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Exploring attention, witness consciousness, equanimity, and forgiveness and their interconnectedness

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Abstract

This paper explores the cultivation of attention, witness consciousness, equanimity, and forgiveness within the context of Jainism and modern psychology. These concepts are integral to Jain philosophy, promoting spiritual growth and ethical living. We examine the interconnectedness of these virtues and how the development of one can facilitate the others. Barriers to practicing these virtues are identified, including modern life's distractions and psychological challenges. The paper also discusses the spiritual benefits of these practices, such as inner peace and liberation. Practical, implementable solutions are proposed to integrate these virtues into daily life, bridging ancient wisdom and contemporary psychological practices.

Keywords: *Attention, Witness Consciousness, Equanimity, Forgiveness, Jainism, Modern Psychology*

Introduction

Jainismemphasizes a path of non-violence, truth, and self-discipline. Central to its teachings are the concepts of attention, witness consciousness, equanimity, and forgiveness (Jain, 2010). These virtues are not only spiritual ideals but practical tools for personal development and ethical living. In the modern world, characterized by constant distractions and psychological stressors, the relevance of these concepts has magnified (Sharma & Singh, 2015). This paper explores how cultivating these virtues can lead to holistic well-being and spiritual advancement. By examining their interconnectedness and the obstacles to their practice, we aim to provide insights and practical solutions for integrating these timeless principles into contemporary life.

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Objective

The objective of this paper is to explore the significance of attention (अप्रमाद), witness consciousness (साक्षी), equanimity (समता), and forgiveness (क्षमा) in Jainism and modern psychology. We aim to:

1. Analyze the interconnectedness of these concepts and how cultivating one facilitates the others.
2. Identify barriers that prevent individuals from practicing these virtues.
3. Discuss the spiritual and psychological benefits derived from these practices.
4. Provide practical, implementable solutions to incorporate these virtues into daily life.

Literature Review

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of mindfulness and attention in promoting mental health (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In Jain philosophy, attention is considered essential for spiritual progress (Jain, 2010). Witness consciousness has been explored in the context of self-awareness and detachment in Eastern philosophies (Dalal, 2001). Equanimity and forgiveness are linked to emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships in psychological literature (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Research indicates that practicing equanimity can reduce stress and improve well-being (Desbordes et al., 2015). Forgiveness has been associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). However, there is a gap in integrating these concepts from Jainism with modern psychological practices, and limited resources provide practical ways to cultivate them collectively.

Topic Explanation

Lets dwell into each of these concepts.

1. **Attention:** In Jainism, attention refers to vigilance and attentiveness towards one's thoughts and actions (Jain, 2010). It involves being constantly aware of the moral and spiritual implications of one's behavior. In modern psychology, this aligns with the concept of mindfulness, which has been shown to enhance cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).
2. **Witness Consciousness:** this is the practice of observing one's thoughts and emotions without attachment or judgment. It fosters a sense of inner calm and self-awareness (Dalal, 2001). This practice is akin to metacognition in psychology, where individuals

become aware of their cognitive processes, leading to better decision-making and stress management.

3. **Equanimity:** Equality is maintaining a balanced mind in the face of life's ups and downs. It is the ability to remain unaffected by external circumstances (Desbordes et al., 2015). Equanimity is crucial for emotional resilience and is a focus in therapies addressing mood disorders.
4. **Forgiveness:** Forgiveness involves letting go of anger and resentment towards oneself and others. It is a liberating practice that promotes healing and reconciliation (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Psychologically, forgiveness is linked to better mental health and reduced stress.

Commonalities Among the Concepts: All four concepts are deeply rooted in self-awareness and the cultivation of inner peace. They require a disciplined mind that can observe thoughts and emotions without becoming entangled in them. This detachment is not indifference but a higher form of engagement that allows for thoughtful responses rather than impulsive reactions (Tang et al., 2015). By practicing these virtues, individuals can break free from negative thought patterns and emotional disturbances, leading to a harmonious and balanced life.

Interconnectedness of the Concepts: Cultivating attention enhances witness consciousness by fostering greater self-awareness. This, in turn, aids in developing equanimity, as one becomes less reactive to external stimuli. Forgiveness arises naturally when one maintains equanimity and understands the transient nature of emotions (Sharma & Singh, 2015). The practice of these virtues creates a positive feedback loop, reinforcing each other and leading to a state of inner harmony and spiritual growth.

Barriers to Practice: Modern life presents numerous distractions that hinder attention and mindfulness. The constant influx of information and technology can overwhelm the senses (Rosen, 2012). Psychological barriers such as stress, anxiety, and ingrained negative thought patterns also impede the practice of these virtues. Societal pressures and a fast-paced lifestyle make it challenging to cultivate inner stillness and reflective practices (Kumar & Kumari, 2016).

Spiritual Benefits: Practicing these virtues leads to inner peace, reduced karmic bondage, and progress towards liberation (moksha) in Jainism (Jain, 2010). From a psychological

perspective, they contribute to mental well-being, resilience, and overall life satisfaction. The alignment of one's actions with these principles fosters a sense of purpose and fulfilment (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Practical Implementable Solutions:

1. **Mindfulness Meditation:** Incorporate daily mindfulness practices to enhance attention and witness consciousness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).
2. **Reflective Journaling:** Regularly writing thoughts can increase self-awareness and help process emotions.
3. **Cognitive Behavioural Techniques:** Challenge and reframe negative thoughts to develop equanimity (Linehan, 1993).
4. **Forgiveness Exercises:** Engage in practices that promote empathy and understanding towards others (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Findings

Integrating the principles of attention, witness Consciousness, equality, and forgiveness can lead to significant improvements in both spiritual and psychological well-being. The interconnectedness of these concepts means that cultivating one can positively influence the others. Barriers such as modern distractions and psychological challenges can be mitigated through conscious practice and the adoption of practical techniques rooted in both Jain philosophy and modern psychology. The synthesis of ancient wisdom with contemporary practices offers a holistic approach to personal development.

Conclusion

The cultivation of attention supports practice of witness consciousness which in turn supports equanimity, and which makes forgiveness natural. All these together are essential for spiritual growth and psychological well-being. By understanding their interconnectedness and actively working to overcome barriers, individuals can experience profound personal transformation. Implementing practical solutions bridges the gap between ancient Jain teachings and modern life, providing a pathway to inner peace and fulfilment.

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Jaina Sculptures in Orissa State Museum

Jayanti Rath[1]

Jainism, the ancient Indian religion has got a rich and vast connectivity with Orissa. It has exerted tremendous influence over this land for centuries together as has been reflected in art, literature and various concepts, ethical codes, rituals and philosophy. Even Lord Jagannath, the supreme deity is conceived as a Jina by some ardent admirers of Jaina Tradition. Jainism was surely very much established in Kalinga (the ancient Orissa) by the age of the *Nanda*s or 4th century B.C.1 According to the *Hāthigumphā* Inscription of Khāravela, (dated to2nd half of 1st century B.C.)2 he brought backfrom Magadha to Kalinga the image of Kalinga Jina, which had been taken away by a Nandaking.3

Khāravela was a devout Jaina and a patron of Jainism.4 The above reference to there presentation of Kalinga Jina which must have been an object of worship, may also indicate the popularity of Jainism in Kalinga. Architecturally viewed, the sculptures depicted in the caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri Hills, constructed by Emperor Khāravela mainly for the *Jaina Arhats* (saints) are certainly the superb Jaina monuments that Orissa still possesses with pride. The artistic endeavour did not end with Khāravela. It continued upto 12th -13th century A.D. with a gap of few hundred years. It sounds strange, but it is true that these rock-cut cave art portrays of the figures about twenty *Tīrthaṅkaras*. It is quite a rare phenomenon in the history of *Jaina Art*. Apartfrom this site, a large number of Jaina images have been identified in different parts of Orissa, i.e. Puri, Keonjhar, Bhadrak, Balangir, Nawpara and Koraput districts. etc. The *Tīrthaṅkaras* occupy the most exalted position in Jaina worship. Tīrthaṅkara image has become the recluse point for visualising the invocatory forms. The Orissa State Museum displays fourteen Tīrthaṅkara images. They include six Ṛṣabhanātha images, two Mahavira images, two Pārśvanātha images, and the image of Ajitanātha, Santinātha, Chandranātha and Padmaprabha (each numbering one).

Ṛṣabhanātha

The most notable image of Ṛṣabhanātha is the one that has been discovered from Podasingdi of Keonjhar district. Here the *Adi-Jina* i.e. the first *Tīrthaṅkara* is seen to be in meditation pose

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(*Yogāsana*). The image is carved out of a solid piece of chlorite stone and measures 2'.6" x 1'.11"in size. On the pedestal are two lotus flowers on either side of a standing bull worshipped by devotees with folded hands. The image has an oval halo (*Prabhāmaṇḍala*) with two flying *gandharvas* on either side with garlands in their hands. The unique feature of this image is that ithas an inscription engraved on the right side of it. Written in *Kutila* script of 8th century A.D, it consists of 15 letters which read Ṛṣabha *Bhaṭṭāraka.* With the passage of time these letter shave become invisible. The stone on which the figure is composed provides an impression of transparent upper garments. Hairs of the*Tīrthaṅkaras* are generally fashioned into the rolls of *Jata*. But in this case, they are designed in curled knots. The composition of curled hair with long ears and half-closed eyes presents a beautiful meditative facial expression.

Another image of Ṛṣabhanātha has been collected from the same place. Here the Adi-Jinastands in *kāyaotsarga* posture on a double petalled lotus pedestal supported by spirited lions. Representation of *chauri*-bearers, bull, *kevala* tree, trili near umbrella, flying *apsaras* are carved in the usual place. So far the period of the image is concerned, it is presumed to be made in 9thcentury A.D. In the image acquired from Keonjhar, Ṛṣabhanātha has seated on a double petalled lotus pedestal in *yogasana* posture. His pedestal contains bull, the conventional emblem and devotees in *Anjalimudrā* amidst heap of offerings. Among other attributes one can safelyrecognize the *chauri*-bearers, trilinear umbrella,*kevala* tree, plain ellipticalhalo, *divya-vādya*, flying *apsaras* with garlands. The hairs of the *Tirthaṅkara* are arranged in *Jata* of which few strands fall on the shoulders. The image represents the Bhanja Art of the 10th-11th century A.D. An image of Ṛṣabhanātha, standing in *kayatsarga* pose has been recovered from Brahmesvarapatna, near by Bhubaneswar. Alongwith all other characteristic features it contains eight planets. It has been assigned to 11th century A.D. Superbly built this image has got a beautiful contour with a very lucid and smiling face. Another image of Ṛṣabhanātha has been collected from Khajuriapara village of Puri district. The distinguishing feature of this image is its profuse sculptural ornamentation around the head instead of the traditional halo. The image stands in *kāyotsarga* posture, along with his cognizance bull and other marks and eight planets. The date ofthis image has been assigned to 10th century A.D.

The image of *Ādi Jina* brought from Charampa of the present Bhadrak district draws spontaneous attention of the visitors. It is depicted as standing in *kāyotsarga* pose on a lotus pedestal flanked by Bharata and Bahubali, the two *chauri* - bearers. The mark of cognizance ,the bull is found below the pedestal. On the two vertical sides of the image eight planets have been carved in sitting posture with their conventional attributes in hands. This fine image

measures about 5'2" x 2'3".Besides this image, three beautiful Jaina images have been brought to Orissa State Museum for display from this place. They include the images of Ajitanātha, Sāntinātha and Māhavīra.

Ajitanātha

Ajitanātha, the second *Tīrthaṅkara* of JainaPantheon has been carved in the *Yogāsana* or *Padmāsana* posture. He sits on a lotus pedestal. It measures 3'8" x 2'7" in size. Sitting image of Ajitanātha is rarely found in other parts of country. Ajitanātha is usually found in *Khadgāsana* or *Kāyotsarga* pose. The origin of his symbolism and his name can be traced to the Jaina texts. The Jina's mother saw an elephant in several dreams. An elephant in India is always connected with kingly power. After his birth all his father's enemies were conquered (*Jita*), hence his name 'the invincible one'. The *Svetambara* author Hemachandra interprets his name as not conquered by excrement of the bowels. The *Digambara* authoritative book explains the word '*Ajita*' as not conquered by sin or by all heretics.7 Thus, all the facts and ideas primarily connected with the life and teachings of this Jina converge to one point- 'invincibility' 'conquest'.8

Sāntinātha

The Sāntināth image of this group is also carved on a lotus pedestal displaying *Yogamudrā*. The pedestal is supported by lions. His emblem, the deer is carved below the pedestal along with a number of kneeling devotees and heap of offerings. Born in Hastinapura, Sāntinātha, the sixteenth *Tīrthaṅkara* occupies a very high place in the Jaina history of pontiffs. He not only revived Jainism which was in tottering condition, but also consolidated the faith so that it never disappeared again. Another extra-ordinary fact about him is that he was the first *Tīrthaṅkara* to become a *Chakravarti* or the Emperor of the whole of India.9 The last *Tīrthaṅkara* image of this group is of Mahavira. He stands in *Kāyotsarga* pose on a lotus throne supported by spirited lions. All these sculptures are provided with *kevala* tree, chauri-bearers, elliptical halo, flying *apsaras* holding garlands, trilinear umbrella, lion throne and heavenly music. From iconographic and artistic consideration these images can be safely placed in the 8th-9th centuries.10 A peculiar feature of these four Jaina images brought from Charampa is that a number of out marks are found on their body. These cut marks are certainly deviation from the other school of Jaina art, if these are purposefully done by the artist.11 The images remind the believer of the faith of the condition hrough which a *Tīrthaṅkara* passed to attains alvation and

that affords him a strong incentive to follow the noble examples of *Tīrthaṅkaras* in life. All these sculptures are carved in chlorite stone.

Two remarkable images of Pārśvanātha, one of the greatest *Tīrthaṅkaras* of Jainism have been displayed in Orissa State Museum. In chronological order he happens to be the twenty-third *Tīrthaṅkara*. One of them, has been brought from the village Vaidakhia of Keonjhar district. It is a unique image surrounded by four other *Tīrthaṅkaras*. each having two attendants in their either side. All the images including the central one have been carved in *Kayotsarga* pose, while the central stele has the snake canopy over its head - the other four images have only *kevala* tree over them. The upper two images stand on lotus pedestal. The two images on either side of the main image stand on the same level. The central image is bigger than the four other standing images. This image shows the keen sense of proportion of the artist. The attendants and dancing *apsaras* of the four other *Tīrthaṅkaras* have been carved in miniature forms. The sculptor has also kept balance while carving the body of the *Tīrthaṅkaras*, the size of the bodies of the other *Tīrthaṅkaras* being less than half of the main image. Under the pedestal, figures of devotees singing with musical instruments in their hands, some *Jaina* monks and the lotus flower, the lion have been flawlessly depicted.

According to Dr. R.P. Mohapatra, the famous archaeologist, this image belongs to the11th century.12 The find spot of the other Pārśvanātha image is Sisupalgarh. From the artistic point of view, it has been assigned to 9th century A.D. Besides the snake canopy, the entire image has been attached with snake's body, which is a remarkable feature of this image.

An image of Chandraprabha or Chandranatha, the eighth *Tīrthaṅkara* has beenc ollected from Jeypur of Koraput district. The image is carved in a *Padmasana* pose. Considering the artistic finish and the iconographic peculiarities, the imaged can be placed in 8th century A.D. The image is flanked by two dancing *apsaras*. It is a peculiar thing to be observed that there are two standing elephants above the head of both the apsaras.

A four-armed female figure sitting in *Padmasana* is seen under the pedestal. She is flanked by two lions on either side. She is most probably Bhrukuti (*Jvālāmālini*), the *śasanadevi* associated Chandraprabha. She is one among the five most popular *Yakṣinis*, the other four being Chakresvari, Ambika, Padmavati and Siddhayika.

The display of *Jaina* Pantheon includes Padmaprabha, the 6th *Tīrthaṅkara*. The find spot of this image is not known. Its style says that it belongs to twelfth century A.D. It is carved in *Kayotsarga* posture, flanked by two attendants. The cognizance of the *Tīrthaṅkara* is red lotus. He is seen standing over a lotus pedestal, and below the pedestal there is a lotus too. The

prabhāmaṇḍala has been carved with floral designs.An image of Mahavira, the twenty-fourth *Tīrthaṅkara*, belonging to the tenth century A.D. has also been displayed. The image is carved insitting *yogāsana mudra* flanked by two attendants. Like other images, it shows *apsaras* with garlands and devotees offering their worship. But a noticeable feature of this image is that it does not have a *kevala* tree. Here, again, the *prabhāmaṇḍala* is not circular. Florally designed it is three petalled. Below the pedestal, there is a beautiful flower-vase along with the emblem-lion.

According to Jainism, a soul completely released from the bondage is a soul in state of *siddha* hood or godhood. In this state soul is freeand it enjoys four infinites: Infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite power and infinite bliss. The released soul is a conqueror - a Jaina. A released soul possesses all the attributes of God. If we interpret god as the manifestation of the highest values, highest virtues and highest morals then such released souls are Jaina gods.13 The images of seven *Tīrthaṅkaras* starting from Ṛṣabhanātha to Mahavira, displayed in Orissa State Museum look absolutely independent of all emotions and passions. Needless to say, that these images epitomize self-realization and state of supreme bliss.

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An Explorative Review of the Socio-Cultural Life of the Sarak Community in Bindapathar Village, Jharkhand

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Abstract

In several western districts of Jharkhand, such as Dhanbad, Bokaro, Seraikela-Kharsawan, Jamtara, and Dumka, adjoining the state of West Bengal, there still exist in very small numbers members of the ancient and traditional Sarak Jain community. Scattered references to this numerically minor yet historically significant group are found only in a few rare sources. Among their present habitations, the village of Bindapathar in Jamtara district deserves particular attention.

A field survey was conducted there on 18 December 2023 under a major project funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). Based on empirical data collected during this investigation, the present paper seeks to offer a sociological description and analysis of various aspects of the local Sarak people's lives, such as the pattern and diversity of their economic arrangements, the internal and external structure of their households, social behaviour and customs, and religious practices. The study thus represents an effort to delineate, in a systematic and interpretive manner, the socio-economic and cultural portrait of this little-known community.

Keywords

Jharkhand, Jamtara, Bindapathar, Jain Community, ICSSR, Sarak, Minority, Sarak Jain

Introduction

In different regions of the Jharkhand districts of Dhanbad, Bokaro, Seraikela-Kharsawan, Jamtara, and Dumka, one still encounters settlements of people belonging to the ancient Jain community, who are primarily known as the Sarak. According to recent demographic research, this community, numerically a minority in Jharkhand, has remained largely silent and underrepresented in modern scholarship. Nevertheless, scattered references to them appear in

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some early and medieval literary works[1], in writings of several colonial officials[2], and in entries within various district gazetteers[3].

One such village, Bindapathar, situated under the Fatehpur Block of Jamtara district, stands out as one of the principal Sarak-inhabited settlements in the region. The village presently comprises approximately fifty-two Sarak families. At the entrance to the village, however, several Scheduled Caste groups also reside. Within the Sarak locality itself, members of the Rajak and Bauri castes, classified among the Scheduled Castes, are also found living side by side.

A field survey was undertaken in this village on 18 December 2023. Through a structured questionnaire and interactive interviews, information was systematically collected regarding various aspects of the Sarak inhabitants' everyday life. The purpose of this inquiry was not merely to enumerate data but to understand, in depth, the socio-economic and cultural fabric of a small but historically significant community that continues to sustain its distinct identity within the broader mosaic of Jharkhand's social life.

Objectives of the Research

The field survey conducted in the aforementioned village was carried out under a major research project funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi. The principal aim of this project is to present before the academic community, and thereby to the public at large, a sociological account of the diverse aspects of Sarak life in various villages of West Bengal and the adjoining state of Jharkhand, through the systematic collection and analysis of field data.

Keeping in view the broader theme and purpose of the project, the present paper sets out to achieve the following specific objectives:

To portray the economic life of the Sarak community in Bindapathar village and to undertake a comparative evaluation of their economic condition vis-à-vis the other caste groups residing in the same village.

To present a factual description of the various facets of rural life in the village, such as the structure and pattern of dwellings, sanitation, roads and local transport, electricity, drinking water and drainage facilities, shops, and other infrastructural arrangements.

To examine the aspects of public health and education, including the institutional framework and the present conditions of health and literacy among the villagers.

To explore, from a historical perspective, the social customs and practices of the Sarak community, especially those related to marriage, food habits, and the status of women within their society.

To analyse the religious practices of the Sarak Jains of Bindapathar within the broader context of Jain cultural tradition, and to determine whether elements of other religions, communities, or cultures have influenced or altered their religious and cultural expressions over time.

Methodology

The present field report has been prepared on the basis of data obtained through a structured survey questionnaire conducted among more than thirty Sarak families in Bindapathar village, supplemented by direct observation of actual living conditions.

During the fieldwork, information was collected through a series of oral interviews and interactive question–answer sessions with local residents. The survey sought to record not only major socio-economic indicators but also numerous micro-level details concerning family composition and demographic features, such as the number of members in each household, their ages, occupations, and blood groups.

Special attention was given to the physical and domestic infrastructure of the families, including the type and structure of houses, the number of rooms, nature of cooking fuel used, presence or absence of toilets, and sources of drinking water. The survey also gathered information on health issues, family planning, educational and literacy levels, and the religious and cultural observances followed within the households.

The data obtained through these inquiries, combined with direct field observations, constitute the empirical foundation of the following analytical report. The methodology thus integrates both quantitative data collection and qualitative interpretation, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the Sarak community's lived experience in Bindapathar.

The Structure of the Rural Economy

Traditionally, agriculture has been the principal occupation of the Sarak families in Bindapathar. However, due to the infertile and drought-prone soil of Jharkhand, the irregular rainfall, and the consequent limitation of cultivating only one major crop a year, many families have gradually moved away from agriculture. Despite these environmental constraints, a number of villagers continue to cling to their ancestral profession as cultivators.

Noteworthy among the experienced and senior Sarak farmers who shared their insights during the survey are Sagar Maji, Dinesh Maji, Ujjal Maji and his son Ranjit Maji, the venerable Sadananda Maji, Alok Maji, Haradhan Maji, and Manik Maji. They spoke extensively of their experiences as hereditary farmers, the challenges of rural agrarian life, and the evolving nature of local agricultural economy[4].

In addition to agriculture, many members of the community are now employed in private companies both within and outside the state. Among them are Shantanu Maji, Rana Maji, Dhananjay Maji, Nityananda Maji, Sandeep Maji (employed in a factory in Chennai), and Shyamrai Maji. Several villagers are also engaged in small-scale businesses, including Asit Ranjan Maji, who runs a shoe and garment shop; Makar Maji and Ajay Maji, who operate a grocery store[5]; and Manas Maji, who manages a customer service point (CSP) affiliated to the State Bank of India[6].

A number of Sarak individuals work as priests (pujaaris) in Jain temples across India—for example, Pradip Maji and Malay Maji serve in Jain temples in Rajasthan, while Bijon Maji is the priest of the local village temple. Some members of the community are also employed in government services, such as Sanjay Maji (Chittaranjan Locomotive Works), retired teachers Nandalal Maji[7] and Purnachandra Maji, and Mohit Maji (Indian Railways).

For those engaged in farming and other manual occupations, the average monthly income is approximately ₹7,000–₹8,000, indicating modest but steady livelihoods.

Banking and Financial Services

Bindapathar village has access to formal banking facilities within its vicinity. Alongside a branch of the Jharkhand State Government Bank, there is a Customer Service Centre of the State Bank of India, operated by a local Sarak youth, and a branch of the Bank of India. Consequently, villagers face few difficulties in availing themselves of banking services.

In addition to banks, some villagers also use the rural post office as a means of saving money. A number of families, from the affluent and middle-income groups, have subscribed to various life insurance schemes, though during interviews, many respondents gave vague or evasive answers regarding loans or insurance-related matters, suggesting a degree of reticence or lack of financial awareness in these areas.

Facets of Domestic Life:

Housing

In Bindapathar, most of the houses are either pucca (permanent) or semi-pucca (semi-permanent) structures, though mud houses (kachcha bari) are by no means absent (see Figures 1 and 2). One such example is the mud house of Rebati Maji, which remains a living instance of the village's older architectural pattern. Although many families still own ancestral mud houses, several of these are now abandoned or in a state of disuse.

There are roughly ten two-storied houses in the village, indicative of a certain degree of financial stability among some Sarak families. Joint families are also a common reason for the construction of such multi-storied dwellings. Semi-pucca houses generally have tin or tiled roofs, and most dwellings consist of two to three rooms, though in the case of joint families, the number sometimes rises to six or seven.


Figures 1 and 2: Mud house and semi-pucca house with tiled roof, Bindapathar

A few recently built single-storied pucca houses were reported to have been constructed with financial assistance from the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana scheme. Every household in the village has access to toilet facilities (Figure 3), though in some cases, the facilities exist only nominally or remain unused. Many of these toilets were constructed under central government sanitation projects. During interviews, several respondents openly admitted that they still do not use these toilets, citing poor construction quality or a habitual preference for open defecation as reasons.

Figure 3: Modern-style pucca toilet, Sarak locality, Bindapathar.

Sources of Fuel

The Sarak families of Bindapathar primarily use coal and firewood as cooking fuel, the coal being procured at a low price from nearby coal mines in Jharkhand (Figure 4). The use of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is relatively limited. A few well-to-do families use LPG regularly for cooking, but for the majority, its usage is confined to making tea, boiling milk, or reheating prepared food.

Figure 4: Coal used as cooking fuel in a Sarak household, Bindapathar.

During interviews, most respondents cited the rising cost of LPG cylinders as the main reason for its limited use, even though many families had received LPG connections under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. Almost every household has a designated cooking area, though the nature of this space varies: some have separate kitchens—usually kachcha or semi-pucca—while others cook in a small extension attached to the veranda. In such cases, coal or wood stoves are placed in a separate corner, whereas gas stoves are generally used on the veranda.

Electricity and Water Supply

Every Sarak household in the village is connected to the electricity grid, though frequent power cuts remain a persistent issue, not only in Bindapathar but throughout Jamtara and much of Jharkhand.

Access to drinking water was one of the main concerns voiced during the interviews. Under the Pradhan Mantri Jal Jeevan Mission's "Har Ghar Jal" scheme, most houses now have water connections. However, the flow is weak and irregular, and water is supplied only at fixed times, leaving the problem largely unresolved.

A limited number of relatively affluent or upper-middle-income households, about 10–12 in total, have installed underground tube wells (Figure 5). Several homes also retain traditional wells (Figure 6), some of which have been fitted with motorized pumps. Despite these resources, the majority of villagers still rely on a government-installed public water tap, located approximately 500–600 metres from the Sarak locality.

Additionally, a tube well has recently been installed within the Jain temple compound, located between two Sarak hamlets, and its water is used by the community for drinking purposes.

Figures 5 and 6: Underground tube well and old well in a Sarak household, Bindapathar

Animal Husbandry

Cattle are commonly found in almost every Sarak household in Bindapathar. Besides cows, some families also keep bullocks, and a few own goats (Figure 7). Only a very small number of families do not possess any livestock. Animal husbandry is also practiced among other caste groups in the village.

Cow's milk constitutes an important part of the Sarak diet. Products such as cottage cheese (chhana), curd (doi), and clarified butter (ghee) are prepared domestically and consumed regularly. Some families also sell surplus milk within the village. Additionally, cow dung cakes are commonly used as fuel for cooking.

Figure 7: Cattle and goats domesticated by villagers, Bindapathar.

Drainage

The Sarak locality in Bindapathar lacks a government-constructed drainage system, which is not unusual for a remote village in Jharkhand. Nevertheless, several families have built private open or covered drains, often connected to small soak pits or, in some cases, simply ending in unplanned earthen outlets.

Roads, Transportation, Public Health, and Education:

Roads and Transportation

Let's take a turn to the matter of local transportation. It must be said that the transport system in Bindapathar and neighbouring Sarak-inhabited villages such as Shalkunda and Karaya is, to this day, extremely rudimentary, almost medieval in nature. The nearest railway stations are Chittaranjan and Jamtara, located at distances of approximately 18 kilometres and 20 kilometres, respectively. Most households in the village own bicycles and motorbikes, and even some lower-middle-income families possess motorcycles. When asked about the reason for this relatively widespread use of motorbikes, many interviewees explained that because there is no reliable or regular public transport system in the vicinity, they are compelled by necessity to keep personal vehicles for commuting, even when it strains their financial means.

Public Health and Healthcare Infrastructure

Among the residents of Bindapathar, chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension are not widespread but are present in noticeable proportions. The survey also found that gastritis and acidity-related ailments are common, affecting not only older but also younger men and women. Nevertheless, many elderly Sarak individuals were found to be physically robust and active, reflecting a legacy of the community's earlier agrarian lifestyle. In earlier times, when most Saraks were engaged in hard agricultural labour under the sun and rain, they maintained strong physiques and good health. In contrast, the decline in physical activity, the growing orientation toward consumerist habits, and the increasing artificiality in diet have, in recent years, weakened both physical and mental well-being.

Bindapathar has its own Primary Health Centre (PHC), which also serves several neighbouring villages. The centre is attended by a rural medical practitioner, who treats minor health issues. However, most Sarak villagers prefer to seek medical care in Jamtara town, which, as a district headquarters, offers better government and private healthcare facilities.

Pregnant women generally travel there for childbirth. Interviews with several families revealed that childbirth is now conducted entirely through modern medical practices—the traditional midwife-assisted (daai) deliveries have not occurred in the last fifteen years or more. According to local residents, even among smaller and economically backward castes, home deliveries have nearly disappeared owing to rising medical awareness and improved access to healthcare.

Education and Contemporary Conditions

Bindapathar has within its limits a primary school, an upper primary school, and a high school, all located within one kilometre of the Sarak neighbourhood. A particularly noteworthy development is the recent establishment of a village library, which, during the field survey, was found to be absent in other Sarak-inhabited villages. Illiteracy is now virtually non-existent in the village. Most elderly individuals have received at least primary education, while the younger generation has generally completed higher secondary schooling. However, the trend of pursuing higher education among young men and women is not strong. A few young men have completed ITI or engineering courses and are now employed in other states. Notably, no woman in the village was found to have attained higher education or to be engaged in formal employment.

It is well known that most of the government policies and welfare schemes in Jharkhand, a tribal-dominated state, are designed primarily to benefit Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes through various forms of reservation and social support. However, the Sarak community, being outside these official classifications, remains administratively unrecognized, they do not possess a formally determined or certified caste status under state records. Consequently, the Saraks of Bindapathar, and indeed of Jharkhand as a whole, have been deprived of nearly all governmental benefits and entitlements. This administrative neglect has generated a sense of grievance and discontent among educated Sarak youth. Yet, as of now, no concrete policy initiative or remedial measure has been undertaken to address their situation.

Social Life, Customs, and Religious Culture:

Social Life

Within the Sarak community of Bindapathar, one observes a strong sense of communal unity and mutual cooperation. Members of the community stand by one another in times of need or crisis. Marriage alliances are generally contracted within the Sarak community itself.

Frequently, matrimonial relations are established with Sarak families from neighbouring Sarak-inhabited villages of Dumka district, adjacent to Jamtara.

Instances of inter-caste marriages are exceedingly rare and, when they occur, are typically the result of romantic circumstances (basically the outcomes of love affairs) rather than social acceptance. The practice of dowry (pan prathaa), once prevalent among the Saraks, is said to have almost disappeared today. Several male and female informants confirmed during interviews that voluntary gifts or dowries are sometimes given by choice, but coercive or traditional dowry customs no longer exist. In earlier generations, child marriage was occasionally practiced, but this is now virtually absent. The wedding rituals and customs observed by the Saraks closely follow the conventional Hindu rites commonly seen among local communities; there are no distinctive or separate marriage practices. During the survey interviews, several residents, including Asit Maji, explicitly stated that Sarak marriage ceremonies adhere to traditional Sanatani (orthodox Hindu) rituals without deviation.

Religion and Culture

The Sarak inhabitants of Bindapathar identify themselves as belonging to the Adideva gotra (lineage). Oral interviews conducted across more than thirty households revealed that these families are fully aware of their religious origins and genealogical heritage. Historically, however, it appears that for a considerable period, the Saraks had drifted away from orthodox Jain practices, adopting instead many of the rituals and observances of the broader Hindu society around them. In recent years, particularly over the past five to six years, there has been a notable revival of religious consciousness within the community, marked by efforts to reconnect with their original Jain faith and identity.

A significant factor behind this revival has been the active involvement and financial support of the Jain Rajparivaar Group, under whose initiative a Jain temple was recently constructed in Bindapathar (Figure 8). The temple has already begun to play a central role in the daily religious life of the local Saraks. The sanctum (garbhagriha) houses an idol of Lord Mahavira, and ritual worship is performed twice daily. Almost all Sarak women visit the temple regularly for prayer and offerings.

Adjacent to the temple, a Dharmashala (religious community hall) has been constructed, where a Jain religious school (pathshala) operates (Figure 9). Under the guidance of Asit Maji[8], who serves as its instructor, the pathshala conducts regular sessions of scriptural recitations, hymns, and religious discourses. Both men and women participate in these

activities, although, according to Maji, women's participation is notably higher. He expressed optimism that this gradual reorientation toward the original Jain mainstream would further strengthen the community's spiritual self-awareness.

Jharkhand, notably, is home to one of the most ancient and sacred Jain pilgrimage sites in India- Parasnath Hill (Parshvanatha Tirtha). Under the patronage of the Jain Rajparivaar group, a substantial number of Sarak residents from Bindapathar have participated in

Figure 8: Newly constructed Jain Temple, Bindapathar (right) — White marble idol of Tirthankara Parshvanath in the sanctum.

pilgrimages to Parasnath, and some have even undertaken journeys to Palitana, the revered Jain pilgrimage site in Gujarat. These journeys are seen not merely as acts of devotion but also as efforts to reconnect the local Sarak community with its ancestral religious heritage and to reinvigorate their cultural and spiritual identity.

Figure 9: Interior view of the Jain religious school (pathshala), Bindapathar.

Conclusive Remarks

Jainism and its adherent communities form one of the most distinguished strands in the diverse religious fabric of India. Today, the Jain community constitutes a religious minority, yet it

remains a vital component of the country's spiritual and cultural heritage. According to the principles of the Indian Constitution, it is the duty of a democratic state to ensure the holistic development and welfare of all minority groups, including the Jains.

However, due to the lack of adequate recognition and administrative awareness about the ancient Jain Sarak community, both at the central and state levels, the Saraks of Jharkhand continue to remain excluded from the privileges and benefits that are rightfully accorded to minorities.

The present research paper, therefore, asserts the need for comprehensive developmental initiatives for the Sarak community living in Bindapathar and other regions of Jharkhand. It is hoped that the findings and documentation presented here will serve not only as a reference for policymakers but also as a foundation for further scholarly research on this historically significant yet marginalized community. If this study, in any measure, contributes to shaping governmental understanding or acts as a catalyst for future investigations into the lives and conditions of the Saraks, the researcher will consider his efforts to have been truly meaningful and successful.

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[5] Interview with Ajay Majhi, conducted by Siddhartha Das, December 18, 2023.

[6] Interview with the mother of Manas Majhi, conducted by Siddhartha Das, December 18, 2023.

[7] Interview with Nandalal Majhi, ibid. The conversation with Nandalal Majhi provided a consistent picture of the state of education and literacy among the Sarak community over the past several decades.

[8] Interview with Asit Majhi, ibid. Asit Majhi is the teacher of the Jain religious school (pathshala) and the chief supervisor of all activities of the Jain Rajparibar Group in the village. Naturally, he offered detailed information about the earlier and current religious life of the local Jain community. Even after the field survey, he assisted the researcher in many ways through subsequent conversations through number of phone calls, for which the researcher expresses his gratitude.

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The Jina & His Serpents: Cults and Connections in the mythology and history of Pārśvanātha

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Abstract:

Symbols have been utilized differently in differing contexts, denoting power in some, piety in others. In Jainism, symbols enjoy ceremonious sanctity, and carry multiple layers of meaning. Every Tīrthaṅkara possesses a unique representative symbol, which in essence, denotes crucial junctures of their canonical life-histories, their modes of veneration, their legendary narratives, and supernatural associations. The symbol of identification for Pārśvanātha is a serpent, while his sculptures too invariably include a seven/eleven hooded snake providing shelter to the valiant sage. Being a historically sanctified and popular Tīrthaṅkara next to only Mahāvīra, his legends and stories carry connotations of socio-cultural significance. In this paper, an attempt shall be made to evaluate the linkage between Jainism and Snake-cults, explore the factors of causation, explain the modes of interaction between the two contemporaneous cultic-systems, and elucidate larger bearing of this association upon the nature and history of Jainism.

Keywords: *Pārśvanātha, Tīrthaṅkara, Dharaṇendra, Snake-cults, Great-little traditions, and Adaptation.*

Introduction:

While writing his disposition towards the philosophical-systems of India, Zimmer (1969:1-2) wrote the following lines that are of much interest to our present endeavour- 'Concepts and words are symbols, just as visions, rituals, and images are; so too are the manners and customs of daily life. Through all of these a transcendent reality is mirrored. There are so many metaphors reflecting and implying something which, though thus variously expressed, is ineffable, though thus rendered multiform, remains inscrutable. Symbols hold the mind to truth but are not themselves the truth, hence it is delusory to borrow them. Each civilization, every age, must bring forth its own. Symbols perform contextually a *transcendental function,* permitting the viewer to go beyond what is in front (Clift 1992: 17). In a similar vein, symbols in Jainism, akin to any other form of faith, permit the laity and the learned to *move beyond,* and explore the rich tapestry of history, culture and legends, enmeshed and intertwined together

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intimately, in their *symbols of appropriation,* and thereby meticulously craft ingenious *images of reverence,* i.e. three-dimensional sculptures in devotional and ritual settings (Cort 2010: 10), that immediately cast an aura of veneration around worshippers, and brings them somewhat nearer to the realization of unanimity with worshipped figurines (Bhattacharya 1939: 24).

The figure of the *Jina* is differentiated through attributes such as *Mahā-Puruṣa* (webbed-fingers/toes, sheathed penis, slender-arms etc.), the use of *Atiṣaya* (figurative moulding Jina figure), and *Pratihārya* (lion-throne, white whisk, Ashoka Tree, drums etc.). Such stratagems of statuary make the Jina image that of a "perfected saint, completely detached from worldly bondage because absolutely purified of the elements of karma that color and deform our normal human lives, which well suggests the sublime translucency of a body purified of the gross of tangible matter." (Zimmer 1951: 209), and help in soldering the factual stance with absolute alacrity that even though the Jina saint appears human externally, he is in essence a *trans-human,* a common ritualistic thematic Jainism shares with its other South Asian counterparts (Cort 2010: 41). While it surely elevated the venerated Jina to a *higher plane of earthly existence,* it performs much more functions than that meets the eye in a first approximation. The relation between Pārśvanātha and his serpentine imagery must be studied in such a context.

The *Kalpasūtra,* a Śvetāmbara canonical text, firstly describes the life of Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara, and models it probably on the life-sketch of Mahāvīra (Dundas 2005: 53). The penultimate Tīrthaṅkara was born in the city of Varanasi to King Aśvasena and Queen Vāmādevī (Bloomfield 1919: 128). His ancestry stands variegated and without consensus in different literary works. *Mahāpurāṇa* 73:92-95 (Shastry 1993: 456) tells us that his family was called the *Ugravaṃśa*, which is a rather mythical dynasty, "probably a branch of the non-Āryana Naga race of the Vrātyas Kṣatriyas (Jain 1977: 12). This is interesting in view of Pārśva's association with the Nāga couple Dharaṇendra and Padmāvati, and of the Sāntara dynasty, who claimed descent from the *olden Ugravaṃśa family* (Adiga 2005: 36). Sāh (2000: 3) asserts that his name probably indicates a connection with Pārśu clan of legendary lore. However, Bloomfield (1919: 57) posits that the name of the Tīrthaṅkara comes from vision of her mother, who saw *'*a wriggling snake on her bedside before giving birth*'* (*Pārśvaha*). Serpents are recurrent agents in the crucial events of his biography, and either provide a retrospective window to previous births of Pārśvanātha, or propel the narrative forward (Zydenbos 2023: 41), even helping the Tīrthaṅkara survive the horrendous onslaughts of *Meghmālin*, an *Asura* and arch-nemesis of the sage from previous lives (Shah 1986: 32).

While the symbolic assertion in Jainist legends is often aimed at particular philosophical argument or idea (Srivastava 2019: 44), the association of Pārśvanātha with snakes goes deeper than a mere symbolic inter-linkage. To fully the comprehend the contours of this relation, we must contextualize it by studying it in light of Pārśvanātha's *relation*ship *with* Mahāvīra, and the nodes of connection existent between Jainism and folk cultures, most of whom included a *reserved position of reverence* for serpent deities (Viyogi 2002: 20).

PĀRŚVANĀTHA and MAHĀVĪRA: Dialogue and Dissensions

Pārśvanātha is generally placed a hundred and fifty years before the birth of Mahāvīra (c. 599-543 BCE), which places his annals in c. 8th Century BCE (Dundas 2002: 53). The tangential reference to Pārśvanātha in *Sayings of the Seers* (IBh, 31) before Mahāvīra, and the uncertain dating of the text (though not later than c. 2nd Century BCE), make Pārśvanātha an immediate predecessor to Mahāvīra, and the chronological gap between the two could be less than a decade (Dundas 2002: 56). The *Ācārāṅgasūtra*(2.15) specifically avers that the parents of Mahāvīra were the followers of the preachments of Pārśvanātha. The relationship between the two monks primarily hinges on their differences related to the qualities of ritual constraints. The *Sthānāṅga* (266) states that Pārśvanātha preached the doctrine of Fourfold Restraint (*Caujjāma*), Mahāvīra practiced the five Great Vows (*mahavvaya*). A traditional explanation of this difference places the onus of burden upon the defective qualities of the laity (*Uttarādhyana Sūtra*, 23), scholars like Jaini (1998: 15-20), Dixit (1978: 7) and Mukhtār (1956: 67-69) posit that the four restraints of Pārśvanātha emphatically, if not solely, focused upon Equanimity (*sāmāyika*) with Jaini (2000: 10) further suggesting that the restraints advocated by Pārśvanātha were, in soothe, four modalities of the body (mind, body, speech and sense), which Mahāvīra later slightly re-articulated into a more rigorous orthopraxy, though using the same sensory and ethical equanimity (Dundas 2002: 54). Later on, in the *Exposition of Explanations,* Mahāvīra is seen converting Pārśvite monks (Deleu 1970; 95), who abandon the Fourfold Restraint for the Five Great Vows, with no hint towards any parallel between the two (Bh 5.9). It is from c. 7th-8th Century CE onwards that Śvetāmbara tradition, in *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* (2.7), starts alluding to Pārśvite monks as dubious, making a living from astrology and diabolical magic (Dundas 1993: 214). It is interesting to note, at this juncture, that some passages of Jain canonical texts possibly refer to the same *lax saints*as *Pārśvāpatyas*(Jhavery 1944: 147), whose practices are said to predate the monastic strictness of Mahāvīra, and are often deemed with *ambiguous respect* since they practiced *Nimittas/Mantras*to obtain things through magical means. Jhavery (1944: 257) further notes

that the traditional dating of Pārśvanātha (c. 876-776/875-775 BCE) is roughly contemporaneous with reactions of Atharvaveda (Goyal 1984:72), thereby leading us to a milieu in which Vedic and (proto-) Jains were avowing marked interest in incantations and magical practices (Zydenbos 2023: 40). Can it be suggested herein that the Snake symbol of Pārśvanātha might have to do something with this cultural context? Our analysis will advance such a suggestion.

PĀRŚVANĀTHA and the Snake Cults: Interactions and Innovations

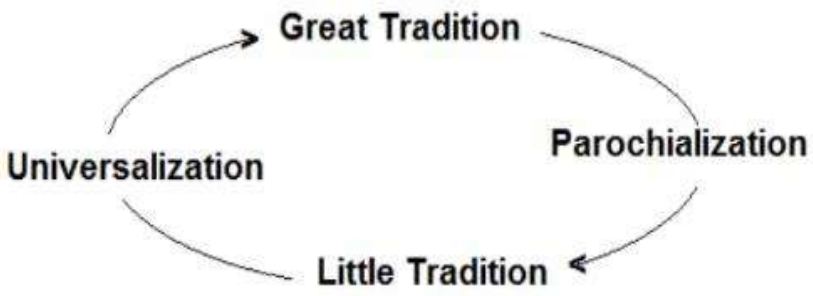
The *Mahāpurāṇa* by Jinasena and Guṇabhadra written in Karnataka in c. 9th Century CE inarguably narrates the most reiterated rendition of the previous lives of Pārśvanātha (*bhāvāvali).*It avers that the noble Brāhmaṇa couple Viśvabhūti and Anundari had two sons: Kamaṭha, whose character was like poison and sin, and Marubhūti, who was like nectar and dharma personified (*Mp* 73:9). Both became ministers of the good king Aravinda. Because the evil Kamaṭha desired Marubhūti's wife, he murdered his brother, and there from commenced a continuous cycle of birth and rebirth in which the righteous brother was incessantly wronged by the wicked brother. 83,500 years after the liberation of Neminātha from the cycle of rebirth, the Tīrthaṅkara was reborn as Prince Pārśva in the Ugravaṃśa dynasty (*Mp* 73:92-95), while his wicked accomplice became his maternal grandfather Mahīpāla, who had lost his wife and out of grief was performing a severe ascetic penance called Pañcāgni, when he affronted by the young prince, who out of affection explained to him the futility of rites, which were akin to striking bran out of rice, churning butter out of water, and labelled the *tapas* as ignorance. Out of the burning logs of wood fell two dying snakes, to whom he taught his philosophy; they later reincarnated into Dharaṇendra and Padmāvati. The king died and became *Śambara*, a *jyotiṣadeva* (*Tattvārthasūtra* 4:3, 5, 12-15).When he neared death and was about to lose his *ghātikarma* and attain *mokṣa*, Śambara in his jealous fury rained down disturbances and caused a storm in the hope of disturbing and ruining Pārśva's progress, and he also threw a mountain at him. By means of his *avadhijñāna*or clairvoyant power, Dharaṇendra knew what was happening, and from the Netherworld he and Padmāvati came and spread their hoods over Pārśva to shield him. This act of gratitude toward a merciful person on the part of basically cruel animals shows the power of mercy, although it ill suited a powerful Jina ascetic.

Figure 1: Carving of Pārśvanātha at the plinth of Kahaum Pillar of Skandagupta (Source-Wikimedia Commons, Creative Attributive License, CC-BY-SA 4.0).

This juncture requires a careful consideration of the link between Pārśvanātha and Dharaṇendra. Jhavery refers to him as '*the Indra of the serpent deities*', in the *Āvaśyakacūrṇi* (1944: 175). Nagarajaiah (1976: 115) points out that in several old texts, Dharaṇendra's name is given as 'Dharaṇa', and also, astonishingly, as 'Pārśva' (as in *Tiloyapaṇṇatti* 4:935; *BhairavaPadmāvatikalpa* 3:38). In other ancient texts, such as the *Tattvārthasūtra*, he is called 'Dharaṇa', and again other Śvetāmbara texts refer to him, somewhat confusingly, as 'Pārśva'(Nagarajaiah 1976: 114-115). The name 'Dharaṇa' is also found in commentaries to Tattvārthasūtra (4:6), where there is mention of the pairs of 'leaders' (Indra) of the various classes of Gods; e.g., in the Sarvārthasiddhi of Pūjyapāda, where we read *Nāgakumārāṇāṃ*

Dharaṇo Bhūtānandaśca, "Dharaṇa and *Bhūtānanda* of the *nāgakumāras*" (Pūjyapāda 2015: 180). 'Dharaṇendra' simply means 'leader Dharaṇa'; but interestingly, Dharaṇa is here listed as leader of the nāgakumāras (as our story tells us, Dharaṇēṃdra and Padmāvati were reborn as Nāgas), and two other names are mentioned as those of the leaders of the Yakṣas: *yakṣāṇāṃ Pūrṇabhadro Maṇibhadraśca.* Thus, the association of Pārśvanātha and Dharaṇendra enjoys a fairly long antiquity, though it was Padmāvatī who later became popular as the Yakṣa accomplice of Pārśvanātha, while also evolving into an independent Tantric deity (Kanisetti 2024), and entered the political annals of the Western Ganga dynasty (c.350-1000 CE) from c. 10th Century CE onwards, reflecting a general trend of interaction of Deccan dynasties with Jainism, who both criticized competitive faiths and accepted some of their magical enchantments to *remain relevant* in public-belief landscape. The association of Nāga cults with Pārśvanātha are a definite product of such a phenomenon at work.

Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of the dynamic interplay of Great-little traditions



(Source- Wikimedia Commons).

An analytically sound and academically sanctified method of modelling forms of interaction between two cults, situated at different levels of community-engagement is the *Great-Little Tradition* (Redfield 1948: 45; 1956: 68), wherein the former refers to the practices sophisticated, philosophical, cosmopolitan and literate, while the latter alludes to those of simplistic, practical, rural/tribal and illiterate populace. Jainism could be regarded as a city-culture, as seemingly all Tīrthaṅkara belonged to newly emergent, sprawling urban hubs of Ayodhyā, Benares etc. (Ghosh 1973: 37). The Nāga cults, on the other hand, were geo-culturally widespread, antiquarian, but had a heavy cultic concentration in rural and tribal belts, a feat observable even now (Hasnain 1992: 56). The roles and rites of fertility, fecundity and vitality of natural and agrarian production is well recorded in literary sources (Kosambi

1962: 22). Since the two communities are located in proximity to each other, there always occurs a *transfer of ritual-cultural elements/practices* from one to the other (Marriott 1955: 28). When elements of the little tradition are transferred to the Great Tradition, the process is referred to as *Universalization,* while the opposite is called *Parochialization.* This transference can result from long-term interaction, common population-base, similar cultural-base, political expediency, and sectarian competition. While all worked in some capacity in case of Jainism (Dundas 1993: 156), the last component made it essential for *survival and growth of Jainism* amidst the ever-widening social sphere of influence of Buddhism and Brāhmaṇic socio-ritual order.

Qvarnstrom (1998: 45) asserts that every minority needs to reorient and react to the contextual and organizational milieu in which they exist, and are compelled by the same structural arrangement to develop means of growth and survival, in order to prevent enthraldom or overshadowing by other dominant Religious-Systems, such as the Brāhmaṇic orthopraxy. In such a situation, the minority faith can either adopt a Localizing, exclusive and defensive approach, or a relatively more engaging Cosmopolitan, Inclusive and Offensive approach. While the Jain monks in Gujarat in c. 9th Century CE, under the mastership of Haribhadra and Hemachandra adopted a midway course of action, a somewhat similar condition faced the twenty-third Tīrthankara, who engaged with creatively assertive and emergent local cultures, who were being gradually assimilated into Greater systems. Jainism could not have fell behind, as the deadlock became more intensified due to developing transportation and communication facilities in c. 8th Century BCE (Sen 2001: 26), which was gradually making spread of discourses and directions swifter. Probably, with this conditionality, Jainism began to utilize certain survival strategies such as-

Toleration of the Other-

Also called *miśranumāna*, it refers to the maintenance of strategic harmony between core thematic principles of Jainism, while also being openly receptive to the ideas, customs and traditions of local communities. Thus, Somadeva (c. 11th Century CE) called for local customs (*deśāchāra*) to be followed for marriage, but only strict Jain principles for salvation (Matilal 1981: 25). Such a stance emanated from the ontological position of Jainist philosophy, expressed well in *Nayavāda* and *Syādvāda,* which made Jain preceptors more 'understanding' of the principles of others. While Pārśvanātha abhorred any sacrifice which harmed living entities, he also verily visited *Yakṣasthāna*, sites which were not well received in social circles, to get away from Brāhmaṇic sacrifices.

Opposition and Absorption-

In his evaluation of Vaiṣṇavism, Hemachandra viewed Viṣṇu rather as a cruel and false god *(Adeva, Kudeva*), whose only interests were in women, wine and wasting pursuits (Jain 1977: 230), while adopting the legends of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, who in his version acted according to Jain principles. While opposition strengthened the perceived moral authority of their doctrines, in order to *retain subjects,* absorption was also necessary, as too much deviance could have resulted in severance of communion with targeted audience, who were connected to Jain creed via their own cultural legends. While Nāgas are classified as *Asuras* in Jain cosmology and have negative connotations, such is not the case in them serving Pārśvanātha.

Adoption-

Qvarnstrom (1998: 26) discusses two forms of Jain adoption- *structural and terminological.* The relative paucity of literary sources enjoining contemporaneity with Pārśvanātha does not allow us to critically evaluate the latter, but the former is evinced in similarity of the Fourfold Restraint with Upaniṣadic wisdom (Pande 1959: 31). Interestingly, the relation of Pārśvite monks with odious magic and charms creates a metaphysical commonality of sorts with Atharvavedic era, which saw greater interaction of orthodox Brāhmaṇic socio-ritual order with autochthonous communities, which chiefly included the Nāga cults and it's practitioners (Viyogi 2002: 58).

Royal Patronage-

Buddhism and Jainism almost operated in parallel in the Gangetic plains, and vied for patronage which could have elevated their social status and economic position. In their formative period, both Jainism and Buddhism needed active support of State patronage to acquire material wealth. While they received the sympathetic attention of non-Brāhmaṇic Warlords of Magadha, the flexibility of Jains also helped them in acquiring a *follower-base* in Middle Ganga Valley, where the Nāga affiliation proved wonders. The *Uttarādhyana Sūtra* (31.2) lists *Dālbhya* as a follower of Pārśvanātha, while Jain tradition highlights Ahichhatra as the site of Pārśva's *Kēvalajñāna kalyāṇaka*(Jain 2008: 35, Kala 1980: 92). The relation of Ahichhatra as the capital of Pānchāla rulers of Nāga descent is well known (Shrimali 2003: 45). Although not perfectly clear, the heterodox roots of Upaniṣad (Goyal 1984: 62) and Nāga affiliation of Ahichhatra align harmoniously in the legends of Pārśvanātha. At this juncture, it is pertinent to inquire into the fundamental reason behind the gradual assimilation and amalgamation of Snake cults into Jainism, which will enlighten us with the importance of

Pārśvanātha, as both a historical personality and Tīrthankara. With much data now at our disposal, the following factors can be possibly cited-

Relatibility- The association of Nāga cults with Pārśvanātha enhanced the relatability of Jainism, which was a relatively less known creed in the variegated landscape of faith. The induction of popular or powerful figures of folklore helped Jainism *situate the Tīrthankara* in the midst of hordes of divine, semi-mundane and trans-human characters, and also *help in the visualization* of glorious purpose and prowess of Jain preceptors to create a *figure of veneration* in a creed which had no supreme gods, and which opposed sacrifices performed in honour of antiquarian deity-figures (Dundas 2002: 23). In a way, the Jina figure was defined through characters subordinate to him in Jain legends. Nāgas helped in the actualization of this imperative, while also making the Jina more relatable to simpletons and common folks. It also made Pārśvanātha an image to be worshipped in order to avoid or cure snakebite.

Connectivity- Among the Vedic Aryans, Ṛṣi, Muni and Yogins had been figures of public reverence since Rigvedic times (Goyal 1984: 38). They were honourable figures in both Brāhmaṇic socio-cultural courts and marginal, forest-dwelling groups as well. Nāgas and Yakṣas has been figures of worship among the common masses and autochthonous communities. Magical spells and incantations were practiced openly by certain tangential social-groups, and was employed secretively by some segments of Arya populace also (Allen 2023: 448).All four societal structures listed afore had some *points of overlap,* where there was a common affliction or social symbiosis. The personality of Pārśvanātha, in a way, resided at the cross-section of all such social currents. His relation to one helped his cult and it's followers to gain traction in others social spheres, thereby enhancing the effective reach and intergroup nodal agency of Jainism.

Centrality- When ideas alien to Jain creed were inducted inside the Jain doctrinal apparatus, it was sufficiently refined so as to increase synergy and synchronicity in Jain principles and propositions. Their modification primarily hinged around the primary imperative of highlighting the moral, ritual and symbolic superiority of Jainism in face of the competing creeds in a limited geo-cultural context and socio-economic construct, that made the *scramble for* adherents and followers necessary. With the absorption of cults belonging to the *Little Tradition,* Jainism located a possible solution to the problem at hand. However, with induction came the trouble of positioning, which was partially solved by integrating popular legendary characters like Dharaṇendra into the Jina origin-story, while the relative position of the Jina was kept intact by making the mighty Nāga lord a *voluntary and willing* subordinate of the

Tīrthankara, since the latter had tried to save his life and provided a peaceful solace to his termination. This attracted the worshippers of Nāga cults, and made them connected to the Jina, who now became central to the canonical narration.

Adaptability- A bigger trouble for Jainism was to survive foreign invasions, purges and persecutions, internal feuds and dissensions, famines and natural calamities, wars and crisis etc. (Qvarnstrom 1998: 30). Such events usually resulted in displacement, migration, loss of followers, and increased the risk of doctrinal dilution and creed competition, since it was possible that their new residence might already have an existent faith. To survive, dominate and thrive in this religious mosaic amidst selectivity-pressures, it was essential for any heterodox creed like Jainism to make a trade-off between cultural assimilation-association and retention of core (relatively orthodox, older and resistant to change) section. Greater cognitive investment in one would had diminished the other. A midway compromise ostensibly was to maintain the superlative status of the Jina imagery, and make induced components of Little tradition contribute to the enhancement of Jina legends. Thus, when Jainism reached Deccan, it attracted the patronage of the Western Ganga Dynasty by incorporating it's origins within Jainist traditions, and inserting Padmāvatī, an old Jain Yakṣinī into the tale of origination. This theme became much popular, even being used by rulers of the Hoyṣala Kingdom, where Sala, the founder is known for combating a tiger to save his Jain Guru Sudatta (Menon 2013: 128). The tiger was eventually revealed as Padmāvatī, who gifted the valiant warrior an entire Empire (Kamath 2011: 78). The epigraphically proposed association of Sāntara dynasty to Ugravaṃśa lineage highlights the use of imagery and annals of Pārśvanātha as a tool deployed by Jain preceptors to gain socio-political influence and standing in the Imperial court.

Conclusion:

We have herein shown the innumerable iterations symbols in Jainism carry, especially in a relevant context. The addition of a snake canopy to the Jina figure of Pārśvanātha, qualifies not only the Snake-cults that gradually got incorporated inside Jainism, but also Jainism itself in its varying nature across the millennium. The inclusion of stories, characters and narratives originally belonging to the Little Tradition helped Jainism survive, thrive and compete with other major Religious-Systems in an interconnected World. While the historical facets of Pārśvanātha remain elusive at best, his symbols and icons paved the way for Jainism to gain royal patronage, connect with myriad Nāga cults throughout the Indian subcontinent, increase the numerical strength and socio-cultural diversity of adherents, and impart a uniquely

positioned status of divinity to the human Jina figure, transforming him into a meta-human. It also helped Jain to draw both connections and conceptions from differing traditions and customs, while also aiding the Jain creed adapt to more diverse environs. Thus, while Mahāvīra properly structured and principally ordered the Jain worldview, Pārśvanātha and his serpents breathed life-force into the emergent creed during its formative period, and become a major Religious-System itself.

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॥ जैन भवन ॥

Revisiting the Pūrvas: Historical Memory, Canon Formation, and Doctrinal Assimilation in Jainism

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Abstract

This study critically re-examines the status, transmission, and eventual disappearance of the fourteen *Pūrvas*, considered the most ancient layer of Jain sacred literature. While traditional narratives claim these texts were entirely lost by the tenth century after Mahāvīra's Nirvāṇa, a closer investigation suggests that the *Pūrvas* were not obliterated but rather assimilated into the evolving Jain canonical structure. Drawing upon textual references from the *Āṅgas*, *Nandīsūtra*, *BhagavatīSūtra*, and traditional commentaries, the paper demonstrates that the doctrinal content of the *Pūrvas* continued to influence later compositions such as the *Kalpasūtra*. It also addresses competing scholarly views on whether the *Pūrvas* were polemical in nature or comprised more general discourses. Ultimately, the decline of the *Pūrvas* appears not as a case of doctrinal amnesia but as an organic rearticulation in response to institutional and pedagogical needs. This reinterpretation underscores the adaptive resilience of Jain scholasticism and invites a reassessment of how textual traditions evolve while retaining continuity.

Key Words: *Pūrvas, Jain Canon, Sthūlabhadra, Textual Assimilation, Mahāvīra, Scriptural History*

1. Introduction: Re-evaluating the Antiquity of the Pūrvas

Anyone with a serious interest in the academic study of Jainism is likely familiar with the early assessments made by 19th-century Indologists such as Barth, Weber, and Lassen. These scholars, relying on the limited evidence available at the time, mistakenly concluded that Jainism was merely a derivative or offshoot of Buddhism. They went so far as to assert that Jain sacred literature lacked historical credibility, claiming that these texts had only been

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committed to writing as late as the 5th century CE. As a result, they dismissed the canonical texts of Jainism as unreliable sources for reconstructing early Indian religious history.

However, this perception underwent a significant transformation due to the more rigorous and methodical research carried out by later scholars like Hermann Jacobi, Georg Bühler, and Augustus Hoernle. Their studies not only refuted the theory of Jainism's Buddhist origin but also demonstrated convincingly that Jainism is an independent and ancient religious tradition. In fact, they established that Mahāvīra, the historical founder of Jainism as we know it today, was a senior contemporary of Gautama Buddha—thereby placing Jainism at least on an equal footing in terms of antiquity and doctrinal originality.

Jacobi, in particular, made an invaluable contribution by presenting compelling evidence to support the authenticity and antiquity of Jaina literature. He argued that many of the Jain texts could be reliably dated to as early as the 3rd century BCE, well before they were formally written down. Moreover, Jacobi drew attention to the existence of even older works known as the *Pūrva*s—a corpus believed to predate the *Āṅgas*, which themselves constitute the earliest surviving portion of the Jaina canon.

The purpose of the present study is to examine whether additional insights can be gained regarding these elusive and foundational texts, the *Pūrva*s. By revisiting classical sources, philological evidence, and the broader historical context, we aim to shed new light on their composition, transmission, and significance within the Jain tradition.

2. Traditional Narratives: The Fourteen *Pūrva*s and the Story of Their Decline

Traditional Jain accounts are remarkably consistent in asserting that the *Pūrvas* represented a much older stratum of Jain sacred literature—texts that were considered foundational even before the composition of the more widely known *Āṅgas*. According to these accounts, there were originally fourteen *Pūrva*s (*caturdaśa-pūrvas*), which held a place of great reverence and doctrinal authority within the early Jain community. However, over time, these texts gradually fell into obscurity and were eventually lost, a disappearance that has long been the subject of reflection and lament within the tradition.

The story surrounding their loss, as preserved in Jain tradition, unfolds as follows: After the compilation of the eleven *aṅga*s during the First Council at Pāṭaliputra—convened to safeguard the oral transmission of Jain teachings in the face of doctrinal erosion—the monastic community (Sangha) became increasingly concerned about recovering the more ancient *Pūrvas*, which were still not part of the canonical corpus. Recognizing the urgency of the

situation, the Sangha decided to approach Ācārya Bhadrabāhu, who at the time was believed to be the sole living master with complete knowledge of the *Pūrvas*. However, Bhadrabāhu had retreated to Nepal to undertake a twelve-year vow of silence and solitude (possibly *loṣṭa-parivrajyā*), making it impossible for him to travel back to Pāṭaliputra.

In a bid to retrieve the lost knowledge, the Sangha sent emissaries to Nepal to persuade Bhadrabāhu to return. Despite their pleas, he firmly declined, citing his ongoing spiritual observance. When the monks persisted and even went so far as to threaten him with excommunication, Bhadrabāhu, though deeply reluctant, conceded under pressure. He agreed to impart the *Pūrvas* to a select group of monks, but under strict conditions. A group of five hundred monks, led by Sthūlabhadra, was chosen for this sacred mission. Unfortunately, the process of learning proved arduous and extremely slow, and most of the monks abandoned the effort midway, disheartened by the rigorous discipline and the time it demanded.

In the end, only Sthūlabhadra remained steadfast, and after twelve long years, he successfully mastered the first ten *Pūrva*s. However, at this critical juncture, Bhadrabāhu refused to teach him the remaining four. The reason, as the tradition goes, was that Sthūlabhadra had used his spiritual powers to perform a miracle—specifically, a display intended to impress or benefit his sisters. This act, perceived as a lapse in ascetic restraint and an indulgence in worldly exhibition, rendered him unworthy, in Bhadrabāhu's eyes, to receive the deepest layers of Jain knowledge.

Eventually, after intervention by the entire Sangha and appeals for clemency, Bhadrabāhu relented and taught the final four *Pūrva*s to Sthūlabhadra, but imposed a binding condition: he must not transmit them to anyone else. Sthūlabhadra accepted this vow of silence regarding the last four texts. As a consequence, his own disciples, Mahāgiri and Suhastin, were never initiated into the complete knowledge of all fourteen *Pūrvas*. This marked a decisive moment in Jain intellectual history—the beginning of the irreversible loss of the complete *Pūrva* corpus.

3. Evaluating the Tradition: Did the *Pūrva*s Really Exist?

At this point, two critical questions emerge from the traditional accounts regarding the *Pūrvas*:

1. Did the fourteen *Pūrvas* genuinely exist and constitute an earlier, now-lost canon, as unanimously claimed by Jain traditions?
2. If they did exist, what were the real causes behind their eventual disappearance?

We must ask whether the traditional narrative concerning their gradual loss—particularly the episode involving Sthūlabhadra—is a historically grounded account or a later invention. Could this story have been crafted as an apologetic device to explain, or even excuse, the eventual fading away of the last four *Pūrvas* due to individual lapses or institutional oversight?

Despite the legendary tone of the account, the historical existence of the *Pūrvas* is supported by strong internal evidence from early Jain scriptures. Notably, both the fourth *Āṅga*, the *Samavāyāṅga*, and the *Nandīsūtra* contain detailed lists of the *Pūrvas*, including their titles and brief descriptions. This makes it clear that these texts were once a recognized and respected part of Jain doctrinal literature. The fourteen *Pūrvas* are named as follows:

1. *Utpadapurva*
2. *Agrāyaṇīyapurva*
3. *Vīryapravādapurva*
4. *Astināstipravādapurva*
5. *Jñānapravādapurva*
6. *Satyapravādapurva*
7. *Ātmapravādapurva*
8. *Karmapravādapurva*
9. *Pratyākhyānapravādapurva*
10. *Vidyānupravādapurva*
11. *Kalyāṇapravādapurva*
12. *Prāṇāvāyapravādapurva*
13. *Kriyāviśālapurva*
14. *Lokabindusarapūrva*

According to textual sources, each *Pūrva* was subdivided into chapters known as vastus, meaning thematic topics or discourses. From the preserved summaries of these chapters, it is evident that the *Pūrvas* dealt with a wide range of subjects, including metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and cosmology. Their contents appear to have been systematically organized and somewhat elementary in style, indicating they were possibly designed for both memorization and pedagogical transmission in the early stages of Jain scholasticism.

It is important to note that no Jain source ever claims that the *aṅgas* were derived from the *Pūrvas*. On the contrary, tradition maintains that both sets of texts were co-existent from the very beginning—dating back to the time of the first *Tīrthaṅkara*, Ṛṣabhanātha. This fact

strongly undermines the notion that the idea of the *Pūrvas* was fabricated at a later date to artificially supply the Jain doctrine with an aura of antiquity or textual authority.

As Hermann Jacobi insightfully observed, if the *Pūrvas* had merely been a later invention, the narrative surrounding them would have been both illogical and unnecessary. Instead, when taken as historically true, the story of the *Pūrvas* aligns coherently with the evolutionary trajectory of Jain literature, which moves from early, orally transmitted texts to increasingly complex and specialized forms of doctrinal exposition. Accepting the traditional account not only helps us understand the layered structure of Jain scriptural development but also underscores the fragility of oral traditions in the absence of widespread written preservation.

4. Were the Pūrvas an Earlier Canon? Their Status Relative to the aṅgas

The next significant issue we must address is whether the *Pūrvas* genuinely constituted an earlier canonical body of literature within the Jain tradition, and if so, how they relate to the later *aṅgas*. Based on textual, historical, and traditional evidence, it seems highly probable that the *Pūrvas* did indeed form an earlier stratum of Jain scripture—predating the *aṅgas* and occupying a foundational position in the evolution of the Jain canon.

Several compelling reasons support this conclusion:

(i) Etymological and Traditional Evidence:

To begin with, the very term *Pūrva*—literally meaning "prior" or "former"—strongly suggests chronological precedence. This implication is not merely semantic but is supported by an independent and well-preserved Jain tradition. According to this tradition, Mahāvīra first imparted the essential teachings of Jainism to his *Gaṇadharas* (chief disciples) in the form of the *PūrvagataSūtras*—that is, the *Pūrvas*. The *Gaṇadharas*, in turn, are said to have organized and expanded upon these foundational teachings to compile the *Āṅgas*, *Ācāras* (disciplinary texts), and other early scriptures. This sequence clearly places the *Pūrvas* as the root texts upon which the canonical edifice of Jainism was later constructed.

(ii) Cross-Referencing from the Ājīvika Tradition:

Further indirect but significant corroboration comes from an unexpected source: the canon of the *Ājīvikas*, an extinct *śramaṇa* tradition that flourished around the same time as Jainism and Buddhism. According to the *BhagavatīSūtra*, six disciples of the *Ājīvika* leader Makkhali Gosāla, known as the Diśācāras, are credited with creating a canon consisting of eight *Mahānimittas* (great omens) and two *Maṅgalas*. Crucially, the text states that this literature was compiled from extracts of the *Pūrvas*, selected according to their own interpretations, and

that Gosāla derived his teachings on the six characteristics of the organic world from these *Pūrva*-based sources.

That these *Pūrvas* refer to the Jain *Pūrvas* under discussion is virtually beyond doubt. One of the earliest inscriptions at ŚravaṇaBeḷagoḷa even notes that Bhadrabāhu Svāmin—widely regarded as the last *ācārya* to have complete mastery over all fourteen *Pūrvas*—was also thoroughly versed in the *AṣṭāṅgaMahānimittas* (the very texts the *Ājīvikas* are said to have derived from the *Pūrvas*). The linkage suggests a historical period of shared doctrinal and textual developments between Jainism and other contemporary traditions, and places the *Pūrvas* within a very early stratum of Indian intellectual history.

Moreover, Dr. B.M. Barua, in his seminal monograph on the *Ājīvikas*, convincingly argues that MakkhaliGosāla was an elder contemporary of Mahāvīra, and that Mahāvīra himself is believed to have spent six formative years of his ascetic career with Gosāla before their paths diverged. This further underscores the antiquity of the *Pūrvas*, since they must have predated or at least coexisted with the earliest *Ājīvika* doctrinal developments.

(iii) Sectarian Accounts of Schisms and Canonical Reference Points:

Additional support for the precedence of the *Pūrvas* over the *aṅgas* is provided by the observations of Dr. Ernst Leumann, who notes that early sectarian accounts detailing the origins of schisms within Jainism refer exclusively to the *Pūrvas*, not to the *aṅgas*. This is a striking omission, and strongly indicates that the *Pūrvas* were seen as the core doctrinal corpus during those formative phases of Jainism's development. If the *aṅgas* had been the dominant scriptural authority at the time, they would almost certainly have been mentioned in those accounts.

Hence, the traditional claim that the *Pūrvas* formed a more ancient layer of scripture seems not only plausible but also well-supported by independent historical references.

It is worth noting, however, that some scholars such as Albrecht Weber questioned the antiquity of the *Pūrvas*, arguing that they could not be older than the *aṅgas* since they were included in the twelfth *aṅga*, the *Dṛṣṭivāda*. This line of reasoning, however, fails to account for the likelihood that the association of the *Pūrvas* with the *Dṛṣṭivāda* may have been a later editorial development. Elsewhere, scholars have shown that the inclusion of the *Pūrvas* within the twelfth *aṅga* was probably a means of preserving what little remained of their teachings, rather than an indication that they originated within that text.

Therefore, this later association should not be misinterpreted as evidence of a late origin for the *Pūrvas*. On the contrary, all available indicators—from etymological clues to inter-traditional borrowings and sectarian memory—point to their primordial status in the Jain literary tradition.

5. The Causes Behind the Disappearance of the Pūrvas

The question of how the *Pūrvas*—once considered the oldest and most revered body of Jain canonical literature—gradually vanished from memory and use has long puzzled scholars. Traditional Jain narratives consistently affirm that the fourteen *Pūrvas*, originally taught by Mahāvīra to his disciples, were preserved intact for six generations following the master's demise. Specifically, this continuity extended through the successive patriarchs beginning with Sudharmā and Jambūsāmi, Mahāvīra's direct spiritual successors.

According to this tradition, the full knowledge of all fourteen *Pūrvas* continued without interruption through a chain of six prominent *ācārya*s: Prabhava, Sayyambhava, Yaśobhadra, Saṃbhūtivijaya, Bhadrabāhu, and finally Sthūlabhadra. These teachers are often referred to in the literature as *cauddasa-puvvī* or *caturdaśa-pūrvadhārin*—that is, "possessors of the fourteen *Pūrvas*." The decline begins only with Sthūlabhadra, as discussed previously. It is said that following his failure—or perhaps his ethical disqualification—to transmit the full canon, the knowledge of the last four *Pūrvas* (11–14) was lost.

Subsequent generations of teachers were known as *daśapūrvī*—those who retained mastery over only ten *Pūrvas*. The last among this line was Vajrasvāmin, after whom even the knowledge of the ten surviving *Pūrvas* began to wither. This gradual erosion is reflected in later sources such as the *Anuyogadvārasūtra* and the *BhagavatīSūtra*, which mention the emergence of a group of teachers called *navapūrvī*—those who retained only nine *Pūrvas*. This process of textual and oral decline continued until, by the time of Devardhigaṇin in 980 *VīraNirvāṇaSaṁvat* (c. 5th century CE), even the last remaining *Pūrva* had vanished from the collective memory. In short, the complete disappearance of all fourteen *Pūrvas* was essentially finalized by the end of the 5th century CE.

The key moment in this process of loss seems to coincide with Sthūlabhadra's role in the Council of Pāṭaliputra, where the eleven *aṅgas* were formally compiled and systematized. This correlation is unlikely to be mere coincidence. As Hermann Jacobi insightfully suggests, this development may represent the deliberate replacement of an earlier canon by a newer one. The compilation of the *aṅgas* may have signaled not just a response to textual loss, but a conscious act of restructuring and reorienting the doctrinal corpus of the Jain tradition.

Jacobi's hypothesis is that the *Pūrvas* primarily focused on "dṛṣṭis"—philosophical opinions and doctrinal positions, not only of the Jain system but also of rival schools. In his view, many of the *Pūrvas* likely documented the debates and controversies that Mahāvīra had engaged in with contemporaneous teachers, defending his views and refuting theirs. The frequent use of the suffix *pravāda* (discourse or discussion) in the titles of several *Pūrvas* seems to support this interpretation. If this is true, then it is reasonable to conclude that such polemical discourses gradually lost their relevance over time, particularly as Mahāvīra's rivals passed away and the sects they represented faded into obscurity. In such a scenario, the Jain community may have felt the need for a more unified, systematized canon—one better suited to a community that was becoming increasingly institutionalized and codified.

Yet, this theory is not without challenges. Firstly, as noted earlier, the association of the *Pūrvas* with the *Dṛṣṭivāda* (the twelfth *aṅga*) appears to have been a later development, and therefore cannot reliably inform us about the original content or character of the *Pūrvas*. Secondly, Jacobi's assertion that the word *pravāda* proves the *Pūrvas* were centered around debate or controversy may be overstated. In fact, this suffix occurs only in eight out of the fourteen titles (specifically, numbers 3 through 10). Moreover, the term *pravāda* may simply denote "discourse" or "treatise," rather than implying a confrontational or dialectical form.

Thus, while Jacobi's view provides one plausible explanation—namely, that the *Pūrvas* fell into disuse as their content lost contextual relevance—it is equally likely that the reasons for their disappearance were multifaceted: a combination of textual decay, changing pedagogical needs, institutional consolidation, and possibly sectarian disagreements over authority and transmission. The formalization of the *aṅgas* may have represented not just an act of canonization but also a symbolic closure of a more fluid, earlier phase of doctrinal development.

6. Reconsidering the Loss: Were the Pūrvas Truly Lost or Gradually Assimilated?

Although brief descriptions of each *Pūrva* survive, they offer little clarity regarding whether these texts contained controversial material, as some scholars have speculated. Nevertheless, there is still more to be said about the nature of their disappearance. The widespread belief, rooted in Jain tradition, that the fourteen *Pūrvas* were entirely lost by the tenth century after the *Nirvāṇa* of Mahāvīra should not, in our view, be interpreted literally. A more nuanced and historically grounded interpretation is that the *Pūrvas*, over time, lost their status as an independent canonical entity, not that their doctrinal content was wholly extinguished.

This process of gradual assimilation and textual transformation appears to have unfolded during the long history of Jain scriptural consolidation. As the community evolved, both doctrinally and institutionally, the teachings of the *Pūrvas* were progressively incorporated into the emerging corpus of canonical texts—including the *aṅgas*, *Ācāras*, and later commentarial literature. By the tenth century of the Vira era (i.e., around the 5th century CE), this assimilation seems to have reached completion. Several key facts support this view:

(a) Integration through Recitation and Reformulation:

One important tradition, noted by the scholar Albrecht Weber, holds that Mahāvīra first recited the contents of the *Pūrvas* to his *Gaṇadharas*. These chief disciples, in turn, recast the teachings into new textual formats, eventually forming the *aṅgas*, *Ācāras*, and other core scriptures of the Jain canon. This narrative suggests not the loss but the transformation and preservation of *Pūrva*-material within the newly systematized body of literature. The teachings endured, though the original structure did not.

(b) Internal Echoes within Canonical Texts:

Further corroboration is found in references to specific *Pūrvas* within existing texts. For example, the second *Pūrva*, the *Agryāyaṇīya*, is said to contain the essence or key principles of the eleven *aṅgas*. This implies that the *aṅgas* may have evolved from within the conceptual framework of the *Pūrvas*. Their doctrinal seeds were likely embedded in earlier formulations, later refined and expanded into the structured canon familiar today.

(c)Influence on Later Canonical Works:

Perhaps the most telling evidence of continuity lies in the case of the *Kalpasūtra*, a major Jain text. Tradition asserts that Bhadrabāhu, the last known master of all fourteen *Pūrvas*, composed or compiled the *Kalpasūtra* based on the ninth *Pūrva*, the *Pratyākhyānapravāda*. One version of the tradition goes further still, claiming that the *Kalpasūtra* actually formed the eighth chapter of that *Pūrva*. If these accounts hold any historical value, they provide concrete examples of how *Pūrva* content continued to exert doctrinal influence and textual presence long after their formal transmission had ceased.

Taken together, these lines of evidence strongly indicate that the *Pūrvas* were not entirely lost in the historical sense often presumed. Rather, they were absorbed into the fabric of Jain canonical literature, their structure dissolved but their substance preserved. Over centuries, the Jain community did not abandon the *Pūrvas* so much as rearticulate and reorganize their teachings into a more enduring, accessible, and adaptable textual framework. This reflects not

a rupture in tradition, but a dynamic process of scriptural evolution, guided by pedagogical, philosophical, and institutional needs.

In light of this, the narrative of "loss" should be reframed: it was not a disappearance but a transformation through assimilation—a common phenomenon in the life cycle of ancient religious literatures.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of the *Pūrvas* reveals a complex interplay of preservation, transformation, and gradual reconfiguration within the Jain textual tradition. While traditional accounts speak of their eventual disappearance, a critical analysis suggests that the *Pūrvas* were not so much lost as they were absorbed into the evolving canonical framework of Jainism. The early Jain community, faced with the demands of doctrinal clarity, sectarian organization, and pedagogical transmission, appears to have restructured its scriptural corpus through the formation of the *aṅgas*, drawing heavily from the conceptual reservoir of the *Pūrvas*. The continued influence of the *Pūrvas*—seen in textual references, thematic parallels, and acknowledged derivations—demonstrates that their content lived on, even as their independent identity faded. This process reflects not a rupture but a natural evolution of a religious tradition responding to the challenges of continuity and coherence. Far from being a story of loss, the fate of the *Pūrvas* illustrates the resilience and adaptability of Jain scholasticism in preserving its core teachings across generations.

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