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A discourse on Jain Goddess Ambika from Odisha at Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Sreyashi Ray Chowdhuri[1]

In Jain pantheon there are references of several goddesses. They largely owed their origin from the earlier tradition of worshipping the Yaksis. They are semi- divine beings and are technically known as *Sasanadevis*[1].They are attendant spirits regarded as devotees of Jinas[2]. Among them Ambika occupies a foremost position in the Jain tradition. She is the attendant of Neminatha, the 22nd Tirthankara and is variously named as Ambika, Ambai, Amba, Amra and Kushmandini. The word 'Ambika' literally means a mother and in Jainism she is the goddess of material prosperity, childbirth, childhood diseases and motherhood. She is also a source of protection against the evil forces of nature. The Jainas adopted her form from an early Yaksi named Bahuputrika meaning one who has many children. She is highly venerated in both the Jaina sects (Digambaras and Svetambaras) and is amply represented in several Jain religious sacred space. In this paper an attempt has been made to critically analyse the image of Ambika from Odisha preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in the light of its style and iconography and situate it within the broader repertoire of Ambika imagery in Jaina iconography.

Before delving into the image of our present discourse a few words may be said about the textual and iconographic features of Ambika which is essential for critically analysing our image. Ambika, as the name implies is a reflection of Mother Goddess of Brahmanical tradition. She is regarded as an Amnaya Goddess who gradually became a *Sasanadevi* associated with Jina Neminatha or Aristanemi. However, it is interesting to note that her association with Tirthankaras other than Neminatha is mentioned in the Svetambara text *Vividhatirtha- kalpa* of Jinaprabha Suri where she is mounted on a lion protecting the

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of History, Mahitosh Nandy Mahavidyalaya and Guest Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta

Tirtha of Mathura[3].The text also mentions the myth associated with Ambika where she was supposedly born as a human being and was married to an orthodox Brahman Somabhatta in the city of Kodinar in Saurashtra. They had two sons Siddha and Buddha. According to the story once Somabhatta invited some Brahmanas to dinner on the occasion of the *sraddha* ceremony of his ancestors. But instead of giving food to the Brahmanas, Ambika gave the food to a mendicant who needed it to break his fast which he undertook for a month. For this act Somabhatta drove Ambika out of his house. She left the place with her two sons. In her journey miracles happened to her. She found a dried mango tree full of ripe mangoes and a dry lake filled with water. It helped her to feed her sons. Then she rested under the shade of the mango tree. At home miracles also happened which opened the eyes of Somabhatta and his mother. Somabhatta came running after her to restore them to their house.But Ambika misjudged Somabhatta's intention and jumped into a well with her sons. She was born in heaven as a *yaksi* devoted to Neminatha. Her husband soon died and was reborn as a lion, the *vahana* of Ambika. The Digambara version of the story is mentioned in the "*Yaksi- katha*" found in *Punyasrava- katha*. According to it Ambika was known as Agnila and her husband was Somasarman, a Brahmana of Girinagara. Their sons were Subhankara and Prabhankara. In this version it is stated that she left her husband in company of her two sons and a faithful maid servant and went to Urijjayant hill where Varadatta, the sage whom she gave food for breaking the fast was living. Iconographically Ambika images can be two-handed, four-handed, eight-handed and having more than eight hands. The two-armed variety usually portray her as standing and sitting. Our sitting image of Ambika from Odisha at the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection belongs to the two- handed variety.Regarding this variety the textual reference of Jinaprabhasuri may be cited .He describes her in *Urjjayantra - sthava*. He states" May Ambika, of golden colour, riding on a lion and accompanied by (her two sons) Siddha and Buddha and holding a bunch of mangoes in her hand, protect the Jaina Sangha from obstacles". In addition to this, there are other textual evidences from both the Svetambara and Digambara tradition which make reference of the iconography of Goddess Ambika. In case of the two-handed variety, Ambika is usually represented as mounted over a lion holding a mango branch and a child. At this juncture it may be pointed out that the mango tree does not only serve the mythological necessity. In fact, the mango tree symbolically represents fertility and thus is an apt inclusion in the framework of the Ambika icon. *Chaturvimsatika* portray Ambika as having two hands. According to *Pratisthanasaroddhara* Ambika are two armed. She holds a mango branch (*amralumbi*) in

one hand and her son Priyankara on the other. Her another son Subhankara stands closely under the shade of the mango tree. The text *Pratisthatilakam* also speaks on the same lines. *Aparajitaprccha* describes her as a two-armed *yaksi* holding a fruit in one hand and displaying the *varada mudra* on the other. Both her sons are required to be beside her of whom one is to be carried by Ambika in her lap. Some texts mention Ambika as two armed or four armed. According to *Pratisthasarasamgraha* of the Digambara tradition Ambika, referred as Kushmandini is mounted on a lion and has two or four arms. *Nirvanakalika* text of the Svetambaras conceive her as a goddess mounted on a lion and holding a citron and a *pasa* in her right hands and carrying her son and an *ankusa* on her left hands[4]. Similar description is found in *Devatamurtiprakaranam*[5]. However, some texts like *Mantradhirajakalpa* donot mention her as carrying a child. According to the text her sons Siddha and Buddha are projected near her waist. *Rupamandana*, a significant treatise on iconography mentions *nagapasa* instead of *pasa* as her attribute. On the other hand, *Pravacanasaroddhara* replace citron for the mango branch. *Ambika Nataka* states that one of her sons would be holding the finger of Ambika and the other will be carried by the goddess. In addition, she holds a fruit, a mango branch, *ankusa* and a *pasa*[6]. The tantrik text of the Digambaras mention Ambika as four armed seated on a lion. She is also conceived with eight arms holding a conch, disc, bow, *parasu*, tomara, sword, *pasa* and *kodrava*. *Ambika - Tantra*, a tantrik text describes the terrific form of Ambika[7].

Coming to the image of our concern it may stated without doubt that the jaina deity Ambika preserved in the South Asia Gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London can be considered as one of the finest representation of the goddess. It is from Odisha and is assigned to c 1150- 1200 CE which coincides with the Eastern Ganga period. It is carved in grey chlorite and measures 119X 58 X 30 cm. Its weight is about 290 kg and the museum exhibit number is IS.61.1963.In keeping with the iconographic prescription, this image shows Ambika with her two sons sitting under the mango tree with mangoes. She is gracefully draped in a translucent lower garment and is bedecked with ornaments. Her hair is beautifully dressed with festoons of pearls and pendants and tied in a side knot. According to Gauri Parimoo Krishnan her hair style emulates Odishan hairdo[8]. Her right hand holds a cluster of mangoes while her left hand supports one of her sons. Her other child stands on the pedestal playfully reaching up to his mother. The deity's vehicle or *vahana* is the lion which is a typical iconographic characteristic of Goddess Ambika. The lion is chiseled beneath the lotus pedestal. On the pedestal are chiseled a pair of kneeling adorents who can be the donors.

Above the goddess one can see a number of figures. Among them the one in the centre with the halo can be identified as meditating Tirthankara Neminatha.He is flanked by two guardians and a pair of celestial garland bearers. The presence of Tirthankara confirms the Jain affiliation of the image. Moreover, the carving of Jina Neminatha is a fitting inclusion in the image as it helps us in the identification of the deity (Pl 1).

Stylistically the figure of Ambika reveals her elegant feminine charm. She is carved with a lot of grace. The sensuousness is created by her slender waist, full hips and ample breasts. The linear rhythm expressed in ample turns and curves is praiseworthy. She sits in *lalitasana* posture with her right leg dangling down. Moreover, the sculpture reveals the quintessential nature of a mother expressed by her protective stance towards her son positioned on her lap. The touching playful attitude of her second son to reach his mother indicates the emotional attachment a mother enjoys with her child. It may be emphasized that such features of motherhood were an obvious inclusion in the sculpture as the image was meant to highlight the concept of divine motherhood that the goddess stood for in the Jaina pantheon.

A comparative analysis with some icono- plastic representations of Jaina Ambika with our image of study (Ambika in the Victoria and Albert Museum) may be attempted in order to situate our icon within the broader repertoire of Ambika imagery. However, our discussion will be limited to those Ambika images which share some icono- stylistic similitude with our image.

A number of interesting images of Ambika from Odisha speak of its rich Jain heritage. Among them some icons display iconographic and stylistic resemblance to our Ambika image. In this regard mention may be made of a much-defaced small image of a two-armed jaina Ambika deity found attached on the inner wall of the jagamohana of the Balunkesvara temple at Barala, district Puri. The image displays close similitude with our image from the Victoria and Albert Museum. Like our image the well decked deity is sculpted sitting in *lalitasana posture* over a double petalled lotus holding her son in her left lap and a mango twig in her right hand. Her hairdo also shows much resemblance with our image. The branches of the mango tree behind her head can be identified despite much abrasion. Devotees and lion below the pedestal can also be seen. Despite much damage, one cannot miss the bountiful and

self-content appeal of the deity which is so pronounced in our image at the Victoria and Albert Museum[9].

Another two-armed image of Ambika preserved in the Ambika temple near the Khandagiri hills of Bhubaneswar, District Khorda in Odisha should be taken into consideration[10].This image to a great extent resembles the Ambika sculpture housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Similar to our image the Ambika temple icon shows *lalitasana* posture with right leg pendant over a lotus pedestal. She is holding the baby in her left lap and a mango twig in her right hand. Like our image here too below her seat is the lion. However, the devotee in this specimen is chiseled on the right. In our image the devotee is sculpted on the left. A small effigy of Neminatha is noticed on the mango tree above the head of the deity. The mango tree is elaborately carved with mangoes like our image. Moreover, the curve of the tree shows striking similarity with our image. Though the deity's hairdo matches the Odishan Ambika image in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the presence of halo in the Khandagiri image is not seen in our image. Moreover Khandagiri Ambika's sophisticated sensuousness in her attenuated waist and ample bust, her soft smile, refined linear rhythm and finesse greatly matches our image. (Pl 2)

A partially abraded two armed Ambika datable to 13th century CE in the temple of Harishankaresvara in the village of Kuanrapur, district Kendrapara, Odisha shows some stylistic and iconographic similarity with our Ambika image. Here Ambika is seated in her conventional *lalitasana* posture over the lotus pedestal. A mango tree bearing fruits can be seen above the deity's head. The image carries her son in the left lap and holds *amralumbi* in the right hand just like our sculpture. Her second son, whose head is mutilated in seen standing in frontal position on her right side. In contrast to this the second son in the Victoria and Albert Museum specimen displays childish liveliness in his attempt to reach his mother. The lion below the pedestal do not portray the energy which we see in the Ambika image at Victoria and Albert Museum. Further the flying garland bearers in the Kendrapara image is not seen in the Ambika sculpture at Victoria and Albert Museum. Moreover, the refined sophistication and feminine charm witnessed in our Ambika image is nowhere seen in the Kendrapara image. Robustness to some extent is seen in the depiction of the Kendrapara image. However, the sensuous appearance of the deity and the stylized chiseling of the mango leaf come close to our image[11].

Another image of two-handed Jaina Ambika from the Narayana temple complex in Ada in the Balasore District, Odisha deserves mention. This image shows stylistic resonance with our image. However, unlike our image, the slab in which the image of Ambika is chiseled in Ada is divided into two segments. While the upper segment is occupied by seated diminutive Tirthankara Neminatha in *dhyanamudra*, the lower segment showcases bejeweled Ambika in a larger dimension. Other iconographic markers like deity's *lalitasana* posture, *amralumbi* in her right hand, child in her left hand, mango tree in the backside and the lion below the lotus pedestal are similar to our image. Her other son to her right also shares commonality with the Ambika deity in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The headress of the image also show striking similitude with our image. However, the child's posture is different. The mango tree with mangoes is realistically carved in the Ada example.In contrast the mango tree in our image is stylistically carved. Moreover, Neminatha's *lanchana*, that is, the wheel is prominently positioned in the centre of the lotus pedestal of the Tirthankara. This is not seen in our specimen from Odisha preserved in the Victoria and Albert museum.However the jewellery, hairdo and the dangling *amralumbi* perfectly matches our image. Inspite of the partly abraded face, the graceful feminine charm that characterizes the Ambika image from Ada matches our image[12]. (Pl 3)

Quite similar in conception to the Ambika image from Ada is another beautifully sculpted icon from Balighat in Balasore, Odisha. The two-handed deity is chiseled on the lower panel of a rectangular slab, while the upper panel illustrate Jina Neminatha. She is possibly protecting the child with her partly mutilated left hand and the right is holding the *amralumbi*. She is seated on the double petalled lotus in a similar posture as our image. Another child below can be seen. The couchant lion below the pedestal also displays same stance as our Ambika image at the Victoria and Albert Museum. A devotee below the pedestal can also be seen. Above the head of the deity is the mango tree above which is a lotus pedestal. Jina Neminatha is placed above this pedestal. Herein lies a difference between the Balighat Ambika depiction and the image. In our image a small effigy of Neminatha is seen above, whereas in the Balighat depiction a large image of Neminatha is sculpted flanked by devotees. However, the stylized mango tree, jewellery and the physiognomy of the deity greatly matches our image[13].

It can be undoubtedly stated that the images of Jaina Ambika from Odisha iconographically and stylistically show striking similarity with our Ambika image preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum. However, considering the ample iconoplastic representations of jaina Ambika throughout the Indian subcontinent, it will not be unwise to delve into the icono- stylistic study of some Ambika deities found outside Odisha and attempt a comparative study between them and our image.

A beautiful representation of Ambika from Madhya Pradesh datable to 8th - 9th century CE preserved in the Royal Ontario Museum deserves special mention. The bejeweled deity is two handed like our image displaying *lalitasana* posture. However, unlike our Ambika at the Victoria and Albert Museum collection, the left leg is not dangling down. Rather it is placed on her mount, the lion. She supports her plump son with her left hand while the right holds the *amralumbi* quite like our image. Her other son beside her left leg peeps out. This gesture of the child is completely different from our image. She sits on the lotus pedestal which is not elaborately carved like our Odishan image. Unlike our image, this representation in the Royal Ontario collection is a haloed deity. The lion mount with its tense muscular paw is more life- like than our image. The submissive attitude reflected in the figure of lion in the Ambika figure from Madhya Pradesh is praiseworthy. The detailed depiction of the mango tree with mangoes is realistically chiseled. It gives the appearance of a canopy which is blossoming with mangoes. This concept is totally absent in our image. Unlike our image, the Ambika from Madhya Pradesh do not chisel the Jina. In contrast to the frontal position of our goddess, the image in the Royal Ontario Museum shows slight twist of the waist which brings dynamism in this superb artwork. Though iconographic marker of Ambika from Madhya Pradesh resembles our image, but stylistic parameters show some difference. In fact the Ambika from Madhya Pradesh closely resemble feminine forms that existed in Central India in the early medieval period. She is represented as a stunningly beautiful goddess whose half closed eyesadds spirituality to the figure. While our Ambika at the Victoria and Albert Museum collection reveals a harmonious blend between earthy (emotional bond between mother and child) and spiritual (feeling of divinity), the Madhya Pradesh image is purely spiritual[14].

A partially abraded and mutilated two handed images of Ambika from Madhya Pradesh preserved in the Himachal State Museum, Shimla may be taken into consideration. It is datable to 10th - 11th century CE. The deity holds *amralumbi* in her right hand while the left

hand holds the child like our specimen in the Victoria and Albert Museum. However the *amralumbi* do not dangle down like our image. Moreover, the mango tree and Jina is also absent. It may be conjectured that the tree might have been carved above the head of the deity when the image was intact. Quite similar to our image she sits in *lalitasana* posture on the lotus pedestal with the lion beneath her. She rests her leg on the lotus petaled cushion which is absent in our image. This image displays sensuousness with ample breasts and rounded contours indicating the element of fertility. Her inner serenity radiates calm and peacefulness. This creates spirituality in the figure like the above example from Madhya Pradesh. But the feeling of content motherhood evidently displayed in the image in Victoria and Albert Museum collection is not seen here[15].

An image of two armed seated Ambika from Rajgir is mention worthy. It is placed at the porch of temple no.3 at Vaibharagiri. The image is datable to 8th century CE. Here bejeweled Ambika is seated holding a bunch of mangoes with her right hand and her standing child tries to reach it, a stance similar to our image. Above is the mango tree with fruits. She holds the other child on her lap. She sits in *lalitasana* like our image. However, the lotus pedestal chiseled in our image is not found here. Her *vahana*, the lion is behind her right leg quite similar to the image of our study. However, the alert look of the lion in Rajgir example is not visible in our image. Moreover, the elegant grace of the Odishan Ambika with remarkable linear rhythm is missed in the Rajgir image[16].

A richly carved haloed image of Goddess Ambika from Shahabad District, Bihar deserves special mention. It is preserved in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and datable to 6th century CE. It is made of sandstone. It is four armed unlike our two handed Odishan image in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Like our image she sits in the usual *lalitasana* posture on a lion. However, in this image the left leg falls down instead of the dangling right leg as seen in our Ambika image. Moreover, the deity sits on the submissive *vahana* with her right knee resting on the head of the lion. This is a completely different stance as compared to our image. She supports a plump baby on her left thigh like our image. Unfortunately, the baby's head is mutilated. The other left hand of the deity is broken. The right lower hand holds a *matulinga* (lemon) and right upper hand holds a bunch of *amralumbi*. The other child is not seen here. Unlike our image the Jina and the mango tree is not represented in the Bihar image. Her jewellery is quite different from our image. The calm graceful gesture of the deity with a soft smile and half-closed eyes brings divine elegance

in this masterpiece. This calm gracefulness resonates with our image. However, the indelible stamp of regional specification remains prominent in the Bihar sculpture[17]. (Pl 4)

Rajasthan too has ample specimens of jaina heritage. With regard to Ambika image mention may be made of a beautiful figure of the Goddess in marble datable to 13th century CE from Dilwara group of Temples at Mt Abu. It is sculpted in the niche. The framework of this beautiful piece is different from our image. The head of the image from Mt Abu is surrounded by mango tree with bunches of mangoes. Like our image, here too the goddess holds the child with her left hand. The child fondly touches her breast. Another child stands below beside the couchant lion. Unlike the round gracefulness of our Odishan image, the Mt Abu specimen reveals a squarish face with leg flexed sharply at the knee and the garment. In fact, the regional style dominates the conception, framework and decorative details of the icon[18]. (Pl 5)

The cave temples of Ellora are considered as one of the most significant monuments showcasing rich Jaina heritage. Here several jain Ambika images have been recovered. Among them a beautiful representation of Ambika chiseled in the Ellora cave. No 33 is an interesting one. It is belonging to mid-8 th century CE. In the two-armed image the deity displays its characteristic *lalitasana* posture like our image and rests on a lotus. The elaborate lotus pedestal as we see in our image is not seen in this specimen at Ellora. Unfortunately, her hands are broken. A mutilated plumpy child stands by her left side. A mango tree with fruits and bird is chiseled above. It is completely different from the Ambika image at Victoria and Albert Museum. Another deviation from our image is the oval halo above which is the effigy of Neminatha. Unlike our image the lion at Ellora is carved with a lot of elaboration. Its gaping mouth, stylized mane with tense muscular development reveals the ample energy of the beast. The deity is flanked by a number of male and female devotees in different postures. This feature stands in contrast to our image. Moreover, the deity does not sit in strict frontal position like our image, but shows slight right flexion. The soft grace of the deity to some extent bears akinness to our image[19].

Another figure of two-handed Ambika from cave 33 of Ellora may be taken a note of. It is a mutilated image seated in a frontal position like our image. The Ambika figure from Ellora exhibits *lalitasana* posture like our image. However, in place of dangling right leg visualized in the Ambika at Victoria and Albert Museum, this image from Ellora shows the

left leg in the dangling position. Ambika sits with her left leg flexed over the body of the lying lion. Another deviation from our image is the presence of halo in the Ellora specimen. Goddess Ambika holds a child with her left hand like our image. However, the head of the child is broken. The other child stands by her right side. The right hand of the deity holds a bunch of mangoes. There is a conglomerate of mango leaves and fruits amidst which is a small effigy of the Jina. This is not seen in our image at Victoria and Albert Museum. The round and heavy spreading form noticeable in Ambika at Ellora extends beyond the principal figure and encompasses the entire composition with an expansive conception of plastic volume frequently seen in other reliefs at Ellora. Thus, the Ellora examples should be looked as a grand composition related to Goddess Ambika rather than simply an imagery of jaina goddess Ambika. Herein lies a difference with our Ambika image at Victoria and Albert Museum[20].

From a detailed analysis of the jaina Ambika from Odisha kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London it can be unquestionably stated that the image is one of the magnificent representations of its kind. The impeccable delineation of the iconographic features with a refined sense of aesthetic speaks greatly of a strong atelier under the guidance of which this masterpiece must have been produced. The stylistic minutiae showcased in the sculpture greatly resonate to the icono- stylistic idiom intrinsic to its core area, that is, Odisha. A comparative icono- stylistic analysis with some Ambika images from other parts of India substantiates our assumption. Moreover, the use of hard chlorite stone usually seen in the artistic production of Odisha is the material par excellence in our image. Chorite stone gives an almost metallic finish to the image which is clearly noticeable in our Ambika image. Although generally speaking the timeframe of our image coincides with the rule of Eastern Gangas of Odisha, the absence of epigraphical data related with our image prevents us from ascertaining authorship and the nature of patronage so far as the original context of our sculpture is concerned.

Thus in the final analysis it may be stated that the jaina Ambika image from Odisha preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London is one of the finest representation of the jaina Ambika sculptures so far retrieved from the Indian subcontinent. The radiant tenderness and quiet ease along with bountiful benevolence of a mother is beautifully accomplished in the sculpture. The detailed delineation of the iconographic features, the exquisite rendering of large and small figures, the skillful chiseling of ornaments and the

creation of the elegant feminine poise in the figure accentuates the religio-aesthetic effect of this icono- plastic marvel. In fact all praises fall short for this masterpiece and we are irresistibly absorbed in the realization of the metaphorical concept of the mother goddess that the deity stood for.

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Plates:

Pl 1: Ambika, Odisha, Preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Photographed by the author)

Pl 2: Ambika, Jain Temple, Khandagiri Hill, Bhubaneswar, District Khorda, Odisha

(Photo Courtesy Ashis Ranjan Sahoo, 2015)

Pl 3: Ambika, Narayana Temple Complex, Ada, District Balasore, Odisha

(Photo Courtesy: Ashis Ranjan Sahoo, 2015)

Pl 4: Ambika, Bihar (Photo courtesy Pratapaditya Pal, 1994)

Pl 5: Ambika, Dilwara, Mt Abu, Rajasthan (Photo Courtesy M.N.P Tiwari, 1989)

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Mallinātha or Lakṣmī? A Re-Identification of a Jaina Icon utilizing Sanskrit Texts dealing with Iconography

Devesh Chetan Shah*

Introduction

The Indian subcontinent is home to a rich heritage of religious and cultural artefacts, including idols of deities that are frequently unearthed through excavation or other means. However, the lack of inscriptions on many of these idols can make it challenging to accurately identify the deity they represent. In such cases, the use of texts containing attributes of the deities can prove to be a valuable resource in correctly identifying the deity and understanding the religio-cultural history of the region.

Identification of deities is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it allows for a better understanding of the evolution of iconography, which is important in understanding how the deity has been represented over the time. Secondly, it enables us to understand the religio-cultural history of a particular region, providing insights into the beliefs, practices, and customs of the people who lived there.

In this paper, we focus on the identification of a Jaina idol using various Sanskrit texts on iconography. Specifically, we draw upon the *"Bṛhatsaṁhitā"* (6th Cent. C.E.), *"Mānasāra"* (6th Cent. C.E.), *"Mayamatam," "Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa"* (15th Cent. C.E.), and *"Śilparatna"* (16th Cent. C.E.) to accurately identify the deity represented by the idol.

Case

The image under investigation (Image 1) is claimed to be of *Tīrthankara Mallinātha*. It is located at the Shri Sambhavnath Jain Temple in Sambhavnath's Khadki, Opp. Aambli Pol, Javeriwad, Ahmedabad. Based on the stylistic features of the idol, it can be inferred that the idol dates back to the Solanki/Caulukya period[1], specifically the 11th to 13th century C.E.

* Department of Sanskrit and Prakrit Languages, Savitribai Phule Pune University

The image of the idol was first circulated on the Facebook page of Devlok Jinalaya Palitana, and was subsequently shared by Arpit Shah, a professional architect based in Kolkata, on his personal website[2]. Neither Mr. Shah nor the Devlok Jinalaya page have taken any initiative to correctly identify the idol.

It has been reported in *Śvetāmbara* literature that *Mallinātha*, the 19th *Tīrthaṅkara*, is said to be a female. Consequently, she is regarded as the only female *Tīrthaṇkara* of this particular time cycle. Although female depictions of the *Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha* are rare, some idols have been discovered which feature the said *Tīrthaṅkara* in female form, characterized by prominent breasts and braided hair[3]. At present, the tradition of depicting *Mallinātha* in female form appears to be lost, although a handful of such idols have been discovered and are actively worshipped.

Problem

The present study aims to demonstrate that the idol in question cannot be identified as that of *Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha* based on several grounds. Firstly, the idol possesses four hands, a feature not observed in any *Tīrthaṅkara* idols. Although the existence of idols of *Tīrthaṅkara Candra* with seven heads has been recorded, such instances are exceedingly rare[4]. Secondly, the idol is adorned with lotus buds, and their stems are present in the upper two hands. Thirdly, the idol lacks the presence of the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on the chest, a customary symbol associated with *Tīrthaṅkara* idols. Fourthly, two elephants are depicted above the upper two hands of the sculpture.

Texts

i) About *Tīrthaṅkara* – Analysis of relevant texts dealing with the iconography of *Tīrthaṅkara*, such as *Bṛhatsaṁhitā*[5], *Mānasāra*[6], and *Mayamatam*[7], reveals that *Tīrthaṅkara* idols should have two hands, with the posture being either lotus or standing straight. The presence of ornaments is discouraged, and the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on the chest is mandatory. The idol should be depicted naked with a shaved head. Therefore, based on the aforementioned discrepancies, it is evident that the idol in question cannot be identified as that of *Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha*.

ii) About *Lakṣmi* – The present discourse concerns *Lakṣmi* and her iconographic features, as elucidated in several ancient texts, including the *Mayamatam*[8], *Mānasāra*[9], *Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa*[10], and *Śilparatna*[11]. These texts describe the prominent features of *Lakṣmī's* iconography, which include the depiction of the goddess holding a lotus in her hands, accompanied by two elephants who are shown pouring water over her. Additionally, the idols of *Lakṣmī* are embellished with various ornaments, and typically feature either two or four hands. These aforementioned characteristics are commonly observed in depictions of *Gajalakṣmī*. The *Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa* specifically highlights the inclusion of the stem of the lotus in the iconography of *Lakṣmī*.

Correct Identification

The creation of a sculpture involves a degree of artistic freedom, which often deviates from the literal depiction of textual descriptions. Consequently, our examined idol displays some level of erosion, resulting in the obscurity of certain features. Upon closer inspection, however, two small elephants are visible on either side of the idol's head. The idol is well-ornamented. Lotus stems with buds are suspended from the idol's upper hands, while two female attendants are situated adjacent to the sculpture. The earrings, shaped like *Makara*, are also noticeable. Another similar idol, identified as a *Yoga Lakṣmī* rather than the *Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha*, is present in the Jain temple of Mt. Abu (Image 2). These attributes do not match with the *Tīrthaṅkara* description.

Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that the aforementioned idol was not created for the purpose of active worship, but rather for ornamental purposes within the temple. Analysis of the idol's sides indicates that it formed a constituent element of a *Devakoṣṭha* located outside of the temple, specifically above the *Gavākṣa* or *Candrāvalokana* (as exemplified by image no. 3).

Conclusion

The identification of the deity represented by an idol holds significant importance. Upon examining the attributes and comparable instances, it has been established that the idol under scrutiny does not pertain to *Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha* but rather belongs to goddess *Lakṣmī*. This case study underscores the crucial role of utilizing relevant texts in accurately identifying deities and comprehending the transformation of iconography throughout history.

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5. *ājānulambabāhuḥ śrīvatsāṅkaḥ praśāntamūrtiśca| digvāsāstaruṇo rūpavāṁśca kāryo'rhataṁ devaḥ ||* - Bṛhatsaṁhitā LVIII: 45.

6. *sthāvaraṁ jaṅgamaṁ caiva lakṣaṇaṁ vakṣyate'dhunā| Dvibhujaṁ ca dvinetraṁ ca muṇḍatāraṁ ca śīrṣakam|| ṛjusthānakasaṁyuktaṁ tathā cāsanameva ca| asaṅghri ṛju(jvā)kāraṁ syāllambahastadvayaṁ yathā|| āsanaṁ ca dvipādau ca padmāsanaṁ tu saṁyutam| ṛjukaṁ ca ṛjo(ju)bhāvaṁ yogaṁ tatparamānta(tma)kam|| - Mānasāra* LV: 36 - 38.
Nirābharaṇasarvāṅgaṁ manoharam| sama(rva)vakṣaḥsthale hemavarṇaṁ srīvatsalāñcanam|| - Mānasāra LV:46.

7. *Sthānakamāsanamuktaṁ siṁhapadmāsanānvitam|| - Mayamatam* 36: 284 (B).
Śeṣaṁ pūrvavaduddiṣṭaṁ yuktyā rūpaṁ nirambaram|| - Mayamatam 36:286 (A).
Pārvabāhulatāratnaṁ tattadvarṇaṁ dvibāhukaḥ|| - Mayamatam 36: 287(A).
Tyaktābharaṇamūrdhvajam| - Mayamatam 36: 282(A).
Note: *Śeṣaṁ pūrvavaduddiṣṭaṁ…|* 36:286(A) of *Mayamatam* points towards the description which one can find earlier dealing with the iconography of Buddha. The 36: 282(A) states that the idol should not have any ornaments.

8. *Lakṣmiḥ padmāsanāsīnā dvibhujā kāñcanaprabhā|| - Mayamatam* 36: 247(B).
Hemaratnojjvalaṃ nakrakuṇḍalaṁ śaṅkha [-kuṇḍalam]| - Mayamatam 36: 248(A).
Mekhalā kaṭisūtraṁ ca sarvābharaṇabhūṣitā|| - Mayamatam 36: 251(B).
Cāmaravyagrahaste ca tatpārśve tu striyāvubhe| - Mayamatam 36:252(B).
Snapayantau kumbhahastau hastinau ca pradarśayet| atha gehārcanāyogyā caturbāhusamanvitā||- Mayamatam 36: 253.

9. *Śeṣaṁ tu pūrvavatkuryād devīṁ(vi) pārśve viśeṣataḥ| airāvatadvayoś(yaṁ) caiva kuryādārāda(dha)yetsudhiḥ|| - Mānasāra* LIV: 33.
Caturbhujaṁ trinetraṁ ca …| - Mānasāra LIV: 20(A).
Pīnonnatastanataṭāṁ phāle bhramarakānvitām| - Mānasāra LIV: 23(B).
Makaraṁ kuṇḍalaṁ vāpi karṇayoḥ svarṇadāmayuk| - Mānasāra LIV: 24(B).

10. *dvivyāmbujakarā kāryā sarvābharaṇabhūṣitā| - Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa* 8: 105(A).
Prathamā caturbhujā kāryā devī siṁhāsane śubhā| - Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa 8: 106(A).
Bṛhannālaṁ kare kāryaṁ tasyādhaḥ kamalaṁ śubham| - Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa 8: 108(A).
Āvarjitaghaṭaṁ kāryaṁ tatpṛṣṭhaṁ ca karadvayam| - Devatāmurtiprakaraṇa 8:110(A).

11. *Muktāgauraiścaturbhirdvipapatibhiratho puṣkarodyadghaṭāsyā-nniryadratnābhiṣiktā karakamalalasatpadmayugmābhayeṣṭā| nānākalpābhirāmā drutakanakanibhā raktapaṅkeruhasthā ramyāṅgī suprasannā vitaratu vipulaṁ santataṁ śrīḥ śriyaṁ vaḥ|| - Śilparatna* 24: 9.
Śbhrebhadvayapuṣkareritaghataghaṭaścyotadviśuddhodakaiḥ snāyantīmatihṛdyarūpavibhavāṁ nīlollasatkuntalām| śubhrākalpaviśeṣavibhramarasāmuttaptahemaprabhāṁ vande bāhuyugaprasaktakamalāṁ devīṁ sarojāsanām|| - Śilparatna 24:10.

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Plates

Image 1

Image 2 Lakṣmī (c. 1150 C.E.), southern bay ceiling, Vimalavasahī, Mt. Abu.

Source: Encyclopaedia of Jaina studies Vol.I.

Image 3 A type of Devakoṣṭha, Ranakpur. Source: wikimediacommons

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Tattvārthasūtra: Propagation of multilateral thoughts by the Jinas through the accommodation of all ideas from the perspective of *Anekāntavāda*

Muhammad Tanim Nowshad[1]

Summary

Anekāntavāda is one of the major proponents of Jainism. Like many other concepts it has become a propeller to make Jain philosophy a special one in the world. It is a manifold doctrine of the Jain *Tīrthaṅkara*s and full of intellectual flavors of Indian metaphysics. It should be noteworthy for the present world as it shuns the *rigidity and stubbornness of unilateralism* in faith-based understandings, *monolithic beliefs or doctrines* and at the same time *monoculturalism*. In today's world when religious tolerance is becoming fragile and the application of logic before accepting and propagating religion is gradually disappearing or becoming parochial or prejudiced, the idea of *Anekāntavāda* can be a very good resort to mitigate the ideological intolerance. Tattvārthasūtra is a quasi-canonical text, developed on the basis of *Anekāntavāda* written in Sanskrit by Ācārya Umaswami . The incumbent essay wants to reexamine Tattvārthasūtra which as a sequel of *Anekāntavāda*. The essay wants to review its necessity and to find out the gamut of its applicability to generate ideological tolerance and thus to create a peaceful world, where people of all faiths and ideologies could coexist in a harmonious ambiance.

Jinas and Tīrthaṅkaras in Jainism

Without understanding the concepts of Jina and *Tīrthaṅkara*, it is quite difficult to understand *Anekāntavāda* and *Tattvārthasūtra*. Historically Jainism developed as a part of the *Śramaṇa movement* of India. The term *Jina* is very important to fathom the Jain *Śramaṇic tradition*. Despite the major sectarian or denominational differences there is enough common

[1] Chief Researcher, Mahavira Foundation, Bangladesh

ground among Jain groups that one may legitimately speak of 'Jainism' and the people who can be considered to be 'Jains'. The term Jain emerged from the term Jina, which means 'victor' or 'conqueror.' But in Jainism Jina refers to someone, who has established his complete victory over attachments and aversions. A Jain is someone who reveres and follows the personages considered to be the Jinas and regards their teachings as authoritative. This is the *sine qua non* of all forms of Jainism. The concept Jina is invariably of great importance in Jainism and the Jain traditions. One may think that Jainism's emphasis on nonviolence might foster mere meekness or docility. But in Jainism the Jina is a victorious one, who might have been—had he so chosen to be—a worldly king and a conqueror of the world. But instead, the Jina becomes a spiritual king and transposes the venue of war from the outer field of battle to an inner one (Babb 1996: 5).

The Jinas are also called the *Tīrthaṅkara*s. The term *Tīrthaṅkara* means 'one who establishes a *tirtha.*' Tirth has two meanings; it primarily means 'ford' or 'crossing a place.' In this sense the *Tīrthaṅkara* is one, who establishes a ford across what is often called (by Hindus as well as Jains) 'the ocean of existence.' The term also refers to the community, established by a *Tīrthaṅkara*, or the ascetics and laity, who put his teachings into practice. Hence such a community itself is motivated and engaged to cross a place (i.e. the mundane life) to be liberated. But it is to be noted that a *Tīrthaṅkara* is a human being, although he is an extraordinary one, who has conquered the attachments and aversions that stand in the way of liberation from worldly bondages. By means of his own efforts, and entirely without the benefit of being taught by others, he has achieved that state of omniscience, in which all things are known to him: past, present and future. But before final attainment of own liberation, the *Tīrthaṅkara* imparts his self-gained liberating knowledge to others so that they might become victors too. Thus, he establishes a crossing passage for other beings (Babb 1996: 5-6).

The great personages, who go by both appellations 'Jina' and '*Tīrthaṅkara*', are the central figures for all denominations and forms of Jainism. Not only are their teachings central to Jainism but they themselves are also Jainism's principal revered persons and hence their images, icons and idols are widely revered in the Jain temples (*Jinalayas*). However, it is crucial to know for the students of the Jain studies that the Jinas i.e. the *Tīrthaṅkara*s after their departure are not believed to interact with their worshipers in our sense. This is because they are no longer present in our part of the cosmos. They followed a specific trajectory; they came, achieved their omniscience, imparted their teachings to the disciples and learners and

then departed. And after their departing they became completely *liberated beings*. Hence, they have ceased to interact with the worldly actions and attachments. They dwell forever at the apex of the cosmos in an omniscient condition and rest there totally in an isolated bliss. But it is also true that their former presence left indelible impacts in the world. With their teachings they also created a social order through a community (i.e. *Caturvidh Sangh*) consisting of four great categories: *Sadhus* (monks), *Sadhvis* (nuns), *Sravaks* (laymen) and *Sravikas* (laywomen). The monks and nuns are those who are directly commissioned to exemplify the teachings of the *Tīrthaṅkara*s in their everyday's life. The term *Sravak* and its feminine counterpart *S*ravika mean the 'listener.' Here we can deduce that the *Sravak*s and the *Sravika*s are those who hear the teachings of the *Tīrthaṅkara*s. The *Tīrthaṅkara*s also left behind them a kind of metaphysical echo of welfare (*Kalyan*) generated by their presence that continues to reverberate in the cosmos and that can be mobilized by rituals and some other ways at a particular time (Cort 1989: 421-22).

According to the Jain cosmology an infinity number of *Tīrthaṅkara*s already came and went in the universe (Dundas 2002: 20). Indeed, there are *Tīrthaṅkara*s' teachings are running in other regions of the cosmos as in ours at the present time. In our region twenty-four *Tīrthaṅkara*s have appeared over the course of the current cosmic period. The last of them was Mahāvīra, who lived, taught, and achieved liberation some 2,500 years ago. In our world there will be no more *Tīrthaṅkara* until after the next cosmic time-cycle has begun. The twenty-four *Tīrthaṅkara*s who have come and gone in our region are the principal beings represented by images and worshiped by image-worshiping Jains. It is true that the Jains also worship deities who are not *Tīrthaṅkara*s. But in fact their worship is entirely subordinate to the worship of the *Tīrthaṅkara*s (Babb 1996: 6-7).

In the Jain cosmology the wheel of time is divided in two halves: *Utsarpiṇī* or ascending time cycle and *Avasarpiṇī*, the descending time cycle. Each consists of 10 x 1 crore x 1 crore *Addhāsāgaropama* (10 kotikotī *Sāgaropama*). Thus, one cycle of time (*Kalpakāla*) gets over in 20 *kotikotī Sāgaropama* (Samantabhadra 2016: 71). The current one is an *Avasarpiṇī*. In each half of the cosmic time cycle exactly twenty-four *Tīrthaṅkara*s grace this part of the universe. The first Tīrthaṅkara in this present time cycle (*Hunda Avasarpiṇī*) was *Ṛṣabhadeva,* who is credited for formulating and organizing human beings to live in a society harmoniously. The 24th and the last *Tīrthaṅkara* of the present half-cycle was Mahāvīra (599 BC–527 BC). It is even recorded in the modern history that Mahāvīra and his

predecessor, Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara existed in the world (Zimmer 1953: 182-183).

So we can surmise that other *Tīrthaṅkaras* might have lived in the world as well.

***Anekāntavāda*: the idea of non-absolutism propagated by the Jinas**

The Jain principles like nonviolence (*Ahiṃsā*), non-attachment (*Aparigraha*) and non-absolutism (*Anekāntavāda*) are relatively *nonanthropocentric concepts* of humanity related to nature, which attract people to embrace Jain path as a way of life. At the same time, one does not have to be a Jain inevitably in all cases in order to learn valuable lessons from Jainism (D Long 2009: XVI). The individualistic and experimental ways to attain truth evident in the life of both Mahāvīra and the Buddha, which resembled and later developed as two approaches through the Jain and Buddhist teachings respectively: *Anekāntavāda* and *Pratītyasamutpāda.* Both infer the multi-faceted nature of truth and the idea of interdependent origination. They have a clear postmodern ring, if we translate the sense from today's understanding (D Long 2009: 75). Mathieu Boisvert deduced form the very facts that the *Pratītyasamutpāda* , commonly translated as dependent origination or dependent arising, is a key Buddhist doctrine shared by all schools of Buddhism. It states that all *Dharmas* (phenomena) arise in dependence upon other Dharmas: 'if this exists, that exists; if this ceases to exist, that also ceases to exist'. The basic principle is that all things (Dharmas, phenomena, principles) arise in dependence upon other things (Boisvert 1996: 6-7).

In fact, *Anekāntavāda* - a fundamental doctrine of Jainism, is very important to understand the Jain ontology and soteriology. The Jain equivalent of the Hindu universalism can be found in the modern recovery by Jain intellectuals in the ancient teachings of *Anekāntavāda*, which manifest the doctrine of the multi-faceted character of reality. *Anekāntavāda* infers that any given topic can be viewed from a variety of valid perspectives. Only an enlightened Jina is capable of perceiving the whole truth of the matter or the fact (D Long 2009: 76). Hence, we can deduce that any single or any specific statement cannot describe the nature of existence and the *absolute truth*. This absolute knowledge i.e. the pure infinite knowledge or *Keval Gyan* is comprehended only by the *Arihants*. Other beings and their statements about absolute truth are incomplete, and they are at best some partial truths (Padmanabh S.1998: 91). Hence this doctrine says that all epistemic claims must be qualified in many ways, even including being affirmed and denied. It is to be noted that an Arihant is a *Jiva* (soul) who has conquered inner passions such as attachments, angers, prides and

greeds. He has destroyed four inimical *Karmas* and realized his pure self. *Arihants* are also called *Kevalins* (omniscient beings) because they possess *Keval Gyan* (the pure infinite knowledge). An *Arihant* is also called a *Jina* (victor or conqueror). At the end of his life an Arihant destroys remaining Karmas and subsequently attain *Mokṣa* (liberation); thus he becomes a *Siddha*. Those who become *Arihanta*s have a body, while the Siddhas are bodiless pure spirit. The *Ṇamōkāra mantra*, the fundamental prayer dedicated to *Pañca-Parameṣṭhi* (five supreme beings), begins with *Ṇamō arihantāṇaṁ* i.e. the obeisance to the *Arihant*s.

These five supreme beings are:

Arihant: The awakened soul who has attained *Keval Gyan*(*Kevala Jñana*) is considered to be an Arihant. The twenty-four *Tīrthaṅkara*s or Jinas, the revered founding figures of Jainism, are the *Arihant*s in the present time cycle. All *Tīrthaṅkara*s are *Arihants* but all *Arihant*s are not *Tīrthaṅkara*s.

Siddha (Ashiri): They are the souls, who have been liberated from the birth and death cycle. A Siddha is one, who has attained *Siddhi* i.e. the power of performing paranormal capabilities (White, Dominik 2012: 34).

Acarya (Ācārya): An *Ācārya* is the head of the ascetic order. Some of the noted *Achārya*s are Bhadrabahu, Kundakunda, Samantabhadra, Umaswami, Sthulibhadra etc.

Upadhyaya: An Upadhyaya is a preceptor or a teacher, who perceives and then teaches to enlighten his pupils.

Muni or *Jain monks:* The Jain monasticism refers to the order of monks and nuns in the Jain community and is divided into two major denominations: the *Digambara* and the *Śvētāmbara*. Although the monastic practices of the two major denominations vary to a great extent, the major principles of them are identical. Five *Mahāvratas* (Great Vows) from Mahāvīra's teachings are invariably followed by all Jain ascetics. Historians believe that a united Jain *Sangha* (community) existed 367 BCE, about 160 years after the Mokṣa, i.e. the liberation of great Mahavira (Padmanabh S.1998: 163).

According to the Jains every soul has the potential to become an Arihant. A soul which destroys all *Kashayas* i.e. the inner enemies like anger, ego, deception and greed, responsible for the perpetuation of ignorance, becomes an Arihant (Sangave 2001: 15). On the other hand, *Kevalins* i.e. the omniscient beings are of two kinds:

Tīrthaṅkara Kevalī: Twenty-four human spiritual guides, who are greatly concerned with the liberation of all human beings. So, after attaining omniscience they started to teach

them the path of salvation. It is to be noted that it is a premise of the Jain belief, only through the life of a human being the sentient beings can attain liberation. Nonsentient beings are always soulless (*Ajīva*) and as they cannot accumulate Karmas, no locomotion takes place for them in the Karmic universe. As a result, nothing takes place for their transformation i.e. their upgradation or degradation in the sentient universe. It has some similarity with the *Bodhisattva* concept of the *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. A Bodhisattva is anyone, who has generated *Bodhicitta* i.e. a spontaneous wish and a compassionate mind in order to attain *Buddhahood* for the benefit of all sentient beings (The Bodhisattva Vow: A Practical Guide to Helping Others 1995).

Sāmānya Kevalī: The *Kevalin*s, who are concerned with their own liberation only. The views of two sects of Jainism, *Digambara* (sky-clad) and *Śvētāmbara* (white-clad) differ on the subject of *Kevalin*s. According to the Digambaras, a *kevalin* does not experience hunger or thirst, whereas the Śvētāmbaras believe that a Kevalin has normal human needs. He also travels and preaches. The Digambaras believe that they do not act in the normal sense of the word. They sit motionless in *Padmāsana* and their bodies emit *Divyadhvani,* a sacred sound which is interpreted by their followers as the fundamental truth (Dundas 2002: 45).
In the second *Upanga Agama* i.e. the *Rājapraśnīya*, there is a dialogue between Kesi, a disciple of Pārśva, and Payasi, a materialist king. In this dialogue we have discovered that Kesi proved to the king the existence of Jīva and its ability to obtain *Kevala Jñana* (Flügel 2006: 113).

Anekāntavāda and the idea of Jain relativity

Jeffery D Long elaborately discussed on Jain contributions to South Asian religious thought especially its relevance to mitigate today's interreligious conflicts. The complex three Jain doctrines that refute the doctrinal bigotries and absolutism have been called by Jeffery the Jain '*doctrines of relativity*'. The first and foremost of these doctrines is *Anekāntavāda,* which claims that reality is complex, or *Anekānta* (literally means *non-one-sided*). We have discussed it slightly above. It deals with the intrinsic nature of existence and conceptualizes a corollary: The entities cannot be reduced to a single characteristic or concept, reality being irreducibly complex. Hence, we can embark upon the second doctrine, *Nayavāda*. It is named by D Long the '*doctrine of perspectives*'. This is an epistemic corollary of the first one – the nature of knowledge in the complex universe that *Anekāntavāda* posits. As the nature of reality is complex, anything may be known from a variety of *Nayas* or perspectives, which correspond to its multiple aspects. Hence this finally implies the third doctrine – *Syādvāda* or

the *'doctrine of conditional predication'* (named by D Long, but it literally means the *'maybe doctrine'*). According to this doctrine the truth of any claim that one makes about a particular topic is dependent upon the related perspective, or *Naya*, from which the claim has been made. A claim can be true in one sense or from one perspective (the technical meaning of the Sanskrit verb *'Syāt'* from the Jain philosophical context), false from another perspective, both true and false from another, although it may have an inexpressible truth-value from yet another etc (D Long 2009: 117).

D Long (2009) wrote, "Given the complex nature of reality, the fact that it can be approached from many partially – though not equally or fully – correct perspectives, and that the truth of our claims depends on the perspective we take, an attitude of openness and toleration toward various views is recommended (p. 116)."

In order to make the gist of these doctrines tangible D Long mentioned the famous allegory of the blind men and their elephant visit, which actually attributed to Siddhartha Gautama first, i.e. the Buddha. One day several blind men are brought before a king and asked to describe an elephant. An elephant is brought to them and they proceeded to feel it with their hands. One who grasps the elephant's trunk claims that an elephant is like a snake. Another grasping a leg claims it is like a tree. Yet another grasps the tail and says it is like a rope. Another feeling the elephant's one side claims it is like a wall. The blind men then proceed to argue amongst themselves about the true shape of the elephant. The moral of the story is that all blind men are partially correct. An elephant, indeed, possesses all the shapes that the blind men attribute to it. Everyone is partially incorrect, inasmuch as he denies the claims of the others (The earliest account of this story is from the Theravāda Buddhist Pāli Canon; *Udāna* 6.4:66–69).

From the Jain corollary only someone like a Jina, who can see the whole elephant, is in a position to say unequivocally, how the true shape of an elephant is. The rest of us are like the blind men, as we do not see 'the true reality' and 'the whole' as well. We can only say with certainty that we can conceive from our limited perceptions, although we deny that we cannot apprehend due to our limited sight.

However, the Jain doctrines of relativity do not constitute a form of *relativism* from the western viewpoint. A fully sighted person i.e. an omniscient Jina is certainly capable of apprehending the true nature of anything. This is very different from the conventional western relativism, which is deeply skeptic about the ability of a human being, if a human being really knows anything with certainty.

The doctrines of relativity are very much related to the claim of being omniscience of Mahāvīra mentioned in the Jain scriptures. In these texts Mahāvīra is shown answering profound metaphysical questions (considered 'unanswerable', or *Avyākata* in the Buddhist tradition) with both 'yes' and 'no', depending upon the perspective of the questioner. The soul is both eternal (in its intrinsic nature) and non-eternal (from the perspective of the karmic changes that it is constantly undergoing); the cosmos is both eternal (in the sense that it has no beginning or end and as such) and non-eternal (inasmuch as it passes through arising and descending cycles) and so on. Another rationale for these doctrines is to be found in the complex nature of the soul, which is true for all living entities. The soul has an unchanging, intrinsic nature; but it also experiences the *karmically* conditioned states. These come into being, exist for a while, and then pass away. According to the famous formula of *Tattvārthasūtra* 5:29, *utpādavyāyadhrauvyayuktam sat* – 'emergence, perishing and endurance characterize [all] entities.' In other words, there is a sense in which all things come to be, perish and endure. Later in the post-canonical Jain philosophical texts this understanding of reality caused an endlessly debate between the Buddhists and the Brahmins regarding the nature of reality, whether soul is permanent or impermanent. Contrasting themselves with the Buddhists, who upheld a doctrine of radical impermanence, and the Brahmins, who – particularly in the Advaita Vedānta tradition – upheld a doctrine of permanence, the Jains claimed that entities/souls are both permanent and impermanent in different senses and from different perspectives (D Long 2009: 119).

Jain philosophers thus believe that they have been able to present *'the true middle path'* between the ever-warring philosophical camps of the Buddhists and the Brahmins and claim the metaphysical high ground in terms of being able to integrate the perspectives of the other two into their own. Historically the Jain doctrines of relativity were a tool for affirming their superiority of the Jain perspective over others. But the potential utility of the doctrines of relativity in resolving disputes between seemingly incompatible philosophies has led to the popular contemporary view that these doctrines are an extension of the Jain commitment to Ahiṃsā in the realm of the intellectual discourse. But this fact is historically dubious as the characterization of these doctrines renders them attractive as a way to address the issue of how to remain committed to a particular tradition while also being open to the views of others. They provide an argument for *religious pluralism*, the view that there is truth in many traditions, and not only in one. D Long also asserts (2009), "If they are simply describing different aspects of the same reality, though, like the blind men trying to give an account of

the elephant, then the idea that they are all true – not in the same sense, but in various senses and to varying degrees – can be defended (p. 119-120)."

Relativity in the view of Śvetāmbara Āgamas: Mahāvīra's middle path and a comparison with the Buddhism.

A common problem faced by both the Buddha and Mahāvīra, according to the texts of their respective communities, was a set of Avyākata i.e. the unanswerable questions both from metaphysical and cosmological grounds, which raised controversies among the various schools of thought at that time.

As we read from the early Buddhist literature, the Buddha often refused to answer some questions considering them not to be conducive to liberation. But when he chose a method called the *Vibhajya* i.e. the analytical method in order to answer the questions, this involved clarifying the assumptions on the basis of which questions were posed. According to B.K. Matilal the Jain doctrines of relativity developed from a similar strategy on the part of Mahāvīra (Matilal 1981: 19-29).

The Buddhist *Majjhimanikāya (Cūlamālunkya Sutta)* lists the Avyākata questions as follows:

1) Is the *loka* (world, man) eternal?
2) Is the loka not eternal?
3) Is it (the loka) finite (with an end)?
4) Is it not finite?
5) Is that which is the body the soul? (Is the soul identical with the body?)
6) Is the soul different from the body?
7) Does the *Tathāgata* [the Buddha, a liberated being] exist after death?
8) Does he not exist after death?
9) Does he both exist and not exist after death?
10) Does he neither exist nor not exist after death? (Matilal 1981: 12)

The Buddha's approach to the Avyākata can be seen as an attempt to avoid philosophical extremes in order to walk through a *'middle path'* among the various currents of thoughts during his time. He simply refused to answer the first four questions, which are concerned with the beginning and the end of the world. The fifth and sixth questions, regarding the identity or non-identity/ non-self of the soul and the body that he addressed with his *Anātman* doctrine, denied an independent existing soul from the perspective of materialism or physicalism. The remaining questions he answered by negation.

Matilal suggests that the Jain doctrines of relativity developed from an analogous strategy on the part of Mahāvīra for dealing with the same set of questions. Unlike the Buddha, however, Mahāvīra replied to these questions in the affirmative, by answering them with a qualified 'Yes' rather than a 'No' – an approach taken by Jains to demonstrate Mahāvīra's omniscience because his profound knowledge of all aspects of reality is not an alleged idea but a premise of the Jain faith. Matilal characterizes this approach as an *"inclusive middle path"* in contrast with the Buddhist *"exclusive middle path"*.

The Buddha avoided exclusive attachment to views by rejecting all of them. Mahāvīra avoided such attachment by incorporating all views equally into his own by generation a holistic view. His positive use of *Vibhajya* i.e. the analysis of the questions into their components parts was illustrated in the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*:

[T]he Venerable Mahāvīra told the Bhikkhu Jamāli thus: … [T]he world is, Jamāli, eternal. It did not cease to exist at any time. It was, it is and it will be. It is constant, permanent, eternal, imperishable, indestructible, always existent.

The world is, Jamāli, non-eternal. For it becomes progressive (in time-cycle) after being regressive. And it becomes regressive after becoming progressive.

The soul is, Jamāli, eternal. For it did not cease to exist at any time. The soul is, Jamāli, non-eternal. For it becomes animal after being a hellish creature, becomes a man after becoming an animal and it becomes a god after being a man (Bhagavatı Sūtra 9:386; Translation by Matilal 1981: 19).

According to Jain tradition, an enlightened being or a Kevalin like Mahāvīra being omniscient is able to see the complexity of reality from all perspectives, and thus answer metaphysical questions from all of the various relatively valid points of view. Hence Mahāvīra posited that from the perspective of permanence the universe is eternal. On the contrary, from the perspective of change the universe is affirmed to be 'non-eternal' (D Long 2009:122).

Hence due to its intrinsic qualities the soul is eternal. As a result 'it did not cease to exist any time.' But from the perspective of its ever-changing, *karmically* determined experiences of *Samsāra*, and its rebirths in numerous different forms, the soul is non-eternal. The crux of the view is, the omniscient one's sight encompasses all perspectives. Mahāvīra thus addressed the Avyākata questions and answered according to their various dimensions.

Mahāvīra's omniscience underscores the importance of the existence of a unique, absolute perspective (another translation of Kevala is 'unique') for the Jain philosophy from which the relative validity of all other perspectives can be perceived and proclaimed. This

absolute perspective is the transcendental foundation, the necessary condition for the possibility, which constitutes the relativity of the Jain philosophy (D Long 2009:122).

It is ultimately a faith-based relativism rooted in the belief of the omniscient Kevalins rather than in the reasons alone. However even the later Jain philosophers did not revert from the idea of the necessity of an absolute perspective while forming the logic of their philosophy of relativity. The omniscience of the Jinas is their foremost priority.

Umāsvāti's *Tattvārthasūtra* and the metaphysical foundation of relativism

The Jain *Āgamas* do not affirm a simple and systematic presentation of the worldview of Mahāvīra and his immediate followers i.e. the *Ganadharas*. On the contrary, the texts include a wide variety of materials, ranging from biographical accounts of Mahāvīra and other *Tīrthaṅkara*s, cosmological treatises, minutely detailed accounts of the kinds of beings that exist in the world (including a variety of microscopic organisms), extensive treatments of ethics, monastic discipline, physiology, astrology, collections of prayers, narratives about gods and demons, detailed accounts of the various kinds of Karma, and discourses on metaphysical and epistemological issues (D Long 2009: 123).

The systematization of Jain doctrine was left to Umāsvāti, the tradition has preserved virtually no information on him, either historical or hagiographical (Dundas 2002: 86–87). Probably he lived between the second and the fifth century of the Common Era, when a variety of Indian philosophical schools began to coalesce and enter into extensive debates with one another. Umāsvāti composed the first known Jain doctrinal treatise in Sanskrit, the *Tattvārthasūtra*. It means "*On the Nature [artha] of Reality [tattva]*." This was the raging Buddhist period, when the Buddhists monks began to write the Sanskrit *Sūtras*. Through writing in Sanskrit the Jains and the Buddhists could engage Brahmanical schools of thought in debates rather than remaining isolated with their respective *Ardha-Māgadhī* and *Pāl*i worlds. These inscrutable languages were only understood by them.

The Tattvārthasūtra took ideas from the Ardha-Māgadhi canons (and in the Digambara *Satkhandāgama*), summarized them concisely and translated many of them to discuss the Indian philosophies of the time broadly. It contributed in giving an explicit and systematic expression to the fundamental metaphysical assumptions and implicit expression in the doctrines of the early Jain community. The discourses attributed to Mahāvīra in the canons. As an early systematic formulation of the Jain metaphysical position, this text became a

touchstone for all future Jain philosophical discourses. As a result, its definitions and characterizations of issues earned 'quasi-scriptural status.'

Most relevant to the Jain philosophy of relativity is this text's systematization of the concepts of *Satsāmānya*, *Niksepa*, and N*aya*. Satsāmānya means 'existence-' or 'being-universal'. It refers to the general characteristics of everything that exists. These are, according to Umāsvāti, "emergence, perishing, and duration (Tattvārthasūtra 5:29)."

The importance of this Jain theory has to do with the character of the soul or *Jīva*, and the process of its liberation, which contrasts with the Brahmanical tradition. It affirms the ultimate permanence of Brahman as the underlying ground of reality. But Buddhism affirms radical impermanence of existence.

Jainism affirms the coexistence of permanence and impermanence, similarity and difference in the nature of the *Jīva*s. A *Jīva* is held to be permanent in one sense. It is eternally possessing infinite bliss, energy, perception and knowledge. But in a different sense it is also impermanent as much as its karmic accretions are in a state of constant flux. In contrast to Brahmanical and Buddhist tendencies toward *Māyāvāda* – a teaching which relegates either change or permanence, respectively, to the realm of illusion – the Jains affirm a metaphysical realism, which ensures that both change and continuity are fundamental.

The pluralistic character of reality that Jainism affirms, claim that a variety of entities (*dravyas*) constitute the world and these entities have a variety of aspects and as a result it raises or can raise variety of perspectives as well, from which all issues can be addressed. The perspectivism that this view entails was systematized by Umāsvāti through the interrelated concepts of *Niksepa* and *Naya*.

A *Niksepa*, or 'gateway of investigation', is a topic in terms of which an entity can be analyzed. Umāsvāti lists the *Niksepas* as *Nāma* (name), *Sthāpanā* (symbol), *Dravya* (potentiality), *Bhāvatā* (actuality), *Nirdeśa* (definition), *Svāmitva* (possession), *Sādhana* (cause), *Adhikarana* (location), *Sthiti* (duration), *Vidhānatā* (variety), *Sat* (existence), *Samkhyā* (numerical determination), *Ksetra* (field occupied), *Sparśana* (field touched), *Kāla* (continuity), *Antara* (time-lapse), *Bhāva* (states), and *Alpabahutva* (relative size) (Translation by Tatia, quoted from Umāsvāti 1994, p. 7–12).

Each *Niksepa* addresses different questions about the entity. What is it called? How can it be represented? What are its potential and actual states? How is it defined in terms of its relations to other entities? What qualities does it possess? What is the cause of its existence? Where is it? How long will it exist? Are there different types of this thing? And which of these types is it? Does it actually exist? How many things of this kind are there?

How much space does it fill? With what other things is it in contact? Does it exist continuously? How long will it stay in the particular state remaining in it? What state does exist in it? How big is it compared to other entities of its kind (D Long 2009:125)?

Nayas are philosophical perspectives from which a particular topic can be viewed and its conclusions can be determined. Umāsvāti lists seven views– *Naigamanaya* (common view), *Samgrahanaya* (generic view), *Vyavahāranaya* (pragmatic view), *Rjusūtranaya* (linear view), *Śabdanaya* (verbal view), *Samabhirūdhanaya* (etymological view) and *Evambhūtanaya* (actuality view). The common view is how an entity is generally perceived – what one might call a 'common sense' or an 'unrefined perspective'. A generic view seeks to classify the entity. A pragmatic view assesses the entity in terms of its possible uses. A linear view looks at the entity as it is in the present moment. A verbal view seeks to name the entity. An etymological view uses this name and its relations with other words to discern its nature. And an actuality view is concerned with the concrete particulars of the entity.

Umāsvāti's commentators see the *Nayas* as partial views collectively making up a valid cognition (*Pramāna*). But the concept of Naya underwent extensive elaboration in the later Jain philosophical texts, so that several variants of this concept now exist.

Conclusion

From Umāsvāti's Tattvārthasūtra we can have a purview of relativism in Jain philosophy, which was embedded by *Anekāntavāda* and later from the canonical through the quasi canonical texts the philosophical arguments were reified and ramified as well. These arguments dissolved the unilateral and obdurate understandings of reality, world and the whole. Therefore, the arguments give space to reconsider the thought ventures and recast the possibilities of insight development. The threads of multiple thinking and accommodation of pluralism are vibrant in the arguments. The principles of *Anekāntavāda* and *Syādvāda* have found practical applications in almost all spheres of life such as personal, family, social and political (national and international) relations and led to the concepts of mutual respect, compromise, tolerance and forgiveness for each other's views and it is essential for coexistence and harmonious living. These aspects have been discussed by Acharya Mahaprajna (2010), Mukherjee (1994) and others in numerous books, essays and articles. We have only considered here Tattvārthasūtra's philosophical possibilities to mitigate ideological intolerance from the connection of *Anekāntavāda*.

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Lord Mahāvīra and Lord Buddha: An Analytical Appraisal

Tenzin Minkyi[1]

Abstract

Mahāvīra was the 24th *Trithankara* (supreme teacher) of Jainism. He was born in a royal family and received all the luxuries. He gave up his luxurious existence to pursue true knowledge. After a vigorous ascetism, he attained liberation and became the omniscient Jina (the spiritual victor). Another exponent, who shared a similar life story with Mahāvīra is the Buddha. He was royal by birth, yet he adopted an ascetic lifestyle to discover the real source of misery. He discovered the true wisdom and became The Buddha (the Enlightened one). Although these two exponents came with distinct religious and philosophical backgrounds, they have a lot in common. With a focus on their parallel personal histories and philosophical viewpoints, the author in this article attempt to demonstrate the similarities between The Mahāvīra and The Buddha.

Keywords: The Mahāvīra, The Buddha, Similarities, life history, Philosophical thoughts, Jainism, Buddhism

Introduction

Lord Mahāvīra and Lord Buddha are eminent philosophers of Indian philosophy, who provided a fresh insight into the socio-religious and philosophical traditions of India. Their thoughts and philosophy influenced scholars from different backgrounds. The great scholar like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was inspired by their thoughts and practiced non-violence, which is known as *Ahiṃsā*, in his life. Gandhi's monumental abhorrence of violence

tminkyi88@gmail.com PhD research scholar, Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, BHU

stemmed from the Jainist and Buddhist infusions into his Hinduism but, particularly, from his love of human beings. (Fischer,1957, pp.288) Besides their influence on the ethical view of Indian society, their non-theistic philosophy changed the picture of Indian philosophy. These two scholars being a practitioner of two different religious traditions, share many commonalities in their life stories and philosophy. The present paper emphasizes more on the parallel life histories and philosophical viewpoints of these two exponents rather than differences. It is structured into two sections: the first part discusses the lives of the two exponents and highlights the similarities between them, and the second part examines the parallel between their philosophical teachings.

Life History of the Mahāvīra and the Buddha

Lord Mahāvīra was the 24th *Trithankara*, who was born in the *Kshatriya* clan. There is a legend that Mahāvīra had two mothers Devānandā and Triśalā, which was written in many texts.[1] He was first conceived in the womb of *Brāhmaṇa* woman Devānandā but was subsequently moved to the womb of kshatriya woman Triśalā. The Digambara account rejects this legend as 'absurd' but the *Śvetambara*s strongly uphold its truth. (Chand, 1948, pp.22) His mother experienced fourteen dreams prior to his birth.[2] One of which was an elephant dream. Digambara accept sixteen dreams. They also assert that she (Mahāvīra's mother Triśala) witnessed two vases instead of one, filled with pure water. (Jain,1974, pp.33) It symbolizes the child would either become a universal monarch or a prophet processing all the possible knowledges.

Lord Buddha was also a prince, born in the royal family. His mother dreamt an Elephant prior to his birth. Later, Buddha was prophesied by Seven *Brāhmaṇa* that he would either become *Cakravarti* (universal ruler) or the Buddha (the Enlighten one). Nagrajji elaborately wrote on this issue in his book *Āgama aura Tripitaka*. Being a prince of the royal family, they received a proper education in philosophy and religion. Kshatriya clan at that time received more benefits than Brahmins in terms of gaining knowledge as they received knowledge not only on spiritualism but also on philosophy, literature, military, administration, music, and fine arts.

Buddha married a princess holding the name Yasodhara and Mahāvira to Yashoda. In the *Digambara* tradition (the sky-clad, naked mendicant order), Mahāvīra was celibate till his death and never married but *Śvetāmbara* asserted his marriage. Buddha and

Mahāvīra renunciated their home and family to attain spiritual awakening at the age of 29 and 30 respectively. Although Buddha accepted *Madhyama Marga* (Middle path), he practiced extreme physical austerity for six years prior to his enlightenment. Mahāvīra practiced vigorous asceticism to attain *Kevalajañāna* (Enlightenment).

After enlightenment, Mahāvīra and Buddha did not give teaching for weeks. According to the Digambara scriptures, even after obtaining *Kevalajañāna* (Enlightenment) at Jrimbhikagrāma, Mahāvīra did not break his vow of silence taken from the time of *Pravrajyā,* and wandering continuously for sixty-six days in silence, reached Rājagṛiha, the capital of Magadha. (Jain, 1974, pp. 57) Buddha did not give his teachings instantly after enlightenment and stayed in deep meditation. It is stated in *Majjhima Nikāya* "If I (The Buddha) were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me." (Bodhi, 1995, pp.260) Later, they preached their own philosophy and gathered many followers. Mahāvīra and Buddha established their own religious sangha and accepted lay women to become nuns, which made a four-fold division of their followers, monk, nun, lay men, and lay women. They both faced schism in their Sangha, which was created by their relative. Jamāli, the son-in-law of Mahāvīra, caused a schism among Mahāvīra's followers and Lord Buddha's cousin Devadatta created a schism in the Buddhist Sangha.

Mahāvīra and Buddha practiced rainy season retreat, Chāturmāsya[3] on summer season. Buddhist practiced this retreat for three months and it is known as Varṣāvāsa[4]. At that time, Sangha members remained in a particular location for several months without leaving that location's boundaries and the same practice is present in Jainism, where Jain monks stay at a place for four months. It is known as *Varshayoga*. Buddhist and Jain monks practice this retreat to incur minimum harm to bugs, insects, and other creatures, that are more prevalent during the rainy season.

At the time of these two exponents, religious leaders received strong support and respect from several kings and their kingdoms. Mahāvīrā and Buddha, being contemporary of each other, received support from many similar rulers. It is stated in the book *lord Mahavira*, "Śreṇika, the ruler of Magadha, was the husband of the youngest of these princesses, Cellanā, who became a lay follower of Mahāvīra of the Sramanopasak variety." (Chand,1948, pp.84) This shows that the king's wife was a follower of Jainism, and the king was aware of Mahāvīra. Śreṇika's son Kūṇika is represented in the Jain texts as a Jaina.

(Jain,1974, pp. 65) This shows the cordial relation of Mahāvīra with king Śreṇika and his son Kūṇika.

Although there was a strong influence of Mahāvīra on King Śreṇika and his Kūṇika, it would be inappropriate to state that they had no affiliation with other religions. In Buddhism, king Śreṇika and his son Kūṇika are known as King Bimbisāra and Ajātaśatru. These two played very active roles in Buddha's life. It is stated in the book *Lord Mahāvīra and His Times*, "In the Buddhist texts Śreṇika and Kūṇika are known by the names of Bimbisāra and Ajātśatru and both were devoted to the Buddha. (Jain, 1974, pp.65) It demonstrates that King Śreṇika and his son Kūṇika respected both religions. The indulgence of Mahāvīra and Buddha in the life of the King and his son suggests that the king and his son were Jain but were persuaded to become Buddhists by the influence of the Buddha. Mahāvīra and Buddha had not only shared a cordial relationship with similar rulers, but also shared many similar places for dwelling such as Nālandā, Rājagṛiha, Śrāvasti, Bhadrikā[5] and Vaiśāli.

Philosophy and Teaching of the Mahāvīra and the Buddha

In addition to the comparable live histories, Mahāvīra and Buddha also had many similarities in their teachings. One of the main teachings of these two exponents is *Ahiṃsā*, non-violence, towards all the living beings. They strongly refuted any harm towards living beings. Jainism is the first religious faith in the world which incorporated within it the principles of Ahimsa as a part of its teaching. (Kotturan,1973, pp.11) Jains believe the existence of life not only in humans and animals but also in plants and elements that it should not be harmed. Buddha strongly refuted harm towards sentient beings and his non-violent method influenced people from different religions. As it is stated in the book *Ahimsa: Gautama to Gandhi*, "Though the concept of ahimsa perhaps existed in one form or the other before him, it was only after him (Buddha) that it began to exert a lasting influence on the life and thought of the Indian people." (Kotturan,1973, pp.14) In the teachings of Mahāvīra and Buddha, they showed the principle of non-violence and equal respect to all. They refuted the birth-based division of caste, the authority of the Vedas and animal scarification and focused strongly on birth-based one's Karma.

Mahāvīra and Buddha taught Karma and rebirth theory, where the physical and mental activities lead to the accumulation of karma and continuity towards the next life. They also taught the method of ceasing karma and the rebirth process, which is known as the liberation method. According to Jainism, the practice of five great vows *Ahiṃsā* (Nonviolence), *Aparigraha* (Non-possessiveness), *Satya* (truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing)

Brahmacharya (Celibacy) should be done for the attainment of liberation. In Buddhism, Vinaya (rules of conduct) are the foundation of spiritual realization. There is a basic five vows, which are abstaining from killing, stealing, telling lies, sexual activity (celibacy) and intoxicants, which need to be practiced by Buddhist monks and nuns. These five are known as *pañcaśīla* (five precepts) and Jain's five great vows are included in these five precepts.

On the metaphysical level, Mahāvīra and Buddha refute the concept of God as the creator and God's scriptures. They believed that living beings take birth due to their past karma and their karma leads to the next birth. Through liberation, living beings can cease their karmic rebirth. Buddha taught that living beings can attend liberation without caste, class, creed or race distinction. This concept is also accepted by Mahāvīra. But his followers Digambara and *Śvetāmbara* shared a different view on the liberation of women. The Digambara believed that women could not achieve spiritual liberation because of their gender. She must live an ethical life so that she can be reborn as a man and attain liberation. But *Śvetāmbara* interpreted Mahāvīra's teaching as encouraging both genders to pursue ascetic life with the possibility of *Kevalajañāna* (*moksha*) by both. Svetambara's concept is closer to the Buddhist concept of the attainment of liberation by any human being.

Jain practices three jewels, *Samyag Darsana* (right intuition), *Samyag Jnana* (right knowledge) and *Samyag caritra* (right conduct) for the attainment of liberation. The entire Jain religion, philosophy and ethics are included in these three jewels. These three are present in the Buddhist eight-fold paths, *Samyag Drsti* (right attitude), *Samyag Sankalpa* (right resolve), *Samyang Vāca* (right speech), *Samyag Karma* (right action), *Samyag Ajiva* (right livelihood), *Samyag Vyāyāma* (right action), *Samyag Smrti* (right thoughts) and *Samyag Samādhi* (right concentration). These eight are also known as *Madhya Marg* (The Middle Path). Jainism accepts five *Jñāna* (valid knowledge), which are *mati-jñāna, śruta-jñāna, avadhijñāna, manaḥparyaya-jñāna* and *kevala-jñāna*. The meaning of these ***Jñāna is*** accepted by Buddhists.

Even though, Mahāvīra and Buddha focused on the cessation of suffering and attainment of liberation, their concept of liberation is different. Liberation in Jainism is experienced through liberating the soul from the karmic existence as they believe in the concept of *Ātman* (Soul) and on the other side, Buddhists strongly refute the concept of *Ātman* as liberation in Buddhism is attained through no-soul theory *(Anātmavāda)*.

Conclusion

Though the Mahāvīra and the Buddha share many similarities in their life history, the author has not come across any description of their interaction. Being contemporary with each other and sharing many similar places for dwelling such as Nālandā, Rājagṛiha, Vaiśāli, it would be difficult to say they were not aware of each other's presence. Buddha's cousin Devaduatta was aware of Mahāvīra. It is probably under the influence of Mahavira's teaching that Devadutta insisted on having the five special rules introduced in the Buddhist order. (Jain,1974, pp. 72)

Their parallel life histories influenced their philosophical perspective, that they shared many similarities in their teachings and philosophy. They refuted the authority of Vedas and God as the creator of the world, which gave a strong blow to the Vedic religion that existed prior to them. Although their thoughts correspond with each other to some extent, their main philosophy is different. Buddha, being an asserter of no-soul theory, focused strongly on removing the root cause of suffering, which is *avidyā* (ignorance), whereas Jain focuses on removing Karma through vigorous asceticism and the attainment of liberation by *Ātman*.

Despite these two exponents sharing both parallels and differences, what makes them special is they gave up their opulent princely lifestyles and endured all kinds of adversity to achieve true wisdom. Their life stories have not only given lessons but a ray of hope that we, too can attain perfect bliss if we practice their path. It will be beneficial if we study their philosophy not just for academic purposes but to discover the true purpose of our lives.

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2. Elephant, bull, lion, the goddess Laxmi, garland of flower, moon, sun, a military ensign, a large jar, lotus lake, sea, celestial residence of sages, a collection of pearls and smokeless flame of fire.
3. Chāturmāsya is Sanskrit term, where Chātur mean four and māsya means month.
4. Sanskrit: Varṣāvāsa Pali : Vassāvāsa, which is means Rainy (summer) season retreat
5. Pali: Bhaddiya. It is also known as Monghyr in modern times.

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The Spiritual Tapestry: Unveiling the Religious Beliefs and Way of Life in Purulia's *Sarāk* Community

Dr Anupam Jash[1]

Religion's impact extends beyond an individual's worldview. Furthermore, its societal influence can be readily detected. Various forms of rituals and concepts within religious practices exert influence over the everyday lives of individuals in diverse manners. India, our nation, is not exempt from this distinctive societal characteristic. A diverse population of individuals of many religions has resided in this nation for an extended period. The prolonged cohabitation of different religious communities has led to the discernible impact of one religion on the lives of individuals belonging to other communities. Despite the pervasive impact of technology and globalization, religious ideas remain deeply embedded in the fabric of society.

The religious ideas of the majority have been prioritized in our nation's understanding. Conversely, the religious beliefs of minority cultures have been given less significance in academic circles. This article focuses on the *Sarāk* community residing in the Purulia area. Currently, the *Sarāk* community comprises over 34,000 individuals in the entire West Bengal

[1] Associate Professor of Philosophy, Bankura Christian College

region. The *Sarāk* community has the highest population in the Purulia district of West Bengal.

In addition to Purulia, the community is also present in the districts of Bankura and West Medinipur. The surrounding states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha contain dispersed communities of individuals belonging to this particular group. The primary subject matter of this essay revolves around the intricate connection between *Sarāk*'s religious beliefs and societal traditions. This study paper mostly relies on data extracted from the publications, census reports, and research papers authored by diverse British officials who were active in the region during the 19th century.

An Overview of the *Sarāk* Community

Prior to the mid-19th century, the *Sarāk* village remained unfamiliar to the city's inhabitants. The British administrative personnel stationed in various regions of the Manbhum, specifically the Chotanagpur plateau, were the first to document the presence of this people. The *Sarāk*s were initially intrigued by the ancient temples and idols of gods and goddesses constructed in this area. Each temple and sculpture have small variations in their design and form compared to the conventional Hindu temples and deities.

The term "*Sarāk*" is derived from the word "hearer" in its literal sense. Originally, members of the Jain society were referred to as "householders." The predecessors of this community were followers of the Jain religion. This fact is primarily apparent through their antique buildings and sculptures. All of these sculptures depict Pareshnath and other Jain *Tirthankara*s. Scholars estimate that the dissemination of Jainism in the area occurred approximately 500 to 600 years before to the advent of Christ. The dissemination of this faith in this area was significantly influenced by Jain *Tirthankara*s and Jain merchants. According to prevailing belief, Jain Tirthankara Mahavira arrived in this area and, due to his ideas, managed to convert numerous individuals to Jainism. He achieved enlightenment in *Samad*

Pahar (now called *Pareshnath Pahar*) in Giridi district near this area. Following Jain *Tirthankara* Mahāvīra, other Jain religious teachers frequented this area. Consequently, Jainism proliferated in the Chotanagpur Plateau and its surrounding areas.

Conversely, merchants from regions beyond Bengal engaged in trade involving copper ore sourced from local mines. Numerous old copper mines have been unearthed by archaeologists in this area. The majority of these businessmen belonged to the Jain faith. The merchants provided financial support to build temples and idols dedicated to the *Tirthankara*s for the *Sarāk*s. A panel of specialists posits that all these academicians are, in fact, inhabitants of Gazipur in Uttar Pradesh. Some argue that the scholars' initial place of origin is in Western India.

Within the *Sarāk* community, there are discernible social divisions. However, it is important to note that this social division does not bear resemblance to the caste system prevalent in Hindu society. This class division does not hinder marriage ties. The *Sarāk*s of Purulia district can be classified into three distinct socioeconomic strata. The individuals in question are known as the *Atharshika*s, *Mahata*s, and *Khan*s. These three classes are commonly believed to have formed during the Middle Ages. Following the Bihar campaign, Mansingh, a commander under Mughal Emperor Akbar, arrived at the Manbazar district. He is drawn to a specific woman. The *Sarāk* group sought refuge in the neighboring state of Panchakot Raja in order to protect the dignity of their female relatives. Following this tragedy, several *Sarāk* households promptly departed from Manbazar. All of these families are members of the *Atharshika* group. However, several *Sarāk* families departed from Manbazar precisely seven days following the occurrence and relocated to Panchakot state. They are members of the *Mahata* community. Subsequently, the remaining members of the *Sarāk* family residing in that area migrated to the Panchakot state soon after the mentioned event.

All of these families are members of the *Mahata* clan. The *Atharashika* group is held in the greatest regard in terms of social respect.

Faith in a religious doctrine or system

The advent of Mahavira and other Jain *Tirthankara*s facilitated the dissemination of Jainism in the area, nevertheless, the *Sarāk*s did not embrace this religious faith for an extended duration. During the sixth and seventh centuries, with the revival of Brahmanism, they returned to practicing Hinduism. Despite adhering to Hinduism, certain aspects of ancient Jainism are evident in their religious practices. There are five primary gotras that exist within the *Sarāk* community. The next gotras are Adideva, Dharmadeva, Rishavadeva, Anantadeva, and Shandilya, in that order. These gotras are drawn from the names of Jain *Tirthankara*s. They venerate multiple Jain *Tirthankara*s.

The *Sarāk*s, similar to the local Hindus, venerate the majority of the Hindu deities. However, they abstain from venerating Goddess Kali, who is a prominent deity in Hinduism. They hold the belief that the worship of Goddess Kali entails violence due to the inclusion of animal sacrifice. They adhere to the idea of absolute non-violence in their religious practices. They venerate a range of Vedic deities including Lokayata deities.

Within the Hindu caste system, the *Sarāk* community holds divergent views regarding their social status. The elite *Sarāk*s believe that they are part of the Brahmin caste in the social hierarchy. They perceive themselves as possessing sattvic attributes akin to those of Brahmins. They adhere to a vegetarian diet on a daily basis. They abstain from engaging in any form of anti-social behaviour. They strictly abstain from endorsing violence in any aspect of their own lives. Conversely, another faction of *Sarāk*s believe that they share a connection with Vaishnavas under the caste system. Similar to the Vaishnavas, they highly prioritize non-violence in all aspects of life.

The majority of the elder individuals within the *Sarāk* group identify themselves as belonging to the upper caste. Brahmins typically refrain from consuming food in the households of castes other than their own. The majority of young *Sarāk*s identify themselves as part of the underprivileged social class. The majority of *Sarāk* families rely on agriculture for their economic sustenance. However, due to the underdeveloped state of agriculture in the region, these people face financial hardships. They initiated the request for reservation in government employment in order to enhance their economic standing. In 1973, the *Sarāk* teenagers formed a collective and initiated a movement advocating for their integration into the disadvantaged social groups. Subsequently, the government acknowledged and incorporated them into the disadvantaged communities. Currently, a significant number of individuals from the *Sarāk* community are engaged in several government sectors, capitalizing on this opportunity for preservation.

Conversely, there is a noticeable trend among many of the *Sarāk*s to re-embrace Jainism. Starting in the 1970s, there was a resurgence of religious fervour within this group. At this time, certain Jains belonging to the *Sarāk* community in this district underwent initiation and embraced *sannyasa*. The *Sarāk*s' increasing fascination with Jainism motivated several Jain factions in western India to do the same. Jain temples were founded in numerous villages predominantly inhabited by the *Sarāk* community, primarily through the financial backing of the Jain merchant community from western India. All of these merchant settlements were dedicated to disseminating education among the *Sarāk*s. Currently, a significant portion of the population in *Sarāk*s self-identify as followers of the Jain religion.

_Sarāk_s' social customs

Sarāk's religious beliefs are evident in their everyday activities. The members of this community adhere to their religious principles by incorporating them into their way of life.

The predecessors of this community were adherents of the Jain religion. Consequently, certain aspects of this religion are evident in *Sarāk*'s life.

The *Sarāk*s adhere strictly to a vegetarian diet in their culinary habits. In their daily lives, they consume non-vegetarian food like as fish, meat, and eggs. Additionally, they use components like onion and garlic, which are regarded vital in non-vegetarian cuisine. However, they do not utilize these ingredients in their other cooking. They adhere to the precepts of non-violence in their dietary choices, abstaining from consuming specific vegetarian foods like mushrooms. They hold the belief that it is feasible to cultivate numerous mushrooms from a single living mushroom.

*Sarāk*s consistently adhere to the dietary tenets of Jains, while abstaining from They incorporate a variety of veggies into their regular culinary practices. The Jain community abstains from using some vegetables in their regular meals. The distinctive culinary style of the *Sarāk*s is a result of the confluence of the local population and their predominant engagement in agriculture. Given that agriculture is the primary vocation, they cultivate a diverse range of crops on the agricultural area. Consequently, all of their cultivated crops were incorporated into their dietary consumption. Similar to other members of the surrounding community, they primarily consume rice and mudri as their major source of sustenance. Similar to the Jains, they adhere to a predetermined meal timetable. In their everyday routine, they abstain from eating during the period before and after sundown.

In *Sarāk* society, the consumption of any type of intoxicating substances is strongly disapproved of. They believe that when individuals are inebriated, their sensory faculties surpass their ability to regulate them. Consequently, individuals develop addictions to desires such as lust, wrath, greed, infatuation, and so forth. Notwithstanding this notion, a significant number of individuals from the *Sarāk* group frequently partake in the consumption of tea and

bidi. Although both of these substances are intoxicants, the *Sarāk* society does not stigmatize their intake.

The *Sarāk* families adhere to the principles of non-violence, abstaining from any kind of violence in both their personal and professional lives. They abstain from utilizing the term '*Kata*' in their everyday existence. They believe that this word carries an additional connotation of 'homicide'. In this particular situation, Risley observed that whenever the word "cutting" was said while food was being prepared, it was considered as a sign of bad luck and all the food would be discarded immediately. Not solely limited to violent language. Members of this community perceive the color red as a representation of aggression. Therefore, people refrain from wearing garments of the color red in their everyday existence. However, married women within this group adhere to the tradition of applying *sindoor*, similar to other Hindu women in the locality.

*Sarāk*s typically abstain from incorporating silk items into their attire. Silk goods are derived from silkworms through the process of sericulture, which involves the harvesting of silk by terminating the life cycle of the silkworms. This mechanism is correlated with violence. They primarily utilize cotton garments in their daily lives. Currently, a significant portion of the younger population is opting for silk products as their choice of clothes.

Conclusion

The dynamics of human society are ever evolving. The *Sarāk* civilization is currently experiencing a significant influence from these societal developments. Observable transformations are evident in the customary social practices of the *Sarāk* community. One can observe the dietary habits, clothing, and profession of the *Sarāk*s. However, the majority of the fundamental aspects of their conventional religion remain unchanged. Even in the present day, it continues to differentiate them from other nearby settlements.

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