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Understanding Indigenous Knowledge of Zoology through Jain Literary Tradition: An Interpretative Review of Hamsadeva's Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra

Siddhartha Das[1]

Abstract

The present article offers an interpretative review of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra, a medieval Sanskrit text attributed to Hamsadeva, a Jain poet-scholar of the thirteenth century. The text represents a significant yet relatively neglected source for understanding indigenous zoological knowledge in pre-modern India. Unlike modern zoology, which is grounded primarily in experimental science and taxonomic classification, Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra embodies a holistic mode of knowledge where observation of animals and birds is interwoven with ethics, symbolism, and lived ecological experience. Rooted in the Jain philosophical worldview, particularly the principles of ahiṃsā (non-violence) and reverence for all forms of life, the text presents animals and birds not merely as biological entities but as sentient beings occupying meaningful positions within a moral and cultural cosmos.

Through a close reading of the English translation of the text (1927) and its conceptual framework, this article explores how indigenous zoological knowledge was articulated within Jain literary traditions. It argues that Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra should be recognized as an important contribution to the history of zoological thought in India, reflecting an alternative epistemology grounded in ethical observation, cultural interpretation, and environmental sensitivity (Hamsadeva 1927, 42–47).

Keywords: *Indigenous knowledge, Jain literature, Zoology, Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra, Hamsadeva, Animal studies*

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a renewed scholarly interest in indigenous knowledge systems and their relevance to the history of science, environmental ethics, and cultural studies. Such approaches challenge the long-standing dominance of Eurocentric scientific narratives that often marginalize or overlook non-Western modes of knowing nature

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(Zimmermann 1987, 15–19). Within the Indian intellectual tradition, a vast corpus of texts dealing with animals, birds, plants, and ecological relationships exists, yet many of these remain insufficiently explored from the perspective of zoological knowledge. Jain literature, in particular, constitutes a rich archive of reflections on living beings, shaped by a distinctive ethical and philosophical framework (Dundas 2002, 96–102).

Among these texts, Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra, attributed to Hamsadeva, occupies a unique position. The very title of the work, literally meaning "the treatise on animals and birds", suggests a systematic engagement with fauna (Hamsadeva 1927, 1–4). However, the nature of this engagement differs fundamentally from modern zoology. Rather than emphasizing anatomical dissection or experimental classification, the text foregrounds behavioural observation, symbolic interpretation, and ethical contemplation (Hamsadeva 1927, 15–18). Animals and birds appear not as objects of domination but as co-inhabitants of the natural world, endowed with agency, temperament, and moral significance.

Methodology and Interpretative Framework

The present study adopts an interpretative and hermeneutic methodology rather than a positivist or empirical one. The primary source for analysis is the English translation of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra published in 1927, which makes the text accessible to modern scholars. While acknowledging the limitations inherent in working with a translated text, this article focuses on conceptual structures, thematic patterns, and philosophical orientations rather than linguistic minutiae (Hamsadeva 1927, 7–12).

The interpretative review approach allows for an interdisciplinary reading that draws upon literary studies, history of science, Jain philosophy, and environmental humanities. Instead of evaluating the text against modern zoological standards, the study seeks to understand it on its own terms, within its cultural and intellectual context. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for indigenous knowledge systems, where scientific observation is often inseparable from ethical values and symbolic meaning (Zimmermann 1987, 15–19).

Hamsadeva and the Jain Intellectual Milieu

Hamsadeva is traditionally identified as a Jain author active during the medieval period, a time when Jain intellectuals made significant contributions to philosophy, logic, grammar, poetics, and the natural sciences. Jain scholars were not confined to purely religious discourse; rather,

they engaged deeply with worldly knowledge (laukika jñāna) while grounding their inquiries in ethical restraint and spiritual discipline (Jaini 1979, 108–114).

Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra reflects this broader Jain scholarly ethos. The text demonstrates careful observation of animals and birds, suggesting familiarity with the natural environment and an interest in systematizing knowledge derived from lived experience (Hamsadeva 1927, 7–12). Hamsadeva's work thus exemplifies the Jain tradition of integrating empirical awareness with moral reflection.

Jain Philosophy and Zoological Sensibility

At the heart of Jain philosophy lies the doctrine of ahiṃsā, the principle of non-violence toward all living beings. This ethical commitment profoundly shapes Jain attitudes toward animals and birds. Unlike anthropocentric worldviews that privilege human interests, Jain thought recognizes the intrinsic value of all jīvas (living beings), regardless of their form (Jaini 1979, 108–114; Dundas 2002, 96–102).

This philosophical orientation fosters a distinctive zoological sensibility. Observation of animals is not driven by a desire to control or exploit them but by an effort to understand their nature and minimize harm. In this sense, Jain zoological knowledge is inseparable from ethical responsibility, a feature that clearly informs Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra (Hamsadeva 1927, 36–40).

Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra as a Text of Indigenous Zoological Knowledge

One of the most striking features of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra is its detailed attention to animal and avian behaviour. The text describes various species in terms of their movement, habitat, temperament, and interactions with humans and the environment, indicating a form of empirical knowledge derived from sustained observation (Hamsadeva 1927, 7–12).

However, the classificatory logic employed in the text differs from modern taxonomic systems. Animals and birds are not grouped according to anatomical criteria but are often categorized based on behavioural traits, symbolic associations, or their perceived influence on human life (Hamsadeva 1927, 15–18). This mode of classification reveals an indigenous epistemology that prioritizes relational understanding over structural analysis.

Human–Animal Relationships

Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra also sheds light on how animals and birds were perceived within human society. They appear as indicators of fortune, messengers of natural signs, and participants in

the moral order of the world (Hamsadeva 1927, 21–27). Such representations suggest an intimate relationship between humans and non-human beings, grounded in coexistence rather than domination.

This relational perspective aligns closely with Jain ethics, which emphasize interdependence among all forms of life. The text thus functions not merely as a zoological treatise but as a cultural document reflecting how medieval Indian societies understood their place within a broader ecological network (Hamsadeva 1927, 36–40).

Zoology, Symbolism, and Ethics

Beyond descriptive zoology, Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra integrates symbolic and ethical dimensions into its portrayal of animals and birds. Certain species are associated with specific qualities, emotions, or moral lessons, revealing how zoological observation was embedded within a framework of cultural meaning (Hamsadeva 1927, 30–34).

Such an approach challenges modern dichotomies between science and symbolism. In the indigenous knowledge system represented by Hamsadeva's text, understanding nature involves both empirical awareness and interpretative insight (Hamsadeva 1927, 42–47).

Indigenous Zoology and the Question of Science

From a contemporary perspective, it may be tempting to dismiss texts like Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra as unscientific due to their lack of experimental methodology. However, such judgments risk imposing anachronistic standards on pre-modern knowledge systems. Indigenous zoology, as reflected in Jain literature, represents a different but equally coherent mode of knowing nature, one that integrates observation, ethics, and contextual understanding (Zimmermann 1987, 15–19).

This mode of knowledge recognizes animals and birds as sentient beings embedded within a moral universe, rather than as objects for manipulation. In this respect, Jain zoological thought anticipates many concerns of modern environmental ethics, including respect for biodiversity and moral consideration of non-human life (Dundas 2002, 96–102).

Comparative Perspectives within Indian Zoological Traditions

To fully appreciate the intellectual value of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra, it is useful to situate it within the broader spectrum of Indian textual traditions concerned with animals and birds. Classical Indian literature contains several works that reflect systematic attention to fauna, including

Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra, Varāhamihira's Bṛhat-saṃhitā, and selected sections of the Purāṇas. However, while these texts often approach animals from administrative, astrological, or mythological perspectives, Hamsadeva's work is distinctive in its sustained ethical and observational focus (Hamsadeva 1927, 7–12).

Unlike the Arthaśāstra, where animals are frequently discussed in relation to statecraft, hunting, and economic utility, Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra refrains from instrumentalizing fauna. Its descriptions are not framed by questions of profit or control but by attentiveness to behaviour, temperament, and moral implication. Similarly, while Varāhamihira's Bṛhat-saṃhitā associates animals and birds with omens and cosmic signs, Hamsadeva integrates such semiotic readings with an ethical sensibility rooted in Jain values (Hamsadeva 1927, 21–27).

This comparison highlights an important feature of Jain zoological discourse: the consistent effort to harmonize empirical observation with ethical restraint. The Jain contribution to indigenous zoology thus lies not merely in the accumulation of knowledge about animals but in the manner in which such knowledge is framed and deployed.

Indigenous Epistemology and Jain Modes of Knowing Nature

The epistemological foundations of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra differ markedly from those of modern scientific zoology. Knowledge in Hamsadeva's text emerges through close observation, memory, analogy, and interpretative reasoning rather than experimentation or dissection. This mode of knowing aligns with broader Indian epistemological traditions, where pratyakṣa (perception) and anumāna (inference) play crucial roles, but are always embedded within ethical considerations.

In the Jain context, epistemology is inseparable from moral discipline. The commitment to ahiṃsā restricts certain forms of inquiry, such as harm-inducing experimentation, nwhile simultaneously encouraging heightened attentiveness to the subtle behaviours of living beings. As a result, Jain zoological knowledge often manifests as finely grained behavioural insight rather than anatomical detail (Jaini 1979, 108–114).

Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra exemplifies this epistemic orientation. The text does not seek to penetrate the animal body but to understand the animal as a living presence within a shared ecological space. Such an approach resonates strongly with contemporary critiques of reductionist science and offers an alternative framework for engaging with non-human life (Zimmermann 1987, 15–19).

Ethical Zoology and Environmental Consciousness

One of the most significant aspects of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra is its implicit environmental consciousness. Although the term "environment" in its modern sense is absent, the text reflects a keen awareness of ecological balance and interdependence. Animals and birds are consistently portrayed as integral components of the natural order, whose well-being is closely linked to human conduct (Hamsadeva 1927, 36–40).

This perspective anticipates key themes in contemporary environmental ethics, particularly the idea that human survival and moral integrity are intertwined with the health of the non-human world. Jain literature, including Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra, thus contributes to what may be described as an early form of ecological ethics, grounded not in abstract theory but in lived practice and moral injunction.

The ethical zoology articulated by Hamsadeva challenges modern anthropocentrism by insisting on the moral relevance of animals and birds. In doing so, it invites modern readers to reconsider dominant paradigms of human superiority and to explore more inclusive models of coexistence.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Decolonization of Science

The study of Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra also has important implications for contemporary efforts to decolonize the history of science. Colonial historiography often portrayed Indian knowledge systems as speculative or symbolic, denying them the status of "real" science. Such assessments fail to recognize the internal coherence and empirical grounding of indigenous traditions.

By foregrounding Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra as a text of zoological knowledge, this article challenges narrow definitions of science that privilege laboratory-based experimentation over observational and ethical modes of inquiry. Indigenous zoology, as represented by Hamsadeva, constitutes a valid and sophisticated engagement with the natural world, shaped by cultural values and philosophical commitments rather than technological limitations (Dundas 2002, 96–102).

Recognizing such texts as part of the global history of science not only enriches our understanding of the past but also opens new possibilities for dialogue between traditional knowledge systems and contemporary scientific practices.

Conclusion

Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra stands as a remarkable example of indigenous zoological knowledge within the Jain literary tradition. Through its detailed observations of animals and birds, its integration of ethics and symbolism, and its grounding in Jain philosophical principles, the text offers a holistic vision of the natural world (Hamsadeva 1927, 1–4; 42–47). Hamsadeva's work challenges modern assumptions about the boundaries between science, literature, and ethics, demonstrating that pre-modern Indian knowledge systems approached zoology as a moral and cultural enterprise as much as a descriptive one.

By interpreting Mṛga–Pakṣi–Śāstra within its intellectual context and situating it alongside other Indian traditions of animal knowledge, this article has sought to highlight its significance for the history of science, Jain studies, and environmental humanities. Further comparative research involving Jain, Buddhist, and Brahmanical texts on animals and birds may deepen our understanding of indigenous zoological traditions and their enduring relevance in the contemporary world.

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Between Religion and Sect: The Legal Status of Jainism under Indian Constitutional and Personal Law

Namita Jain*

Abstract

Jainism occupies a paradoxical position within India's legal structure. Although the Indian government recognized Jains as a national minority community in 2014, the statutory Hindu personal law regime—comprising the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, and related statutes—continues to apply to Jains by explicit inclusion. This Article examines the constitutional, statutory, and jurisprudential foundations of this dual identity, focusing on three pivotal points in the doctrine: the Supreme Court's articulation of Hindu identity in *Yagnapurushdasji v. MuldasBhundardasVaishya* (1966), the Court's treatment of minority recognition in *BalPatil v. Union of India* (2005), and the Madhya Pradesh High Court's 2025 reversal of an Indore family court decision excluding Jains from the Hindu Marriage Act. The Article concludes by analyzing reform options and the broader implications for legal pluralism in India.

I. Introduction

Jainism has historically maintained its own metaphysics, ascetic traditions, and canonical literature, distinguishing it from Vedic and post-Vedic Hindu thought. Yet in the statutory framework of Indian personal law, Jains are expressly included within the scope of "Hindu" for matrimonial, guardianship, adoption, and succession matters. This tension surfaced dramatically in 2025, when a family court in Indore refused to entertain divorce petitions filed by Jain couples under the Hindu Marriage Act (HMA), asserting that minority status exempted Jains from the Act. The Madhya Pradesh High Court promptly overturned this ruling.[1]

This Article examines the legal landscape that allows such a contradiction to arise and persist, arguing that India's constitutional pluralism—while protective of religious freedom—produces doctrinal inconsistencies in the classification of communities for personal law purposes.

II. Jainism as a Distinct Religion: Historical and Constitutional Foundations

A. Philosophical Distinctiveness

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Jainism rejects the authority of the Vedas, embraces a non-theistic universe governed by karmic processes, and emphasizes doctrines such as *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *anekantavada* (pluralism of viewpoints).[2] Scholars consistently identify it as an independent religious tradition—not a Hindu sect.The Jain tradition emphasizes an uncreated, eternal universe governed by karmic laws, rejecting the concept of a creator deity, which starkly contrasts with Hindu beliefs in a creator god like Brahma. Philosophically, Jainism distinctively rejects the authority of the Vedas and Brahmanical rites, embracing non-theism and the doctrines of ahimsa (nonviolence) and anekantavada (pluralism of viewpoints), which underscore respecting diverse perspectives and the complexity of truth.

Constitutionally, Jainism is recognized as an independent religious tradition in India, not a sect of Hinduism. It upholds unique scriptures such as the Agamas and Sutras rather than the Vedas. The Jain community strictly adheres to principles like strict non-violence, vegetarianism, and renunciation, which defines their religious identity distinctly from Hindu followers. Jainism also eschews caste divisions, which are prominent in Hindu society. It has its own festivals, religious practices, and denominations, primarily the Svetambara and Digambara sects. These factors collectively affirm Jainism's distinct religious identity based on historical, philosophical, and constitutional foundations.

B. Article 25 and the Constitutional Structure

Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion. Explanation II to Article 25(2)(b) states that references to Hindus "shall be construed" to include Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs "for the purpose of social welfare and reform."[3] This clause has been judicially construed as a functional legal inclusion rather than a theological statement.It does not imply that Jainism or other included religions are subsets of Hinduism but allows for social welfare measures and reforms traditionally applied to Hindu institutions to extend to these communities. Such a constitutional approach recognizes Jainism as a distinct religion but permits practical inclusion under certain legal frameworks for reform and welfare.This distinction is important because while Jains have a distinct religious identity rejecting the Vedas and different theological tenets, the state law pragmatically extends protections or reforms for Hindu religious institutions to also benefit Jains and others in similar contexts. This balances Jainism's constitutional recognition as a separate religion with the need for inclusivity in social reform efforts under the law.

Thus, Article 25 embodies a constitutional structure that respects Jainism's distinctiveness yet provides a mechanism for legal and social inclusion in matters related to Hindu social reform, highlighting a nuanced approach to religious pluralism and minority rights in India.

C. Minority Rights and the 2014 Notification

Articles 29 and 30 grant protections to cultural and religious minorities. Under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992, minority status is formalized through executive notification. In 2014, the central government notified Jains as a minority community.[4]The notification, however, did not amend personal law statutes.

III. Judicial Foundations: *Yagnapurushdasji* to *BalPatil*

A. *Yagnapurushdasji v. MuldasBhundardasVaishya*

In *Yagnapurushdasji v. MuldasBhundardasVaishya*,[5] the Supreme Court described Hinduism as an inclusive and elastic tradition, suggesting that Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs historically fell within its cultural umbrella. The Court's articulation, while influential, conflated cultural identity with religious autonomy and has been heavily critiqued.

B. *BalPatil v. Union of India*

In *BalPatil v. Union of India*, [6] the petitioners sought recognition of Jains as a national minority. The Supreme Court declined to issue a mandamus, reasoning that minority designation under the 1992 Act is a matter of policy within executive discretion.[7] The Court made several observations—widely considered dicta—suggesting that Jainism emerged from Hinduism's "essence."[8]

Critics like L. M. Singhvi, author of an earlier Minority Commission report, argued that the judgment failed to account for Jainism's distinct religious character.[9]

IV. The Hindu Personal Law Regime and Its Application to Jains

A. Statutory Inclusion

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 provides:

"This Act applies to any person who is a Hindu by religion and to any person who is a Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion."[10]

Identical language appears in the Hindu Succession Act, 1956; Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956; and Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956.

B. Reasons for the Inclusion

1. **Shared customary practices** among Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs at the time of codification;
2. **Administrative coherence** during the 1950s codification project;
3. **Reformist objectives** of uniformity and gender justice in personal law.

C. Resulting Dual Identity

Jains are:

- A distinct religious community for constitutional and minority-rights purposes;
- Yet part of the statutory category "Hindu" for personal law.

This doctrinal duality is the source of repeated litigation.

V. The 2025 Madhya Pradesh High Court Decision

A. Indore Family Court Controversy

A family court in Indore rejected approximately twenty-eight mutual-consent divorce petitions filed by Jain couples under the Hindu Marriage Act, arguing that the 2014 minority notification implied removal from the Act's scope.[11]

B.The High Court's Holding

The Madhya Pradesh High Court (Indore Bench) reversed the lower court, holding:

1. The 2014 notification **did not amend** the Hindu Marriage Act;
2. Section 2 expressly **includes Jains**, leaving no judicial discretion;
3. Courts must not make theological determinations where statutory text is clear;
4. Minority status has **no automatic effect** on personal law statutes;
5. Marriages solemnized through Jain or Hindu rites properly fall under the Hindu Marriage Act.[12]

C. Impact

The decision restored legal certainty and reaffirmed legislative primacy in personal law classification.

VI. Analysis: Identity, Classification, and the Architecture of Indian Legal Pluralism

A. Multiple Legal Identities

India's legal system assigns different identities to communities depending on the context:

- **Religious identity:** under Articles 25–26;
- **Minority identity:** under the NCM Act;
- **Personal law identity:** under the HMA and related statutes.

Jains uniquely occupy all three identities in different ways.

B. Legislative and Institutional Inertia

Parliament has never enacted a separate Jain personal law. Reasons include:

- Concerns about **fragmentation** of personal law;
- Historical inertia from the 1950s codification project;
- Political reluctance given debates over a **Uniform Civil Code**.
-

VII. Reform Possibilities

A. Legislative Clarification

Parliament could clarify that minority recognition under the NCM Act does not affect personal law statutes unless expressly amended.

B. Enactment of a Jain Personal Law Code

A separate code would enhance religious autonomy but may increase personal law fragmentation.

C. Movement Toward a Uniform Civil Code

A secular civil code could eliminate inter-religious disparities but remains politically contentious.

VIII. Conclusion

The legal identity of Jainism in India reflects a deeper tension inherent in constitutional pluralism: the divergence between religious identity and statutory classification. While the Madhya Pradesh High Court's 2025 judgment resolves immediate uncertainty, broader questions remain about the structure and future of personal law. Jainism's dual legal identity—both distinct and subsumed—continues to challenge the coherence of Indian personal law and the vision of a pluralistic constitutional order.

Footnotes

1. *See* Order, Madhya Pradesh High Court (Indore Bench), Mar. 24, 2025 (unreported).
2. *See generally*Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (1979).
3. *See* India Const. art. 25(2)(b) & Explanation II.
4. Government of India Notification, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Jan. 27, 2014.
5. *Yagnapurushdasji v. MuldasBhundardasVaishya*, AIR 1966 SC 1119 (India).
6. *BalPatil v. Union of India*, (2005) 6 SCC 690 (India).

7. *Id.*
8. *Id.*
9. L. M. Singhvi, Report of the National Commission on Minorities (Gov't of India 2007).
10. Hindu Marriage Act, No. 25 of 1955, § 2 (India).
11. See Family Court, Indore (M.P.), Misc. Petitions on Mutual Consent Divorce, Feb.–Mar. 2025 (unreported).
12. Order, Madhya Pradesh High Court (Indore Bench), Mar. 24, 2025 (unreported).

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An Enquiry into the Jaina Concept of Reality and its Comparison with the Ideas of the so-called Brahminical Religious Texts

Abhigyan Dutta*

Abstract

Jainism and the so called Brahminical religion (popularly called Hinduism) both are one of the most ancient religions of India. They both originated in the soil of India. As a result, they both have some similarities in common. But they have some dissimilarities. This article would discuss about them.

Keywords

Jainism, Brahminical, Religion, Karma, Dharma

Jainism is one of the religions that originated in the land of India and contributed to its culture and philosophy in many ways. The antiquity of this religion is much debated. Scholars like A.N. Upadhye argue that the antiquity of this religion goes back to prehistoric times. (Upadhye 1975) But to support this claim, not enough archaeological evidence is available. A common consensus among scholars is that this religion flourished during the 6th Century CE along with Buddhism. But the origin of this religion is much older. In the words of Upinder Singh we can safely say, "The Jaina doctrine is much older than the Buddhist one, but it is difficult to say precisely how old it is. The Buddha and Mahavira were contemporaries and there are some similarities between their teachings, for instance in their rejection of the authority of the Veda, their non-theistic doctrine, emphasis on renunciation and human effort as a means to attaining salvation, and establishment of a monastic order for men and women. However, there are also several marked differences in their philosophical ideas". (Singh 2020)
Now, the thought of so called Brahminical religious texts (corpus of Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and other texts) which would convey the highest philosophical understanding, had certain similarities and dissimilarities with Jaina school of thought. This paper would investigate into this matter.

If we want to get a glimpse of Jaina philosophy, we can go through the following passage:

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"The Jaina criticism of other philosophical systems is that their pronouncements about reality—for instance, on whether reality is eternal or non-eternal, changing or unchanging—represent a single (ekanta), partial, and extreme view of things. The views of other schools are not condemned as absolutely invalid but as partially true statements (nayas), which cannot lay claim to absolute validity. Jaina doctrine insists that reality is manifold (anekanta) (see Jaini [1979], 2001 for details of Jaina doctrines). Everything that exists (sat, i.e., being) has three aspects—substance (dravya), quality (guna), and mode (paryaya). The Jaina doctrine of anekantavada (doctrine of the manifold nature of reality) holds that reality is very complex and has multiple aspects. The doctrines of anekantavada and syadavada (the doctrine of maybe) emphasize the relativity of all knowledge. According to syadavada, every judgement we make is relative to the particular aspect of the object we are judging and the point of view from which we judge it. No judgement is true without qualification. The essential point behind syadavada and anekantavada is that reality cannot be grasped in its entirety and complexity. All that is possible are a number of partially true statements about it. Every statement about reality should be prefixed with the word syat ('maybe', or more appropriately in this context, 'in some respect'). Another word that is added to all such statements is eva (in fact). Together, the words syat and eva, added to all statements, emphasize that such statements refer only to a particular aspect of reality from a particular perspective.So, with the addition of 'syateva', the statement that the jiva (soul) is eternal would be accepted as partially true from a certain point of view. But the statement that the jiva is not eternal, preceded with the words syateva, would also be accepted as partially true from another point of view. Every statement about any aspect of reality is conditional on four factors—the specific being (sva-dravya), specific location (sva-kshetra), specific time (sva-kala), and the specific state (sva-bhava) of the thing that is being spoken of. These ideas are further developed to construct the theory of sapta-bhangi-naya (the seven-fold nayas). Existent reality consists of three basic categories—sentient (i.e., that which has consciousness), material, and neither sentient nor material. The sentient category is represented by the jiva (variously translated as sentient essence, life monad, or soul). Matter is the second category and is made of aggregates of atoms (pudgala), which have form, colour, taste, and smell, and can be touched and felt. The third category is known as arupi-ajiva. It includes four substances (dravya)—space (akasha), the principle of motion (dharma), the principle of rest (adharma), and time (kala)." (Singh 2020)

Now, if we examine the doctrine of the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita we can find some similarities. In the 1st Mandala of Rig Veda, 164thSukta, 46th Mantra it is said:

'EkaṃSadviprāBahudhā Vadanti' meaning the truth is one but the learned people define it in many different ways. It seems similar to the concept of anekantavada in the way that one truth or reality might have many aspects. However, the concept of dharma is different. In the so-called Brahminical religious texts, the word Dharma stands for righteousness and one's own duties and as we have seen in Jainism it stands for the principle of motion.

The Jains have the concept of an eternal universe divided into infinite number of cycles, utsarpini (period of improvement) and avasarpini (period of decline). In so called Brahminical religion there is also a concept of four yugas, each being worse than the previous. But in the words of A.L. Basham, "Unlike the cosmology of the Buddhists and Hindus, that of the Jainas involves no cataclysms of universal destruction." (Basham 1954)

Both in Jainism and the so-called Brahminical religion there are concepts of Kalpa Vriksha, the wish-fulfilling tree.

There is a concept of nyavada in Jainism:

"The object of knowledge, thus, is highly complex; it consists of substances, qualities, and modifications; it is extended over three times (past, present, and future) and infinite space; and it is simultaneously subjected to origination, permanence, and destruction. It can be fully known only in omniscience (kevala-jnāna), which is not possessed by ordinary human beings who perceive through their organs of sense. What they know is only partial; they are like blind men who touch some part or other of an elephant and variously describe it as a fan, a pillar, a snake, etc. Thus, the apprehension of an ordinary human being is partial, and therefore valid only from a particular point of view. This is what is called nayavāda in Jainism." (Upadhye 1975)

This concept of elephant felt by different blind persons can be found in both Buddhism and Hindu texts.

However, the Jaina concept of Karma is much different from that of Brahminical religion:

"Jaina philosophy conceives of an infinite number of jivas. The jiva does not have a form of its own. In the way in which light from a lamp fills up a room, it acquires the size and form of the body it inhabits and becomes co-extensive with it. The jiva has three main qualtities—consciousness (chaitanya), bliss (sukha), and energy (virya). Jaina doctrine holds that jivas transmigrate due to karma, but its ideas of transmigration and karma are unique. Karma is understood as consisting of material particles floating about in space. Karmic matter is of different kinds; some have a directly negative effect on the jiva, others do not. The major culprits are the mohaniya (delusion-causing) karmas. The karma particles obscure and obstruct

the consciousness, bliss, and energy of the jiva, in the in which dust mars the reflective power of a mirror. The karma particles are attracted towards the jiva due to its association with the passions, desire, and hatred. The state when the karma particles actually begin to flow towards the jiva to bind it is known as asrava (flow). A jiva associated with karma particles is considered to be a jiva in bondage (bandha). Some jivas have an important quality known as bhavyatva—the capability of becoming free—that does not get affected or overwhelmed by the karma particles. By exertion and right knowledge, the influx of fresh karma can be stopped (samvara). The next stage is that of nirjara (wearing out). In successive stages, though a transformation of consciousness and behaviour, the jiva can move from bondage to liberation. When the last karma particle has moved away from the jiva, ignorance disappears, and it is restored to its omniscient, ideal state. The cycle of samsara is broken and moksha is attained. The ladder leading from ignorance to omniscience is visualized as having 14 rungs or stages of purification called gunasthanas. One who has entered the 13th stage of kevalajnana is known as an arhat. An arhat who has also already acquired the capability of teaching the doctrine is known as a tirthankara. The 14th stage is achieved by an arhat immediately before his death, when he is liberated from all activity and from the last few remaining karma particles. The final abode of liberated souls is a world called siddha-loka." (Singh 2020)

However, in Brahminical religion the concept of Karma is different. It refers to the the universal law of cause and effect, meaning every action (physical, mental, verbal) has consequences, shaping one's destiny and cycle of rebirth.

Thus, Jainism and the Brahminical religion have many similarities and dissimilarities.

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॥ जैन भवन॥

Jain Lives in Kundahit: A Field Study

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Introduction:

Kundhit, the main block headquarters under Kundhit Block of Jamtara district in Jharkhand, is a growing and dynamic village. At the same time, this Kundhit block centre–cum–village is also inhabited by members of the Sarak community. Administratively, it falls under the Nala police station. On 28/12/2023 and 30/12/2023, a field survey was conducted in this village. On the basis of interviews collected from nearly 36 families and several pieces of information gathered during the survey, the present report has been prepared. Approximately 42 Sarak households reside in this village. Among the Sarak inhabitants, both the surnames Mondal and Maji are found, though those bearing the surname Mondal are numerically dominant.

Objectives of the Research:

In several parts of Bengal and Jharkhand belonging to the ancient Bhūm region, Jain lay followers, or Saraks, who are regarded as the indigenous inhabitants of these areas, continue to reside even today. Therefore, it can hardly be doubted that since very ancient times they have played a significant and driving role in shaping the economic, social, and cultural structures of these regions. It is, however, unfortunate but true that although some scattered studies focusing on the ancient and early medieval periods have examined the socio-economic and cultural profile of this ancient and traditional Sarak community, no detailed research has been conducted on the multidimensional aspects of Sarak life in modern times, more specifically, from the post-Independence period to the recent past. Keeping this limitation in mind, the present fieldwork-based research has been undertaken with several objectives, which are documented below:

Firstly, to highlight the various aspects of the economic life of the Sarak people of the village.

Secondly, to gain a clear understanding of the layout of houses and the different structural features of Sarak households in the area.

Thirdly, to present, on the basis of survey data, the issues of public health, infrastructure, family planning, and sanitation among the Sarak families.

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Fourthly, to examine the position and quality of education among the Saraks in recent decades and in the present, along with the local educational infrastructure and its comparative impact on the Saraks vis-à-vis neighbouring communities.

Fifthly, to offer an objective discussion on the similarities with, and deviations from, mainstream Jainism through an examination of the prevailing religious and cultural practices of Sarak life in the village.

Research Methodology:

As mentioned earlier, the present report is based on a field survey conducted in Kundhit village between 28 December 2023 and 30 December 2023. In order to conduct the survey in a systematic manner, a draft questionnaire consisting of planned research questions was prepared. On the basis of this questionnaire, surveys were conducted among Sarak households of the village, and information was collected primarily through interviews with family members according to the pre-designed questions. These data were then analysed and interpreted through various perspectives of social science and documented in the form of the present report.

Livelihood:

On the basis of medieval literary texts, several research articles, and archaeological evidence, it is assumed that the traditional occupations of the Sarak community included metal extraction, metal purification, manufacture of metal goods, weaving, and above all moneylending. However, none of these occupations has any connection with the present-day Sarak life of Kundhit. For the past several centuries, they have been primarily engaged in agriculture. Compared to neighbouring communities, local Saraks possess relatively larger tracts of agricultural land. Paddy cultivation is their principal agricultural activity. Although agriculture has traditionally been the main occupation of Sarak families, water scarcity and the consequent dependence on single-crop cultivation in a year have recently led many families to gradually move away from farming. In several households, a tendency has also been observed to employ labourers instead of cultivating the land themselves. Those who have withdrawn from agriculture due to various risks now mostly work in private companies or factories either within the district or outside the state. In this context, mention may be made of Kalyan Mondal, aged about fifty-two, who works in Goa in the private sector. Examples of engagement in grocery shops, wage labour, and small businesses are also not uncommon.

There are also one or two individuals working as priests in Jain temples in other states. In this regard, the names of Prashanta Mondal, a priest at a Jain temple in Madhuban, and Tapan Kumar Mondal, who serves as a caretaker at a Jain dharmashala in the same place, deserve mention. Besides these, Sarak residents employed in government services are also found in the village. Notably among them are Sukdeb Maji, a former mathematics professor who once took various legal initiatives demanding reservation for the Sarak community, Aparna Mondal, a primary school teacher, and Prabin Mondal, a para-teacher. Apart from all these, there is also a medicine shop run by Saraks and two or three small grocery shops in the village.

Housing, Household Arrangement, and Related Aspects:

Most of the houses in the village are either fully pucca or semi-pucca; mud houses are almost nonexistent. According to elderly villagers, however, two or three decades ago, mud houses and even double-storied mud houses were quite common among the Saraks. Though not stated directly, they attribute the disappearance of such houses to the present imitative social order and consumption-oriented modernity. The few remaining mud houses in the era of pucca constructions genuinely reflect the poverty of those families. Alongside single-storied pucca houses, there are now several double-storied houses, which indicate the relative economic stability of local Saraks. Semi-pucca houses are generally roofed with tin sheets or tiles. Typically, houses contain two to three rooms, though in the case of joint families the number sometimes goes up to six or seven rooms. At present, however, joint families are very few. Except for one or two houses, almost every household in the village has a toilet. Many of these toilets were constructed under central government schemes, as learned during the survey. During interviews, almost everyone reported using toilets, although during the survey period, while staying at the village Jain temple, the surveyor personally observed many Sarak individuals going out into the open for morning defecation.

Sarak families in Kundhit generally use coal as fuel; the use of gas and firewood is quite limited. In some well-off households, cooking gas is used regularly, but in most homes its use is very restricted. Most respondents identified the rising cost of cooking gas as the main reason. Every house has a designated cooking area—some with a separate kitchen, others with a small kitchen space adjoining the veranda. Usually, coal or wood stoves are found inside the kitchen, while gas stoves are placed in a specific corner of the veranda.

Every Sarak household in the village has an electricity connection. However, when it comes to drinking water, many respondents expressed serious concerns. Although under the Jharkhand government's initiative, the "Har Ghar Jal" scheme of the Prime Minister's Jal Jeevan Mission has extended water pipelines to almost every house, water supply has not yet started. In addition, about 12–14 relatively well-off or semi-well-off Sarak households have underground tube wells. Several houses also have traditional wells, though for drinking water nearly everyone depends on a government tap located within 500 metres at one end of the Sarak settlement. Overall, the water appears to have a relatively high mineral content. Some scientifically aware Sarak residents attribute this to the stony soil and mineral-rich zone of the region, which affects the water layers and leads to higher mineral concentration.

Although there is no formal government drainage system within the Sarak settlement, many houses have both open and covered drainage channels, about half of which connect to soak pits. Overall, the drainage system reflects a typical rural pattern.

Animal Husbandry:

Approximately 30 percent of Sarak families in the village own cows. Cow's milk is an important component of their diet, and many households also sell milk locally. Cow dung is used to make fuel cakes. Goats are found in only a few households. Although bullocks were once kept for agricultural purposes, they are rarely seen today due to difficulties in maintenance and the declining utility of bullocks in modern agriculture. In contrast, in neighbouring Harijan and Bauri settlements, along with cows, bullocks, buffaloes, and goats are still commonly reared.

Transport System and Modes of Travel:

Most households in the village own both bicycles and motorbikes. Even among some lower-middle-class families, motorbikes are common. When asked about this, many respondents explained that since there is no reliable and regular public transport system in the surrounding area, personal motorbikes have become essential. The Rajnagar Road runs through the village, and the Dumka–Jamtara Road is about one kilometre away. Although the roads are in good condition, public transport facilities are extremely poor. Only a handful of buses or vehicles operate throughout the day, and fares are relatively high considering the distances.

Educational Structure:

Primary, upper-primary, and high schools are located within the Kundhit block area, all within 1 to 1.5 kilometres from the Sarak settlement. A degree college is also located in Kundhit, about 2 to 2.5 kilometres away. The nearest university is Sidho Kanhu University at Dumka, approximately 35–40 kilometres away. The number of educated Sarak youths in the village is not insignificant. Many young men have completed BA or BSc degrees, and several have undergone industrial training. A few Sarak students are also pursuing engineering (B.Tech) degrees. Similar educational trends are visible among women. In this context, mention may be made of the daughter of Shyamapada Maji's paralysed brother, who, despite severe family constraints, is currently pursuing a B.Tech degree at NIT Jamshedpur. Since the Sarak community is not listed under any recognized category in Jharkhand's caste certification framework, many Sarak youths, despite higher education, remain deprived of reservation benefits, making employment opportunities difficult to access.

Banking System:

A Jharkhand State Gramin Bank is located adjacent to the Sarak settlement. Additionally, the State Bank of India's Kundhit branch is situated near the BDO office, a little farther away. As a result, Sarak residents, as well as people from other communities, face little difficulty in banking matters. Every Sarak family has at least one bank account per household. Although an ATM is located near the block office, people rarely use it, and respondents reported that it often runs out of cash. Besides banking, several well-off and semi-well-off families have also taken out life insurance policies. However, during the survey, many respondents were reluctant to give clear answers regarding loans and insurance matters.

Public Health, Health Infrastructure, and Related Issues:

In discussing the village's health conditions, issues such as diseases, treatment patterns, medical institutions, medicines, and maternal health come into focus. During the two-day stay in the Sarak settlement, detailed surveys were conducted in nearly every Sarak household using questionnaires. Based on the collected data, it can be stated that in about 40 percent of families, members aged fifty or above suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Among them, around 80 percent regularly take medication. Heart-related problems were found only in one or two individuals, who also take regular medication. Digestive issues such as acidity are present, to varying degrees, in almost every household. In

addition, a case of filariasis was observed in one Sarak family, a disease commonly found in rural agricultural regions of Jharkhand. Filariasis is a parasitic disease caused by worms that enter the body through the skin of bare feet and later multiply, leading to severe swelling and eventual tissue damage. Due to the Jharkhand government's initiatives in providing medicines and preventive vaccinations, the prevalence of filariasis has been significantly reduced, though not completely eradicated. Since the village is close to the block headquarters, a primary health centre and block hospital are nearby and are commonly used for basic medical needs. For private treatment, villagers usually travel about 18 kilometres to Nala. For childbirth, the Jamtara district hospital, about 25 kilometres away, and the Nala hospital, around 18 kilometres away, are the main options. With the spread of modernity and awareness of public health, no one now resorts to traditional methods for childbirth or treatment. For at least the past two to three decades, institutional and modern medical practices have been the norm. Two medicine shops are located along the Rajnagar Road outside the village, one of which is owned by a local Sarak resident.

Social Profile:

The local Sarak community lives in a closely knit manner, standing by one another during times of need or crisis. No significant internal divisions based on economic differences were observed. In matters of marriage, alliances are formed strictly within the Sarak community, and instances of inter-caste marriage are almost nonexistent. Regarding dowry, several Sarak men and women stated that although the practice existed in the past, it has now virtually disappeared. However, voluntary gifts are often given during marriages. Earlier generations tended to marry off daughters at a young age, but this practice is no longer prevalent. In terms of marriage rituals, Saraks follow the conventional and widely practiced Hindu customs, with no distinct separate rites. After marriage, however, the festival of "Jamai Bandhana" is observed during the months of Ashwin and Kartik—a tradition not exclusive to Saraks but common among Bengali-speaking communities of the Bhūm region.

Food Culture:

During the survey, discussions with housewives and other members revealed that all families adhere to the Sarak tradition of vegetarianism. However, some people from neighbouring communities claimed that a few Saraks consume non-vegetarian food secretly. Their diet

mainly includes seasonal vegetables, various types of lentils, cow's milk, ghee, sweets, and seasonal fruits as affordable.

Religion, Culture, and Ritual Practices:

The Sarak families of the village belong to the Adideva gotra and are aware that they trace their lineage to the Tirthankara Rishabhadeva or Adinath. At the lower end of the Sarak settlement stands a small Jain temple, which most residents believe to be around eight to ten years old. The temple was constructed by the Jain Rajparivar Group, and at the time of the survey, reconstruction work using white marble was underway. A dharmashala hall has also been built beside the temple. Inside the temple are stone idols of several Tirthankaras, including Neminath and Shantinath. The religious life of the local Saraks revolves around this temple. Every afternoon around three o'clock, a Jain religious class is held here. Every evening, worship with arati is performed, accompanied by devotional songs sung collectively by Sarak women—a scene personally witnessed by the surveyor. Important Jain festivals such as Paryushan, Oli, and Mahavir Jayanti are observed with devotion. Jharkhand is also home to Parasnath Hill, the most sacred Jain pilgrimage site, where, according to belief, Mahavira and several other Tirthankaras attained final liberation. Numerous temples associated with Jain Tirthankaras have developed there, attracting Jain devotees from across India and abroad, as well as visitors from other communities. Naturally, Saraks of Kundhit, young and old alike, visit this pilgrimage site at some point. It was learned that in recent years, such pilgrimages have been organized almost every year with the support of the Rajparivar Group.

Conclusion:

Through the present report, an attempt has been made to present a brief portrait of the socio-economic and cultural life of the Jain Sarak community of Kundhit village in Jamtara district, Jharkhand. It appears that such compilations have rarely been undertaken earlier; therefore, as a pioneering effort, any errors or shortcomings should be considered excusable. If this social-science-based study can, in the future, help document the evolving history of Sarak life and contribute even minimally to the welfare of the local Sarak community, the compiler of this report will consider the effort to have been partially successful.

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