) Dinajpur**

In Dinajpur the ruins of a Jain temple is still visible. The idols have been preserved in the Dinajpur Museum.

**c) Damdampir of Jessore**

A 7 inch statuette of *Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha* has been excavated and the archeologists opined that this sandstone statuette dates back to some 1800 years. The statuette was dedicated to Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha. On the statuette “*Bhagavān Mallinātha*” (Lord Mallinātha) – this writing is engraved. The archeological department of Khulna discovered the statuette during an excavation period.

**d) Paharpur of Naogaon**

In Paharpur a copper-inscription was discovered, which insinuates the existence of Jain Vihāra in the Botgohali village. In 1980-81 CE during an excavation period a big structure was discovered. The archeologists assume that this dating back to over 18<sup>th</sup> century and was a part of a Jain Vihāra.

**e) Bogura and Meherpur**

There are two Jain temples still existing in Bogura and Meherpur. One temple has been remaining in Satmatha of Bogura and another in Bakshi Lane of Meherpur. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century some Jain merchants and traders of Gujarat built these temples.

**f) Lalmai of Comilla**

Some engraved stone and mud idols, complete and incomplete, were found in the hilly area of Lalmai; the area is located in the western part of Comilla.

**The Jain artifacts in the Bangladeshi museums**

Some significant Jain artifacts and remnants of the Jain temples have been excavated and the artifacts have been preserved in the Dhaka, Khulna, Dinajpur and Rajshai's Varendra Research museums. The Dhaka museum is the national museum of the country. The excavation started here from the British colonial era. So, we better delineate the history sometimes. Here we are mentioning some of the most significant artifacts:

- a) A bluish statuette of Lord Mahāvīra in Khaḍgāsana Mudra, height 73.6 cm, is now preserved in the National Museum of Bangladesh, Dhaka. The statuette was made within 10-11 century AD.
- b) A bluish statuette of Lord Pārśvanātha in Khaḍgāsana Mudra, height 60.9 cm, is now preserved in Dinajpur Museum. The statuette was made within 10-11 century AD.
- c) A bluish statuette of a Tīrthaṅkara in Khaḍgāsana Mudra, height 93.9 cm, is now preserved in Dinajpur Museum. The statuette was made within 9-10 century AD.

- d) A bluish statuette of Lord Śhāntinātha in Khaḍgāsana Mudra, height 65 cm, is now preserved in Varendra Research Museum of Rajshahi.
- e) A bluish statuette of Lord Ṛṣabhadeva in Padmāsana Mudra, height 99 cm, is now preserved in Varendra Research Museum of Rajshahi.
- f) A sandstone statuette of Lord Mallinātha, height 7 inch, preserved now in the Khulna museum.

In most of the cases the discovered Tīrthaṅkara statuettes of Bangladesh are similar to those found in the West Bengal like the engraved figures of the Tīrthaṅkaras. The Tīrthaṅkaras are standing in most of the cases as Shubha Majumder has presented in his work. (Majumder: 1998: 11-16) It also reminds us that once the East Bengal was unified with the West Bengal.

### **Jain legacy in the East Bengal of the undivided India**

In the East Bengal the Jain civilization thrived through centuries and from the rubbles, artifacts and the remnants we can surmise the long historicity of Jainism in this land. In 1927 A copper plate dates back to 159 Gupta Era (479 AD) was discovered in the Pāhārapura Baud'dha Vihāra (i.e. Paharpur Buddhist monastery). It was found in the northeast corner of the monastery. The plate mentions that it was a donation of a Brahmin couple to Jain Acharya Guhanandi of *Nikāya* at Vata Gohli, identifiable as the neighboring village of Goalapara. (Asher: 1080: 15) Sukumar Dutt also mentioned this. (1988: 371) This Vihāra is also called *Somapura Mahavihāra*.

The architectural remains of the vast Somapura Mahavihāra cover 11 hectares (27 acres) of land. *Sheo Sing* wrote (1982) that this Vihāra was an important intellectual centre (and we surmise a melting pot as well - author) for Dharmic Traditions such as Buddhists, Jains and Hindus alike. Masud et al (2007: 53 (8): 1639–1650) have mentioned that the area of the complex is 8.5-hectare (21acre), where 177 cells, Viharās, numerous stūpas, temples and a number of other ancillary buildings were built. The outside walls with ornamental terracotta plaques are still manifesting the influence of these three religions.

Hence, the question arises, did a mélange of the three religions rise in Bengal during the Pāla dynasty? The syncretic Buddhism from the Mahāyāna tradition emerged during the Pāla Empire (750-1161 CE). *Banglapedia*, one of the most reliable sources on history and archeology of Bangladesh, vividly mentions that:

“The representations of divinities of hierarchical religion are few and far between. The Brahmanical as well as the Buddhist gods are equally illustrated in the plaques. They are the principal varieties of Shiva and other Brahmanical gods like Brahma, Visnu, Ganesha and Surya. Buddhist deities, mostly of the Mahayana School, including Bodhisattva Padmapani, Manjushri and Tara are noticed here and there. Well-known stories from the Panchatantra are represented with evident humour and picturesque expressiveness.” (Banglapedia; See: [Paharpur - Banglapedia](#))

Banglapedia mentioned the Jain legacy within this ambit of Mahāyāna tradition:

“*Inscriptions* discovery of an inscribed copperplates and some stone inscriptions has helped us to determine the chronology of the different periods. The copperplates found in the northeast corner of the monastery is dated in 159 Gupta Era (479 AD). It records the purchase and grant by a Brahman couple of a piece of land for the maintenance of the worship of Arhats and a resting place at the Vihara, presided over by the Jaina teacher Guhanandin. This Vihara, which was situated at Vatagohali in the 5th century AD, must have been an establishment of local celebrity.” (Ibid)

Banglapedia also mentions some material reasons of the Mahāyāna tradition's abreast position of the Jainism.

“It is worth mentioning here that the same name Vatagohali is found on a mutilated copperplate found at Baigram dated 128 GE (448 AD). The mention of the name Vatagohali in a record from Barigram, which is about 30 km to the north of Paharpur, indicates that the two places Vaigrama and Vatagohali may not be far away from each other. The Guhanandi Vihara at Vatagohali must have shared the fate of other Jaina establishments in Pundravardhana, when anarchy reigned supreme in Bengal in the late 7th century or early 8th century AD. At last peace was established and the Pala

Empire was securely founded in Bengal in the 8th century AD and Dharmapala at Somapura established a magnificent temple along with a gigantic monastery. (Ibid)

Then Banglapedia continues with the assessment of *K.N. Dikshit*. It says,

Dikshit believes that the monks in the new Buddhist Vihara might have been given the royal permission to appropriate the land belonging to the Jaina Vihara and kept the original charter in their possession. According to him 'this supposition can alone, explain the find of the plate among the ruins of the Buddhist Vihara'." (Ibid)

In Somapura Mahavihāra many terracotta plaques are still representing Hāra (Śiva) and *Pārvaṭī* above the meditating Buddha. It seems that the plaques represent them to be *the power house* of Buddha. *Pārvaṭī* is the *samabaini shakti* of Shiva; so they are also together here. It is also an insignia of the influence of Shaktism on the Bengal brand of Buddhism. However, one can watch the terracotta representation of Balarāma, the elder brother of *Lord Kṛṣṇa*, *Vināyaka* (Gaṇeśa), *the Nāgas* and many stories of the *Purāṇas* like the water churning of the gods and demons in a body to help *goddess Śrī* to resurface and so forth. Some elegant panels are still unscathed, which depict the most popular themes of *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and various other incidents from daily life of the rural folk. The small chambers of the monks and pupils indicate us to the esoteric practices of the *Tantrik Buddhists* especially the adherents of the *Vajrayāna*. Atisa Dipankara (982 CE–1054 CE) went to Tibet during this Pāla reign. The Paharpur iconographies contain the vestiges of Tibetan Buddhism and hence one will realize that the Tibetan Buddhism was influenced by Hinduism invariably. Therefore, we may call the *Somapura Buddhism* to be a ‘*penumbra*’ of Hinduism, because here one can distinguish Buddhism from Hinduism but cannot dissociate.

Anupam Jash has cited from *The Divyavadana*, a Buddhist text, records a tradition which shows that the *Nirgrantha* or Jaina religion was established in Pundra or north Bengal at the time of Samrat Asoka. Jash has written, “It is said that the lay followers (*upasaka*) of Jainism in the city of *pundravardhana* (north Bengal) had painted a picture representing Buddha falling at the feet of *nirghantha*, and on hearing this Asoka massacred 18000 *Ajivikas* of *pundravardhana* on a single day.” Jash has also mentioned in brackets that he gleaned information from *Divyavadana* ( p.427). He has also mentioned that the account gets mixed up with the *Nirghanthas* and *Ajivikas*, but the name of the sect is uniformly given as

*Nirghanthas* in the Chinese translation. (Jean Przyluski, *La Legende de l'Empereur Aśoka*, p.278).

We can remind that Pundra's a mentionable part is now in the *Rajshahi* and *Rangpur* divisions of today's Bangladesh.

## Conclusion

The artifacts and ruins of the Jain temples imply that the Bengal witnessed a long Buddhist era but with the admixture of the Jain traits. Because of the open ended circumference of the Mahāyāna school, a syncretic Buddhism emerged during the Pāla Empire. Due to the contemporariness of the Jainism and Buddhism, some common traits of Jainism helped Buddhism to embrace it. But at the same time the Jain civilization burgeoned under the syncretic mode of a special denomination of the Mahāyāna school, which did not hamper the Jain socio-culture rather extended its hand benevolently in order to ensure the survival of the Jain culture in Bengal. Therefore, in the East Bengal the Jain civilization rampantly burgeoned and survived especially during the Pāla Empire. Thus, a mélange civilization of three major religions i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism developed in this certain part of Bengal like Bengal's other parts.



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*Paharpur* - Banglapedia



## Tracing the Historic Foundations of 'Sarak' Identity

Anupam Jash<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the field of *Sarak* studies has been pre-occupied with the question of how to best define the *Sarak* religious and ethnic identity. Is it true that Saraks have always been a distinct community with their own identity. Many academics are of the opinion that different *Sarak* identities coexisted within the Hindu community up to the later part of the 19th century, and that each of these identities made an equally valid claim to be successors of ancient Jain heritage. If one looks at early Hindu socio-religious sources, it may be realized that one does not get evidences of the flexible character of *Sarak* identity as it has been claimed.

### The Problem

The results of empirical investigation indicate that '*about two thirds of contemporary conflicts turn on issues of religious, ethnic, or national identity. Less than 10 percent begin as interstate conflicts*'<sup>1</sup>. What causes conflict between religious groups and why does the preservation of religious identity lead to conflict?

### What is identity?

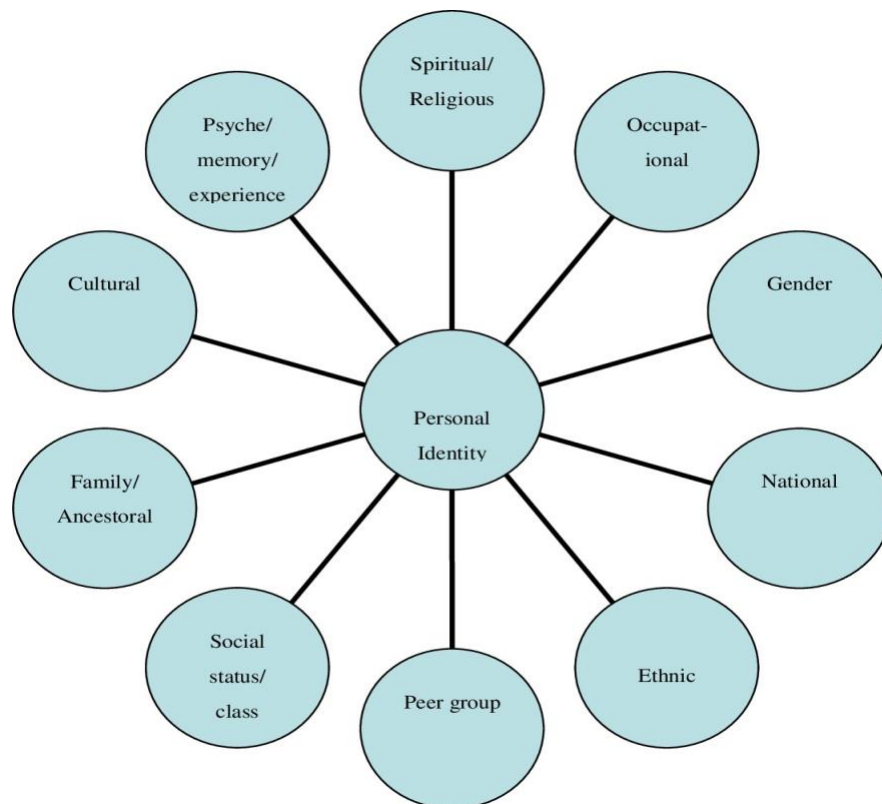
There are numerous aspects to a person's identity. It represents a person's unique personal experience, memories, ethnicity, culture, religious orientation, gender, and occupational role, among other things. Erikson refers to identity as "some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image"<sup>2</sup>. Identity can be defined as one's awareness of oneself and how others perceive one's individuality. The characteristics of a person's identity depicted in Figure 1 are universal in the sense that they may be applied to a person regardless of their culture, religion, or geographic location. The characteristics depicted in Figure 1 may, at certain points in a person's life, become more prominent, such as

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their sense of ethnicity, vocational role, or religious inclination. This may be the case based on the stage of a person's life cycle as well as the specific experiences that a person has had throughout their life. Extensive research has been conducted in the field of psychology on the topic of the connection between personal development and one's identity. Erik Erikson investigates the ways in which an adolescent's sense of identity develops as a result of their vocational and sex roles, relationships, political perspectives, and religious beliefs<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure-1**  
**The Components of Identity**



### **Individual identity and its relationship with the group**

The phrase "identity" is defined on the website [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) as the *set of behavioral or personality characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group*. Because of this, the individual identity of a person is inextricably tied with the identity of the group to which they belong, which might stem from any one or more of the affiliations shown in Figure 1. It would appear as well that psychologists understand the

phrase "identity per se" to mean a "subjective and persistent sense of sameness," relating primarily to the concept of group identity<sup>4</sup>. Some of the components in the diagram, such as nationality, ethnicity, peer grouping, social status, family, culture, and even religion, have a "groupness" component that cannot be separated from them. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that this is how groups will develop under all contexts and circumstances. Additionally, a person may not always be aware of the "group" that they belong to or the necessity of being a part of one.

### **Formation of large group identity – psycho-social theories:**

How does a group come to be, and what exactly does it mean to have a group identity? According to Volkan, the process of identifying with a large group (such as a religious, ethnic, or national one) begins in childhood, and the fundamental aspects of an individual's identity are intricately entwined with the identity of the large group<sup>5</sup>.

Volkan makes reference to Erikson's notion of "pseudo-speciation" in other places, which helps to further his comprehension of large group identification and the growth of a group's sense of superiority over other groups. In order to mention some of what Volkan had to say about the process of pseudo-speciation:

“...at the outset of human history, each human group developed a distinct sense of identity, wearing skins and feathers like armour to protect it from other groups who wore different kinds of skins and feathers. Erikson hypothesized that each group became convinced that it was the sole possessor of the true human identity. Thus each group became a pseudo-species, adopting an attitude of superiority over other groups.<sup>6</sup>”

The Erikson theory, on the other hand, is restricted to particular aspects of racial identity. His reasoning, however, does not consider the factors that cause "groupthink" or the underlying conditions that contribute to the development of groups. These potentially causative factors may include, but are not limited to, the following: competition over resources; power asymmetries; shared history; ethnic cleansing; heightened awareness of the perception of "the other" and dehumanization; opportunities for bonding with one's group; threat or the perception of threat from the "other" group, among other things.

Volkan elaborates on these as conditions that foster the mobilization of large groups, such as selected trauma and glories, shared grievances, and collective history. Specifically, Volkan refers to these as ‘conditions that promote the mobilization of large groups’<sup>7</sup>.

### **Religious “pseudo-speciation” and group mobilization**

Could Erikson's theory of pseudo-speciation be applied to the emergence of religious subgroups under the aforementioned conditions? I would want to suggest that religious communities facing analogous pressures are especially vulnerable to adopting such mindsets. It's clear that humans, like other animals and birds, have an innate and natural tendency to congregate for many reasons. There is comfort, power, harmony, and familiarity in numbers. A sense of belonging, individuality, unity, respect, and safety are all met. When religious communities are subjected to political and economic discrimination and marginalization; when conflict is incited along ideological lines; when the threat perception is high; and when competition for finite resources is fierce, the "grouping" tendency will emerge. According to social scientists, belonging to a community helps people feel secure in themselves. It can serve as a kind of self-defence when it develops in response to aggression through group mobilization.

It's the urge to work together. Identifying with a group always leads to a focus on comparison and an awareness of one's 'self' and 'the other'. It establishes the separation and limits essential for dehumanizing the other. Because it is rooted in inviolable values and the sense of one's identity and self-esteem, a culture of pseudospeciation established on the basis of religious distinction is sometimes hard to resist or dispute. Therefore, the danger of losing one's religious identity can spark widespread and difficult-to-resolve disagreement.

### **Understanding the historical and religious roles in identity-based conflicts:**

Marc Gopin argues that studying the patterns in religious communities requires knowledge of both socio-economics and religious psychology. He argues that cultural and religious differences obscure the importance of economic realities in comprehending the causes of conflict between minority and majority groups. Gopin, echoing the views of many of his contemporaries, argues that resistance to the status quo may "express itself in religious terms." Gopin considers the impact of religious texts, myths, metaphors, laws, attitudes, and traditions in advocating pro-social and anti-social values that contribute to conflict and offer entry points for peacemaking. He stresses the importance of religion in millions of people's personal and social lives.

*“Group conflict is constituted by a series of unique human beings who evolve, for one reason or another, into a complex interaction of adversarial relationships. To understand this, we cannot suppress the roots of that human being, or group of human beings, in the historical cultures and religions from which they have*

*emerged. Connecting the human being to her cultural moorings will help us understand why and when she fights and when she makes peace. ”<sup>8</sup>*

In reference to the Sarak community in Bengal and the areas that are adjacent to it in Jharkhand, we can add an essential facet to our comprehension of religious conflict. This facet is the "fear of life," which is a perception of an immediate danger on the part of a group. This leads to aggressive manifestations of conflict behavior that have the appearance of religious fundamentalism. In certain situations, playing the religion card in order to promote a political cause might effectively persuade individuals to behave in an extreme manner. The argument presented by Gopin can also be evaluated within the framework of Saraks. An examination of the dispute can shed light on the socioeconomic and political forces that lie beneath the formation of religious identity.

It might be helpful to cite Schafer's work (2004) on the dual nature of religion at this point in the discussion. Both Gopin (2002) and Appleby (2000, 2006) make mention of this dichotomy in their respective works. Schafer has a profoundly ambivalent view of religion, viewing it not only as a basis for respect but also for coexistence.

The research conducted by Schafer sheds light on a variety of topics, including religious socialization, collective ethnic identity, the emotional security derived from religious rituals and rites, and the relevance of sacred locations and shrines<sup>9</sup>. Schafer asserts that each of these components helps to frame a person's religious identity within the context of their community. What is particularly appalling, though, is the incapacity of religious communities to share sacred locations with other people or to interact with members of other religious communities as equal members of the human race. It is unquestionably due to the exclusivist nature of many different religious cultures that they view the introduction of the "other" into their surroundings or the encouragement of possibilities to cohabit peacefully as a significant threat.

### **The religious and ethnic identity of the Saraks**

There is a community, that may be found in several regions of India, including West Bengal and the neighbouring regions of Jharkhand. This community is known as ‘Sarak’ community which is a religious and ethnic minority of this area. Their effect cannot be ignored, despite the fact that they do not constitute a very large population.

Someone may have the misconception that the Saraks are a community or tradition that is unique to a certain location or area within Hinduism. Because Hinduism is such a

complex religion, it is divided into numerous sects, sub-sects, and communities, each of which adheres to its own set of beliefs, rituals, and traditions. It may also be possible that the term "*Saraks*" refers to a certain community within Hinduism that is not well known or acknowledged by the majority of people. Their biases are more consistent with those held by Hindu religions due to the fact that they also worship Hindu deities. They belong to the Jati-varna caste system that is practiced in Hinduism. They coexist peacefully with Hindus in their community. They are a very small minority in an area that is predominately inhabited by Hindu people; as a result, they have adopted many of the same religious customs as their neighbours. In addition to this, they are ignorant regarding the various religious affiliations that they genuinely hold.

Despite the fact that the *Saraks* have just been accepted into O.B.C. categories of Hinduism, the question of the religious roots of the *Saraks* as well as the nature of their modern religious affiliations has not been answered.

Information was gathered from knowledgeable people and leaders of the *Sarak* communities and other groups to determine the extent to which Jainism currently affects the *Saraks'* way of life and culture. Although they would take part in the worship of other Hindu Gods and Goddesses, they would not honour the warrior deities *Kali* and *Viswakarma*. Do these rituals fundamentally represent a rejection of the Shakti worship and the use of force? Do these characteristics identify them as Jaina as opposed to Hindus? They do celebrate Hindu festivities with great zeal and enthusiasm.

But there is one thing that cannot be ignored. That is the gotra-name of the *Saraks*, the specific language they used in daily life, their eating habits, chosen vocations, taboos, and prejudices, are more typical of Jainism than Hinduism or other religions. For all these various reasons, it is believed that the *Saraks* belong to Jaina religion. They have been followers of some aspects of Jainism, such as vegetarianism, since ancient times, however, were isolated and separated from the main body of the Jain community in western, northern, and southern India and have been Hindu Bengalis ever since.

### **Etymology of the word *Sarak***

The *Saraks* are an obscure ethnic community. The word '*Sarak*' derives from the Sanskrit word *Śrāvaka*, from which we get the meanings of "respect" (*śraddhā*), "awareness" (*viveka*), and "work" (*kriya*). So, a *Śrāvaka* is someone who, by chance, is a hard worker who treats others with respect. The word for a listener in Sanskrit is *Śrāvaka*. This term is used in Jainism. In Jainism, a *śrāvaka* is any lay Jain so the term *śrāvaka* has been used for the Jain



community itself (for example see *Sarak* and *Sarawagi*). *Śrāvākācāras* are the lay conduct outlined within the treatises by Śvetāmbara or Digambara mendicants. "In parallel to the prescriptive texts, Jain religious teachers have written a number of stories to illustrate vows in practice and produced a rich repertoire of characters"<sup>10</sup>.

A *śrāvaka* in Jainism is a lay Jain. He is the hearer of discourses of monastics and scholars, Jain literature. In Jainism, the Jain community is made up of four sections: monks, nuns, *śrāvakas* (laymen) and *śrāvikās* (laywomen). The term *śrāvaka* has also been used as a shorthand for the community itself. For example, the *Sarawagi* are a Jain community originating in Rajasthan, and sometimes *śrāvaka* is the origin of surnames for Jain families. The long-isolated Jain community in East India is known as the *Sarak*. The conduct of a *śrāvaka* is governed by texts called *śrāvākācāras*<sup>11</sup>, the best known of which is the *Ratnakaranda śrāvākācāra* of Samantabhadra. A *śrāvaka* rises spiritually through the eleven *pratimas*<sup>12</sup>. After the eleventh step, he becomes a monk. Jains follow six obligatory duties known as *āvashyakas*: *sāmāyika* (practising serenity), *chaturvimshati* (praising the tirthankara), *vandan* (respecting teachers and monks), *pratikramana* (introspection), *kāyotsarga* (stillness), and *pratyākhyana* (renunciation)<sup>13</sup>.

### The History of the *Saraks*

The *Saraks* are an ancient community in Jharkhand and Bengal. British anthropologist Edward Tuite Dalton noted that according to the Bhumij tradition in Singhbhum district, the *Saraks* were early settlers in the region<sup>14</sup>. According to Santosh Kumar Kundu, the *Saraks* arrived from the northwestern region of India, presently in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. In the region between the rivers Barakar and Damodar, two democratic republics, Shikharbhum and Panchakot, flourished. Later they merged and came to be known as Shikharbhum, with the capital at Panchkot<sup>15</sup>. According to Ramesh Chandra Majumder, the Jain scholar Bhadrabahu, the second Louhacharya and the author of Kalpa Sutra may have come from the *Sarak* community<sup>16</sup>.

Jainism, whose founder Mahavira was born in the area of Vaisali and spent some of his religious career in Magadha and Champa, has its roots in eastern India. Champa is linked to *Pārsvanātha*, Mahavira's predecessor in the lineage of Tirthankaras, and Eastern India is home to the most significant Jain locale tied to the memory of *Pārsvanātha*, the Pareshnath Hill.

Jaina literature preserves oral histories in which it is said that Mahāvira travelled to Western Bengal but was met with hostility. Although *Vanga* is frequently mentioned in the

Jaina canon<sup>17</sup>, there is no evidence to suggest that he actually travelled east of the Ganges to the land of the Pundras. *Nirgrantha* was the term under which the Jaina community was known prior to the Gupta dynasty.

Thankfully, another set of Jaina tradition demonstrates that North Bengal and a region of lower Bengal had made significant contributions to the development of the Jaina religion well before the second century B.C. Bhadrabahu, who lived at the same time as Chandragupta Maurya, is credited with writing the *Kalpasutra*<sup>18</sup>. Even if this credit is contested, there is no denying that the piece draws on ancient customs. After Bhadrabahu, the Jaina church is believed to have been divided, leading to the establishment of several separate educational institutions that maintained loose ties to one another<sup>19</sup>. According to this tradition<sup>20</sup>, Godāsa, a student of Bhadrabahu, is said to have established the *Godāsa gana*, a school that eventually grew to include four *sākhya*s, three of which are known as the Tamraliptika, Kotivarshiya, and Pundravardhaniya.

The first is located in southern Bengal, while the other two are in northern Bengal and are both well-known tourist destinations. The *Kalpasutra* tradition was well established by the end of the first century B.C. and the first century A.D.<sup>21</sup>, as evidenced by the huge number of school names found in inscriptions from that time periods. A Jaina monk from Radha area, is said to have requested the construction of a Jaina image in a Mathura inscription from the second century A.D.

There are references to the installation of statues of Jaina *tirthankara* Lord *Pārsvanātha* and other *tirthankaras* in several Gupta-era inscriptions, but none of these are from Bengal. A copper-plate from the city of Pāharpur dating back to the year 159 (478-79 A.D.) is the lone exception. It provides evidence that a Jaina *vihara* existed in the *Vata-Gohala* area, "which was presided over by the disciples and the disciples of disciples of the *Nirgrantha* acharya Guhanandin belonging to the *Pancha-stupa* section of Benares." The Great Temple and Monastery, recently discovered in Paharpur, stood on the site of the *vihara*, which was thus founded in the 4th century A.D., if not earlier still.

Hiuen Tsang seems to imply that the *Nirgranthas* were the pre-eminent religious group over all of Bengal in the seventh century. This includes both northern and southern Bengal as well as eastern Bengal. The pilgrim says, "the Digambara *Nirgranthas* were very numerous" in reference to the heretics at Pundravardhana and Samatata.

The *Nirgranthas*, on the other hand, appear to have entirely vanished from Bengal in the succeeding century, with no mention of them in the countless inscriptions of the Palas and Senas. Only immigrants from Western India re-established the old faith in its new form, now

known as Jainism, in various districts of North Bengal during the Muhammadan period." The naked *Nirgrantha* ascetics had most likely merged in religious communities such as the *Avadhutas*, which had become well established in Bengal by the end of the Pala period.<sup>22</sup>

The descendants of the Jaina lay people who lived in this region, notably in the eastern part of India, are known as *Saraks*. They are the direct disciples of the *Nirgranthas* or the Jaina Monks. They inhabited this region between the sixth century B.C. and the twelfth century AD. They established their own community predominately in the states of Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa where they lived.

The Jaina *Sarak* community lost contact with mainstream of the Jaina community in the rest of India after its conquest by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji.

Now a days the *Sarak* peoples are concentrated in Purulia, Bankura and Burdwan district of West Bengal and Ranchi, Dumka and Giridih districts and Singhbhum region of Jharkhand. The *Saraks* belonging to most of Jharkhand and West Bengal are Bengali speakers while those living in historical Singhbhum region speak Hindi and Singhbhumi Odia. Educated *Saraks* speak fluent English.

In 2009, more than 165 *Sarak* Jains living in parts of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar visited the ancient Jain pilgrimage centre of Shravanabelagola. A special function to welcome the *Sarak* Jains was organised at Shravanabelagola<sup>23</sup>.

In the official statistics, they are not taken into account as a distinct population group. The governments of India and West Bengal both have classified some of the *Saraks* under Other Backward Classes since 1994 but many of them have been in the General category from the beginning itself<sup>24</sup>.

**Religion-Ethnic Identity:** The Jain *Sarak* community is primarily Jain, and their religious practices follow both the Svetambara and the Digambara sect. They have established several Jain temples in the Bengal and Jharkhand region in past, and their community members actively participate in religious events and ceremonies. They are also proud of their ethnic identity and maintain their unique cultural practices and traditions.

The characteristics of the *Sarak* communities are as follows:

1. The *Saraks* adhere to a spiritual lifestyle.
2. They probably don't drink alcohol, eat fish or meat of any type, and follow a strict vegetarian diet, so that's a good place to start.
3. You won't find any fur, wood, silk, or leather among their wardrobe selections.

4. They have a naturally pristine demeanour, as evidenced by their frequent showers and spotless attire.
5. They avoid immoral behaviour like stealing, decoying, robbing, etc., because of their commitment to nonviolence.
6. They avoid any line of work that can involve them in or promote violence.
7. Many *Saraks* from Talajuri and Senera village also claimed to be related to the Vaishyas. They gave the following explanations:
8. They dress plainly and accessorize with commonplace items.
9. They do not invest heavily in group meals or consuming alcohol together.
10. They work in agriculture and are known for their extreme frugality.
11. Women in particular are heavily interested in investing in money-landing businesses.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we may say that, the Jain *Sarak* community has made a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of West Bengal and adjacent areas of Jharkhand. They have established themselves as successful traders and have contributed to the growth of the local economy. Their strong religious and ethnic identity has helped them maintain their unique cultural practices and traditions.

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## On the *Saraks*: from 'Notes on a Tour in Manbhoom in 1864-65'

**Let. Col. E. T. Dalton**  
Commissioner of Chota-Nagpur

In the district of Manbhoom, we find two distinct-types of architectural remains. Those that appear most ancient, and are 'said by the people to be so, are ascribed, traditionally and no doubt correctly, to a race called variously *Serap*, *Serab*, *Serak*, *Srawaka*, who were probably the earliest Aryan colonists in this part of India ; as even the Bhumij, who of the existing population claim to be the oldest settlers and whose ancestors had not the skill to construct such monuments, declare that the first settlers of their race found these ruins in the forests that they cleared. We have the same tradition of early settlements of the *Srawuks* in the eastern parts of Singhbhoom, which were broken up by the warlike Hos or Lurka Cols. The *Srawuks* appear to have colonized along the banks of rivers, and we find their temple ruins on the banks of the Damodar, the Cossai and other streams. The Cossai is rich in architectural remains. Within a few miles of the station of Purulia and near that river, are the ruins of an old settlement called Palma. This I have not seen, but Lieutenant R. C. Money has favoured me with a brief account of it. The principal temple is on a mound, covered with stone and brick, the debris of buildings, through which many fine old peepul trees have pierced, and under their spreading branches the gods of the fallen temple have found shelter. In different places are sculptures of male figures, standing on pedestals and under canopies, with Egyptian looking head dresses, the arms hanging down straight by the sides, the hands turned in and touching the body near the knees. One of these images is larger than life. It is broken away from the slab on which it was cut, and the head, separated from the body, lies near. At the feet of each idol are two smaller figures with chowries in their hands, looking up at the principal figure, and on the pediment of each is an animal, differing. I have now seen several of these figures, and there can, I think, be no doubt that

they are images of the "Tirthancaras" of the Jains, each with its representative animal or symbol. Lieutenant Money also observed a stone pillar set up perpendicularly, standing twelve feet high by 11 feet square, with corners chamfered, making it an octagon; and near this four more of the Tirthancaras are found. All about these temple mounds are other mounds of cut stone and bricks, shewing that there must have been here, at a remote period, a numerous people far more advanced in civilization than the Bhoomi and Baori tribes who succeeded them. At the village of Churra near Poorulia, there are two very old stone temples called 'Deols' or Dewalas.' The only tradition regarding them is, that they and some large tanks in the vicinity were constructed by Serawaks here called Seraks. They are built with roughly cut stone, without cement, on the *stone carpentry* principle. There were originally seven of these Deols. Five have fallen, and the fragments have been used in building houses in the village. The most perfect of the two that remain, is a tower terminating in a dome of horizontal courses of stone about 30 feet high, with a circular finial like a huge cog-wheel, and the remains of flag-roofed colonnades on both sides. The slabs forming the roof are great blocks of granite from 5 to 9 feet in length, 2 to 21 in breadth and 1 foot thick. There is no carving about these temples, and no object of worship now in the shrines, but on some of the stones that are scattered about, tracing of the "Tirthancaras" are visible. There is another of these temples at Telkoopī on the Damp Sur; and there is there an image still worshipped by the people in the neighbourhood which they call *Birrup*. This image I have not seen, but it is probably intended for the 24th "Tirthancara" 'Vira' or Mahabira, the last Jina.

Some four miles south of the town of Jaipore on the right bank of the Cossai river, near the village of Boram, are three very imposing looking brick temples rising amidst heaps of debris of other ruins, roughly cut and uncut stones and bricks. Besides the mounds, on which these temples stand, there are other mounds all composed of similar debris and traces of enclosures, shewing this to have been at one time a very important place. The most southern of the three temples is the largest. The tower rises from a base of 26 feet square. The chamber occupies only 9 feet square of this, and after about 9 feet of upright wall is pyramidal in form, the bricks in rows of first three, then two, and near the top one, gradually approaching, till the four sides meet. The remainder of the tower is solid brick work throughout. Its height is about 60

feet, but the upper portion of it has fallen, and it is impossible to say how it was finished off. The bricks of which these temples are composed, some of them eighteen inches by twelve, and only two inches thick, look as if they were machine-made, so sharp are the edges, so smooth their surface, and so perfect their shape. They are very carefully laid throughout the mass of masonry, so closely fitting that it would be difficult to insert at the junction the blade of a knife. The entrance to all the temples faces the rising sun. The objects of worship, whatever they were, have disappeared from the fanes, but in the southern temple there is a stone gutter through the wall, terminating in a well carved gargoyle for carrying off the water used in the ablution of the idol. The bricks used for ornamental friezes and cornices appear to have been carefully moulded for the purpose before they were burned; and the design, executed entirely of bricks thus moulded and put together, is, though very elaborate, wonderfully perfect and elegant as a whole; but in some places stucco has been added, and further ornamentation or more delicate tracery attempted in the stucco on the brick foundation, and this tracery, where it remains, is in wonderful preservation. The entrance to the temple is wide and lofty and arched like the interior, that is by the projection, till they meet, of bricks horizontally laid. Door, there appears no sign of. The fane must have been open to the world. The only animals I could discern in the ornamentation were geese, introduced in the scrolls: the goose is a Buddhist emblem.

The other temples are of similar design, but smaller size. In front of them I observed several pillars of stone but I found no architraves, and the pillars are hardly long enough to have been the support of a covered porch in front of the fane. These three temples are all of the same type, and are no doubt correctly ascribed by the people to the "Srawaks" or Jains. I found indeed no Jain images on the spot, but about a mile to the south, the remains of a Hindoo temple in a grove was pointed out to me, and all the images from all the temples in the neighborhood have been there collected. The grove-temple was dedicated to Siva. But amongst the images were several figures like those already described, that were in all probability the 'linas' of the brick temple.

Near the brick temples I found, amongst a heap of ruins, a square stone crypt in which was a four-armed female figure finely carved in the style of the sculptures of Dulmi, to be presently described. This was worshipped by the women of the place under the name of 'Soshti'. In the grove there was a similar



figure, and the other images of the Hindoo gods found there, appeared to be of the same period. Another mound was pointed out to me about half a mile from the grove as a collection of ruins, but I did not go to it.

The temples of the Manbhum District described in a letter from Lieutenant Beavan, published in the Proceeding of the Asiatic Society for April last, are no doubt of the same Jain type. The colossal sculpture, described as worshipped by the villagers under the name of Bhiram, may be another image of the 24th Jina, "Vira"; at all events it is a "Tirthancara" not a Hindoo image.

From the notice of "Vira" in the IXth Vol. of the Asiatic Researches, article Jains, by Prof. Wilson, it appears that he flourished 500 or 600 years before Christ, and after he had adopted an ascetic life he is represented as traversing the country occupied by the '*Vajra Bhoomi*' and the *Suddhi Bhoomi*, who abused and beat him and shot at him with arrows and baited him with dogs; but he tranquilly went on his course, paying no heed to these annoyances. Now Manbhoom is to this day the land of the *Bhoomi*, or Bhumij. They are a branch of the Moondah race, and were long the terror of the adjoining districts of Bengal. These were no doubt the "Vajra" the terrible "Bhoomi". The other portion of the population, who are not "Bhoomi", are called "Sudh" throughout ChotaNagpur. It is not improbable that the shrines I have been describing, mark the course taken in his travels by the great saint "Vita" and were erected to his honour by the people whom his preaching had converted ; but all these temples are in sight of *Mount Samaye* or Samat, that is the sacred hill from which 250 years before the days of Vira, the Jina Parswa or Parswanath is said to have obtained '*Nirvana*' or ultimate repose from the cares of a separate existence ; and it may be that colonies of Jains had settled on the rivers in the jungle mehals before the appearance of Vira and that Vira preached to men who had already been inaugurated into the mysteries of the Jain faith. The tradition of the Bhumij and their kindred tribe, the Ho or Lurka Coles of Singbhoom, that the Srawakas occupied this country first; shews that the Jains are a very ancient sect. Their antiquity has been doubted in consequence of the modern appearance of their known temples, but those I have been describing as existing in Manbhoom, are doubtless of great antiquity. In the regions that I have shewn were at one time a great seat of this sect, some colonies still remain.

In 1863 I halted at a place called Jumpra, twelve miles from Poorulia, and was visited by some villagers who struck me as having a very respectable and intelligent appearance. They called themselves Sarawaks and they prided themselves on the fact that under our Government not one of their community had ever been convicted

of a heinous crime. They are represented as having great scruples against taking life. They must not eat till they have seen the sun, and they venerate Parswanath. There are several colonies of the same people in Chota-Nagpur proper, but they have not been there for more than seven generations, and they all say they originally came from Pachete. Contrasted with the Moondah or Cole race, they are distinguished by their fairer complexions, regular features and a peculiarity of wearing the hair in a knob rather high on the back of the head. They are enterprising, and generally manage to combine trade with agricultural pursuits, doing business both as farmers and money lenders. The train of "Mahabira" is represented as consisting of "Sadhs", Sramanas and others, and lastly of "Srawaks", the laity and the most numerous class of all. The whole of the Jains are divided into "Yatis" and "Srawaks", clerical and lay, and as their *Gochas* or family divisions include Agarwals, and Oswals, and Parswanath of Mount Samneya is revered by a numerous body of the wealthiest people in India. From central India, thousands of these classes annually visit the hill and their reverence for it is so great, that a pilgrim to the shrines must attend to no call of nature whilst his feet are on the mountain.

(Extracted from the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. XXXV part.1, 1966)



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## **The *Saraks*: from ‘The People of India’**

**Sir Herbert Risley, K.C.I.E., C.I.E.**

A somewhat similar case is that of the *Saraks* of Western Bengal, Chutia Nagpur, and Orissa, who seem to be a Hinduised remnant of the early Jain People to whom local legends ascribe the ruined temples, the defaced images, and even the abandoned copper mines of that part of Bengal. Their name is a variant of Sravaka (Sanskrit 'hearer'), the designation of the Jain laity; they are strict vegetarians, never eating flesh, and on no account taking life and if in preparing their food any mention is made of the word 'cutting', the omen is deemed so disastrous that everything must be thrown away. In Orissa they call themselves Budhists and assemble once a year at the famous cave temples of Khandgiri near Cuttack to make offerings to the Buddhist images there and to confer on religious matters. But these survivals of ancient faith have not saved them from the all-pervading influence of caste. They have split up into endogamous groups based partly on locality and partly on the fact that some of them have taken to the degraded occupation of weaving and they now form a Hindu caste of the ordinary type.

[Extracted from "The People of India" by Sir Herbert Risley, London 1938. pp. 77:78 ]



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## **The Saraks: from ‘Gazetter of the Singhbhum District’**

**Mr. L. S. S. O'Malley, ICS**

Inquiry regarding these ancient mines was made by Professor Ball in 1868. He found ancient excavations in every conceivable situation, at the tops of hills, in valleys, in the thickest jungles, and even in the middle of cultivation where the rocks are obscured by superficial deposits. These excavations show that the ancient miners had carefully searched the country and had considerable mining skill, while the slags furnish conclusive evidence of their proficiency as practical metallurgists. The mines, he found, were attributed to a people called Seraks, who once held the country. The same tradition of the former rule of these people was discovered by Major Tickell, who in 1840 wrote :- "Singhbhum passed into the hands of the Surawaks, a race now almost extinct but then numerous and opulent, whose original country is said to have been Sikrbhum and Pachete. The oppressions of the Surawaks ended in their total expulsion from the Kolehan." (*The Hodesum improperly called Kolehan* J.A.S.B., 1840, p. 696) This tradition is also referred to as follows by Colonel Dalton in the *Ethnology of Bengal*: "It is admitted on all sides that one part of Singhbhum was held by the people who have left monuments of their ingenuity and piety in the adjoining district of Manbhum, and who were certainly the earliest Aryan settlers in this part of India — the Serawaks or Jains." In the Kolehan also there are still a large number of tanks, called Sarak tanks by the Hos.

The name Sarawak, Serak, or Sarak is clearly a corruption of Sravaka, the Sanskrit word for a 'hearer' which was used by the Jains for lay brethren, i.e., jains engaged in secular pursuits as distinguished from Yati, i. e. priests or ascetics. It appears probable that the latter remained in Manbhum, where several Jain temples have been



found, while the Sravaks or lay-Jains penetrated the jungles, where they were rewarded with the discovery of copper upon the working of which they must have spent all their time and energy (Proceedings, A.S.B., 1869, pp. 170-5.) As the Jain temples in Manbhum date back to about the 14th or 15th century A.D., it may be inferred that it was during that period that Jains penetrated to Singhbhum.

(Extracted from Bengal District Gazetteers, Vol. XX. Singhbhum Etc. Calcutta. 1910 pp. 25)



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## **The Saraks : from ‘Gazetter of Manbhum District’**

**Mr. G. Coupland, ICS**

Reference is made elsewhere to a peculiar People bearing the name of Sarak (variously spelt) of whom the district still contains a considerable number. These people are obviously Jain by origin, and their own traditions as well as those of their neighbors, the Bhumij, make them the descendants of a race which was in the district when the Bhumij arrived; their ancestors are also credited with building the temples at Para, Charra, Boram and other places in these pre-Bhumij days. They are now, and are credited with having always been, a peaceable race living on the best of the terms with the Bhumij. To these and perhaps their local converts Colonel Dalton would ascribe the Jain remains. He places them in the district as far back as 500 or 600 years before Christ, identifying the colossal image now worshipped at Pakbira under the name of Bhiram as Vir, the 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthancara whom Professor Wilson represents as having "adopted an ascetic life and traversed the country occupied by the Bajra Bhumi and the Sudhi Bhumi who abused and beat him and shot at him with arrows and barked at him with dogs, of which small annoyances he took no notice." The Bajra or terrible Bhumi are, according to Colonel Dalton, the Bhumij. He suggests, therefore, that it is not improbable that the shrines referred to mark the course taken in his travels by the great saint "Vira" and were erected in his honour by the people whom his teaching had converted, or, it may be—and this is more consistent with local tradition on which, however, no great weight can be placed—that he merely visited places at which Jains were already established, within sight of the sacred mount Samaye where 250 years earlier the Jina Paswa or Parasnath had obtained Nirvana.

Combining Colonel Dalton's and Mr. Beglar's theories we should get a long

period of peaceful occupation of various centres by the Jains or Saraks left undisturbed by the Bhumij settlers whose advent must have been some time before Vies travels. The Saraks must have been superseded some time before the 7th century by Brahmans and their followers; such of them as survived or resisted conversion migrating to places away from the existing civilised centres where they remained unmolested by their Bhumij neighbours. The 10th century, judging by such of the buildings as it is possible to date with any accuracy, saw the Brahmans at their prime, and sometime between that and the 16th century the Bhumij, possibly assisted by fresh migrations from the west and north, must have risen and destroyed them root and branch. The destruction of the Hindu temples is ordinarily ascribed to Muhammadans, but, so far as this area is concerned, there is no trace, not even in tradition, of any invasion. Mr. Beglar draws a similar inference from two inscriptions found by him at Gondwana en route from Barabazar to Chaibasa, the earlier of which, though not interpretable, dates from the 6th or 7th century and the later to the 15th or 16th; the latter records the name of "Lakshmana first Banjara" which, read with the evidence of earlier use of the route to be inferred from the other inscription, suggests a period of 500 years or more during which trade along this route was stopped, and considering the reputation of the Bhumij in later years, it is hardly surprising that if the existing civilisation was forcibly uprooted, it would be long before the country would be even comparatively safe for the ordinary traveller.

To the Saraks reference has already been made in an earlier chapter as the remnant of an archaic community, whose connection with the district must date back to the very earliest times. Though a considerable number are found in the adjoining districts, Manbhum is essentially the main habitation of this caste, the census figures showing 10,496 out of a total of 17,385 as resident therein. The following account of this interesting caste is taken from Mr. Gait's census report.

"The word Sarak is doubtless derived from Sravaka, the Sanskrit word for 'a hearer'. Amongst the Jains the term is used to indicate the laymen or persons who engaged in secular pursuits, as distinguished from the Yatis, the monks or ascetics, and it still survives as name of a group which is rapidly becoming a regular caste of the usual type (Saraogi). The Buddhists used the same word to

designate the second class of monks, who mainly occupied the monasteries ; the highest class or Arhans usually lived solitary lives as hermits, while the great majority of the Bhikshus, or lowest class of monks, led a vagrant life of mendicancy, only resorting to the monasteries in times of difficulty or distress. The origin of the caste is ascribed in the Brahma Vaivartta Puran to the union of a Jolaha man with a woman of the Kuvinda or weaver caste. This, however, merely shows that at the time when this Puran was composed, or when the passage was interpolated, the Saraks had already taken to weaving as a means of livelihood. Mr. Risley says that the Saraks of Manbhum, though now Hindus, retain traditions of having formerly been Jains.

" It is now reported from Manbhum and Ranchi that they claim formerly to have been Agarwals who venerated Parasnath and inhabited the country on the bank of the river Saraju which flows into the Ganges near Ghazipur, in the United Provinces, where they lived by trade and money-lending. They cannot explain, why they left their original home, but in Manbhum they say that they first settled near Dalbhum in the estate of a certain Man Raja. They subsequently moved in a body to Panchet in consequence of an outrage contemplated by Man Raja on a girl belonging to their caste. In Ranchi it is believed that their first settlement was at Ogra near Puri, whence they subsequently migrated to Chota Nagpur. In Burdwan and Birbhum there is a tradition that they originally came from Gujrat, but in the former district the popular belief is that they were brought thither as sculptors and masons for the construction of stone temples and houses, the remains of which are still visible on the bank of the Barakhar. They themselves say that their ancestors were traders and revered Parsnath, but at the present time in Birbhum, Bankura, and Manbhum, they call themselves Hindus. The Saraks of this part of the country are served by Brahmans, who in some parts are, and in others are not, held to be degraded by acting as their priests. In Manbhum it is said that they were not served by Brahmans of any kind until they were provided with a priest by a former Raja of Panchet, as a reward for a service rendered to him by a Sarak, who concealed him when his country was invaded by the Bargis, *i.e.*, the Marhattas. There are seven Gotras or exogamous groups, Adi or Adya Deb, Dharma Deb, Rishi Deb, Sandilya, Kashyapa, Ananta and Bharadvaja. In Birbhum Goutam and Vyasa are also given as the names of *gotras*



and in Ranchi Batsava is added. They are also divided into four *thaks* or sub-castes based on locality, viz:

Panchkotia or inhabitants of the Panchet estate in Manbhum.

Nadiparia, or Saraks residing on the right bank of the Damodar in Manbhum.

Birbhumia, or residents of Birbhum, and

Tamaria, or residents of Pargana Tamar in Ranchi.

"There is a fifth sub-caste based on occupation, viz., the Saraki Tantis or Tanti Saraks of the Bishnupur subdivision of Bankura, who live by weaving and are held to be degraded. The latter again have four subdivisions Asvini Tanti, Patra, Uttarkuli and Mandarani. In the Sonthal Parganas the Sub-castes are Phul Saraki, Sikharia, Kandala and Saraki Tanti.

" Except for the few traditions mentioned above, the names of some of their *Gotras* and the extreme tenderness for animal life mentioned by Mr. Risley, which not only makes them strict vegetarians, but even leads them to eschew altogether the use of the word 'cut', there is little to distinguish the Saraks of West Bengal, Manbhum, and Ranchi from the ordinary Hindus amongst whom they live. In Ranchi the Saraks specially venerate Syam Chand whose worship is performed by a Brahman. All fines imposed for caste offences are set aside for the worship of the godling."

The Saraks in this district are mostly found in thanas Raghunathpur and Para ; writing of a visit paid to Jhapra near Para in 1863, Colonel Dalton mentions that it was their pride that no member of their community had been convicted of any heinous crime, and it is probable that they could justly make the same boast now ; they are essentially a quiet and law-abiding community, living in peace among themselves and with their neighbors



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## On the Ancient Copper Miners of Singhbhum

Mr. V. Ball<sup>1</sup>

"The existence of copper ores and ancient copper - mines in the district of Singhbhum was first prominently brought to notice by Colonel Haughton, who published an account of the mineral resources of Singhbhum in the Journal of this Society for the year 1854.

During the past season I have been engaged in an examination of a portion of country in which the copper-ores occur. Commencing to examine the copper bearing rocks at the foot of the Chhota Nagpur plateau and proceeding thence eastwards, I found that at nearly every point where traces of ore occurred there were ancient excavations. These increasing in size, and being found in every conceivable situation, at the top of hills, in valleys, in the thickest Jungles, and even in the middle of cultivation where the rocks are obscured by superficial deposits. My curiosity was aroused as to who the ancient miners could have been, who have left such imperishable evidence of their skill.

In Dhalbhum the *Purdhan* of Landu having been asked his opinion as to the ancient workers, replied that he did not know, but added "The Seraks formerly possessed the country" This belief of the Seraks having once occupied the country is recorded by Major Tickell and Colonel Dalton, as I shall have to allude to again further on. Having thus had the name

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1. *Geological Survey of India*

Seraks suggested, I was enabled to give a definite form to my queries. The result being that not only were several tanks pointed out as the work of Seraks, but, as I proceeded further eastwards, the mines were all attributed to the same ancient people.

All the published ethnological papers having reference to Singhbhum or the adjoining districts refer to the prevalence of a belief amongst the Hos and Bhumij that their country was formerly in possession of the Seraks.

Major Tickell says " Singhbhum passed into the hands of the Surawaks, now almost extinct but then numerous and opulent, whose original country is said to have been Sikrbhum and Pachete.

Col. Dalton has described several Jain temples and Buddhist emblems in subsequently Hinduized temples which are found in Manbhum. He considers it "probable that these shrines mark the course taken in his travels by the great Saint Vira. It may be that Vira did not visit Singhbhum, hence the absence of temples. Or, on the other hand the yatis, or clerical jains, may not have extended beyond the ranges of hills which bound Manbhum on the south, the more adventurous seraks, or lay Jains, having alone penetrated the jungles where they were rewarded with the discovery of copper, upon the working of which they must have spent all their time and energy, as with the exception of the tanks above mentioned, the mines furnish the sole evidence of their occupation of that part of the country. It is scarcely conceivable that the Hos, when they drove out the Seraks, could have utterly destroyed all trace of buildings. Col. Dalton estimates that the jains were driven out by the Hos more than 2,000 years ago.

[ Extracted from the Proceedings, Asiatic Society of Bengal, June, 1869. pp. 170-741



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## Statistical Account of the District of Manbhum

W. W. Hunter<sup>1</sup>

The Srawak settlers in Manbhum and Singhbhum Districts have been the subject of some discussion, but it appears to be now admitted that they were Jains. The local tradition which ascribes to them the architectural remains of Manbhum District and the old copper mines of Singhbhum, is not very precise; but in Man-bhum corroborative evidence is to be found in the character of the temples themselves and Colonel Dalton sees traces of an infusion of Aryan blood in the physical traits of the population of Singhbhum. Obscure as the early history of Jainism is, it seems most probable that the creed spread from Behar. If this be conceded, and the existence of Jain remains in Manbhum be considered in the light of the Jain tradition that the saint Mahavira was pursued with dogs and arrows by the Vajra Bhumi or 'terrible Bhumij' of Manbhum, there would seem to be no difficulty in supposing that the early Jain devotees, like the primitive Rishis of the Vedic period, went out and established hermitages in the jungles, which became the centre of a colony of Jain worshippers. The following account of Srawak community, visited by Colonel Dalton in 1863, seems to place beyond a doubt that the mysterious early settlers of Bhumij and Ho tradition were in fact Jains. In 1863 I halted at a place called Jhapra, 12 miles from Purulia, and was visited by some villagers who struck me as having a very respectable and intelligent appearance. They called themselves Srawaks, and they prided themselves on the fact that under our government not one of their

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Director-General of Statistics to the Govt. of India



community had ever been convicted of a heinous crime. They are represented as having great scruples against taking life. They must not eat till they have seen the sun, and they venerate Parswanath. There are several colonies of the same people in Chutia Nagpur Proper, but they have not been there for more than seven generations, \_and they all say they originally came from Panchet. Contrasted with Munda or Kol race they are distinguished by their fairer complexions, regular features and a peculiarity of wearing the hair in a knob rather high on the back of the head. They are enterprising, and generally manage to combine trade with agricultural pursuits, doing business both as farmers and money lenders."

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