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Exploring attention (*apramāda*), witness consciousness (*sāksi*), equanimity (*samatā*), and forgiveness (*ksamā*) and their interconnectedness

Shailesh Mehta*
Dr Trapti Jain#

(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

Jainism emphasizes 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).

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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.

Objective

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

Analyse the interconnectedness of these concepts and how cultivating one facilitates the others.

Identify barriers that prevent individuals from practicing these virtues.

Discuss the spiritual and psychological benefits derived from these practices.

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 behaviour. 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:** Witness Consciousness 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:** Equanimity 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 *apramada, saksi, samata* and *kshama* 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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Death as viewed in different world religions and particularly in Jainism in the light of the ritual of death

Dr. Namrata Kothari

Death is the most curious phenomenon in the modern era. Persons living in the scientific and secularized society regard death with some ambivalence that has traditionally characterized towards God. The question of death give rise to variety of philosophical questions. One of the most important of these questions is about the nature of death[1]. Generally, philosophers interpret this as a call for the analysis of the definition of the concept of death. Like Plato proposes to define death as a separation of soul from the body. Other have defined death simply as cessation of life. This too is problematic since an organism that goes into suspended animation ceases to live, but may not actually die.

The Judeo-Christian tradition mythically explains the death is the result of transgressions of a divine decree. Sometimes, death is attributed to an accident, such as the message that fails among some African cultures. In ancient Jewish religion, God gives life and takes it with death the punishment for sin.

Within the context of classical Hinduism, it is possible to find two responses of death: ritual and renunciation of the world. The ritual response to death involves a funeral procession by the chief mourner. With the exception of burying children and women dying during the child birth. A second response to death is renunciation of the world, a means for transcending the world by a symbolic death. The rationale is following: if one is already dead, one cannot die again. Within the teachings of the Buddha, death is directly connected with his First Noble Truth: all life is suffering. So, death is described as 'mysterious' because we cannot formulate a satisfactory concept of death. Death is typically regarded as a great evil, especially if it strikes someone too soon.

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Thus, death is identified by terms like *marana, Vigama, Vināsa*, etc. It is identified with a process, in which the matter (*pudgala*), called *anubhuyamana*, would separate from the soul (*ātman*), and then perish.[2] The Agamas preach that the loss of life (*jiva*) of body (*sarira*), by itself would not complete the process of death; it is the successful destruction of *ayu-karma*. The liberation is identified with terms such as *udurtana* (promoting oneself from the lowest stage, or hell), *kala* (escaping from the ordinary world of men) and *cyuta* (getting released from the world of demigods). The terms *udurtana* and *cyuta*, however, are reserved for divine beings.[3] Some texts debate the akala, untimely or premature, and *svakala*, mature or timely, death. It is stated that death can be hastened through the *udirna* process, as a raw mango can be ripened by the *payala* and other processes of treatment.[4]

The *Tattvārtha Sutra*, compiled in the 5th century BCE represents the earliest known compendium of Jain doctrinal beliefs. The author of this massive work was the chief disciple of Lord Mahavira, a man named Umasvāti, who created a "handbook for understanding the meaning of the basic truths"[5] in which he describes fourteen stages through which a soul must travel in reach the end point of *moksa* or liberation upon death. These fourteen phases are known as the *Gunasthāna* or "levels of virtue" and are likened in the rungs of a ladder.[6]

One may climb up or down on the ladder depending on their actions but in order to achieve the ultimate goal of transcending the cycle of *samsara* a *jiva* must at some point move sequentially up the ladder, through the fourteen stages. Each higher stage moves the practitioner from various states of ignorance, passion, bad conduct, and more *karma* to states of omniscience, less passion, perfect conduct, and decreasing amounts of *karma* until there is no *karma* left at all. This path to perfection is sometimes called the "path of purification."[7]

The Jains identify ritual-death with various terms, each term connoting a distinctive characteristic of its own.[8] The wise, partially-wise, and foolish deaths are associated with aspirants who are respectively proficient, partially-proficient and foolish ones. The result of such deaths is recognized by the state of their attainment (such as *kevali, siddha*, etc.) in different heavens, and also from possibility and non- possibility of the recurrence of birth.[9] The goal of the proficient one is to become *svayambhu* or *paramātmā*, to achieve liberation of the soul from *samsara* through Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. If Right Faith makes him realize the essential purity of the soul, Right knowledge leads him to understand the objective as laid down in the *Agamas* by the *Arhantas*: Right Conduct secures him perfect equanimity, in as much as he burns through penance, the *karma* accumulated over many existences.

In texts we find as many as forty-eight types of deaths, though all these falls under a couple of groupings. More succinct and meaningful lists are provided in the *Bhagavati Sutra* and *Bhagavati Ārādhanā*. [10]

After discussing different types of death, here it is important to bring into limelight the Jain ritual of death known as *Sallekhanā* which is not found in any other religions of the world. Now the question is what is *Sallekhanā*, to answer this we have to deal with the inner meaning of the term.

The derivation *sat* (praiseworthy), *lekhana* (emasculation or enervation of the body), or a praise worthy process of emasculating the body, appears to have been at the root of the ritual meaning of *sallekhanā*.[11] The householder is expected to generally observe it at the last moment of his life (*maranantikamsallekhanamjosita*), to ensure a passionless, peaceful, unpressurised end.[12]Kundakundacarya regards *sallekhana* as part of the *siksavratas*, the vows which insure and promote renunciation.[13]Kartikeya, Samantabhadra and Umasvati go into the nature of *sallekhanā* after a discussion of the *silavratas*; this is also endorsed by Hemachandra and others.[14] While Kundakunda treats *sallekhanā* as one of the *vratas*, others give it a place in the context of ritual death.[15]

In the *Sthānānga Vrtti*, the Acarya Abhyayadevasuri said that *Sallekhanā* is, "The activity by which the body is weakened and passions are overcome."[16] Other works give a slightly different linguistic allusion describing *Sallekhanā* as the "peeling off of the passions" of the body and the forfeiture of bodily strength in order to strengthen the spirit.[17]To weaken the physical body is *Dravya Sallekhanā*, while to overcome the passions of the body is *Bhava Sallekhanā*. Since Jain thought considers the body a prison for the soul, and the passions like the chains that hold the soul in its prison, it is of paramount importance in Jain belief in weaken these two entities in order to liberate the soul.

Sallekhanā is a continuing practice aimed at weakening the body externally and the passions internally. Thus, *Sallekhanā* can actually be an open-ended form of preparatory penance that trains the aspirant to embrace the final act of death but does not necessarily have to end in death itself. The penance in and of itself is a spiritually rewarding ritual. The positive death that results from the *Sallekhanā* is then called *Sānthāra* or *Samādhimarana*. The fact that the preparatory act of *Sallekhanā* is designed to end in the death of the aspirant is qualified in the texts by the adjective "*maranāntiki*" or "ending in death". This adjective thus sets it apart linguistically and conceptually from *Sānthāra* which is essentially just death. Also, the

option of specific periods of time in which to take *Sallekhana*, such as twelve years, twelve months or twelve weeks proves that it is an open-ended penance that is not always meant to end in death.

The term *Sallekhana* is used to encompass the preparatory penance preceding the enlightened death and *Samādhimarana* are is the act of dying an enlightened death. A third term, *Sānthāra*, connotes the level of rigor of the final stages of dying This process begins with the gradual withdrawal from all obsessions connected with the family as well as society, after realization of the true nature of worldly life; it is accompanied by repentance for the sins which originate from the brutal and boastful behaviour of the aspirant.[18] Without understanding the true nature of piety (*dharma*) from the learned sages,[19] the aspirant should not attempt to seek renunciation and initiation. A king may abandon his kingdom only after selecting his successor, training him in his duties, and familiarizing his successor with the responsibilities of his office and subjects. Even a sage-to- be has a duty to society, and without fulfilling it, he was not to attempt ascetic abandonment.

Whether a house-holder or a monk, he was required to ensure the stability of his monastery. Withdrawal from the family is followed by initiation into the realm of renouncers, by a *diksā guru*. The initiation is not a formal ceremony, a mechanical fulfilment of rites and rituals; it is an intense exercise to gain will-power. It begins with self-examination and proceeds to contemplate on the tenets which unravel the purpose and goal of life. It is a process of churning out the truth. No teacher is to initiate the aspirant without assuring himself of the intention, sincerity, and ability of the aspirant.[20]

Almost all the texts lay down the conditions under which a monk or a lay-disciple is expected to seek termination of life by accepting the vow of *sallekhanā*. A caution is given to all those who see only the purposelessness of the body; they are informed to note that the normal body has its own utility, and wanton destruction of it is not desirable. “When the body is still fit”, says the author of the *Yasastilaka Campu*, “do not attempt to destroy it; nor lament over that which gets naturally destroyed”,[21]Asadhara makes a distinction between the recoverable and terminal stages of life and advises destruction of only the last, through the process of renunciation and mortification.[22]

The body has a role to play in helping the aspirant attain the three jewels (*ratnatraya*); hence, its destruction should not be the sole goal of an enlightened aspirant.[23]Nonetheless, the aspirant should know its limited use, its inevitable destruction, and its remote relevance to the

ultimate welfare of the soul. "Birth, death, diseases are all associated with the body, not with me, (the soul), realizing this, I (soul) should cultivate detachment from the body".[24]

While death is to be hastened at the closing part of the life-span, preparation for this final act must be made throughout the life-time. During the preparatory period, prescribed vows (*nompis*) are to be observed; one such vow, named *acamla-vardhana*, involving alternate days of fasting, engages the aspirant for as long a period as about fifteen years.[25]This means that the acceptance of the vow of *sallekhanā* at the end of the life-span is not to be a spontaneous and sudden decision, but it is to be the culminating point of a series of severe austerities already suffered and mastered by the aspirant. This process is appropriately compared to a period of training which a warrior has to go through in order to be successful fighter. If his training is in complete and unsatisfactory, he would not be able to face a fierce enemy; if he happens to be one of those whose training (observance of *nompis*) has been through and perfect, but who would panic in the battlefield (while observing the *sallekhanā*-vow), defeat and humiliation are bound to be his only gains.[26]

Thus, the *sallekhanā*-death is to be the proper fruit of rigorous penances practiced throughout one's life-time rather than as only an act to gain the final fruit.[27]*Two Stages in the Vow of Sallekhanā*: The ritual of *sallekhanā* falls into two parts –(1) *bahya-sallekhanā*, relating to the external observances: (2) *abhyantara-sallekhanā*, governing the internal purifications.[28] The external penances are aimed at subjugating the urges of the body, through a process of self-flagellation. The target of this penance is the subjugation of emotions (*ragas*); the weapon of attack is fasting.[29] The external austerities are spelt out in terms of a variety of constraints imposed on the intake of four types of food: consuming less than what is needed, conditional acceptance of food, rejection of any one or all of the nutrients such as ghee, milk, curd, sugar, salt, oil, etc. While practicing these, the art of mortifying he body without allowing the will-power to flag.[30]This process of flagellation of body, in order to gain control over emotions (*rāgas*), or passions (*kasāyas*), is called *dravya-sallekhanā*.[31]

The internal austerities (*abhyantara*) consist of expedition, reverence, service, study of the scriptures, concentration of mind, etc.[32] This process by which the soul is cleansed of anger and longing, hatred and passion, fear and misery,[33] is identified as *bhava-sallekhana*.[34] Abandoning love, hatred, compassion, etc., and purifying the mind, the one who aspires for the *sallekhanā* death should forgive others and forgive himself; he should begin pleasing words to be forgiven by his people and servants for the possible wrongs he may have

committed in the past. As this is intended to free himself from *rāga* and *dvesa*, (love and hatred), it may be regarded as an attempt to secure *kasāya-sallekhanā*.[35]

Gradually reducing and ultimately renouncing solid food, the aspirant should resort to nutritive liquids and, then, after some time, rejecting even the latter, take only warm water. In the next stage, he should abandon even the warm water, and fast rigorously; exerting to the best of his ability, he should concentrate on the *pancanamaskāra* hymns until he breathes his last.[36]

The final exertion should be devoid of *sallekhanā-aticaras*, i.e. desire either to live or die, recollection of past friends and anticipation of sensual compensation in the next world for the ascetic sufferings in the present.[37]He who quenches his thirst from the nectar of *sallekhanā* shall not only obtain the great comforts enjoyed by Lord Indra, but shall sail in the vast ocean of moksha. This state of moksha is marked by a synthesis of universal knowledge or *vidyā*, *darsana, virya*, health, contentment, bliss and highest purity, which shine in him eternally like a diadem on the forehead of the lord of three-worlds. If he were to rebirth, he shall be born with all the best that humans should need on this earth, including the opportunity to observe the rite of *sallekhanā*. [38]The ritual of *sallekhanā* has been extensively discussed in the kavya-literature produced between the 9th and 14th centuries in Karnataka.

The *sallekhanā*-vow was invariably administered by a learned and senior monk; the initiation of the aspirant took place in the presence of members of the monastic order, an assembly of prominent laity, and, on some occasions, with the chieftain or the ruler of the place (especially if he was a Jaina) participating in it. The aspirant was required to announce his intention to take the vow and prove the sincerity of his conviction to the congregation; it was after ascertaining the causes of the action and the capacity of the aspirant to endure the severity of the ensuing observances, that his faith in the pursuit was accepted, and he was helped to fulfil the vows. Srutamuni, who lived in Sravana Belgola,[39]was more fortunate than Manikasena, who lived at Hadurvalli,[40] because the former could seek the guidance and help of the order, while the latter had to depend more on the secular chieftain than on the weakly organized order for fulfilling his *sallekhanā*-vow. Though both accepted death in the 15th century, the strong religious base at Sravana Belagola and the absence of such a base at Haduvalli, perhaps made this difference inevitable.

The *sallekhanā*-vow seems to have been observed over a period of anywhere between two-and-a-half months and three-days before the termination of life. Mallisena's observance were concluded within three days; Srinandi and Bhaskaranandi took a month to complete the vow; Manikasena had to observe the vow for thirty-three days, while Nemicandracarya took as many as two-and-a-half months to complete his vow.[41]

The peaceful death and the journey towards achieving it were perhaps developed as a response to the truth written in the *Dasavaikālika Sutra* which says ever so simply. "Everyone wants to live and none wants to die."[42]In the broadest sense of Jain philosophy an eternal soul (*jiva*) is subject to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (*samsara*). When in a physical form, particularly a human form the worth of the body that houses the soul is based on utility. The physical body is a tool or the conduit by which the soul seeks out knowledge and enlightenment and proceeds on its spiritual journey. When the physical body begins to fail and is more of a burden than an asset the Jain canons teach that the enlightened aspirant is best served by accepting that their body is but a temporary vessel and that death is a natural progression and thus it is preferable to embrace death rather than hang on to life.

The Jain canons in essence suggest that rather than allowing the grim spectator of death to stalk you, you as the aspirant, give up life-sustaining practices such as eating and drinking and meet death with a posture of openness. This psychological acceptance of death you adopt a position or attitude of equanimity towards death. This process of accepting death, of psychologically preparing oneself to voluntarily end one's life, known as *Sallekhana*, should ideally result is the person looking back on a life of piety and therefore having no fear because they are assured of a good reincarnation.

The *Tattvārthasutra* tells that the aspirant should think, "I have followed the path of virtue and thus I do not fear death."[43] Conversely one who has lived a sinful life full of worldly attachments dies fretfully, fearing death for fear of being reborn in hellish circumstances or as an animal.

The Jain emphasis on the primary importance of conduct in achieving spiritual liberation has led to the development of a highly rigorous code of monastic practices and a very stringent code of conduct for its laity. Severe penance as a means of purging accumulated *karma* from the soul is prescribed for all followers of the Jain philosophy.

Here I want to bring into limelight that *Samādhimarana* and *Sallekhanā* are frequently used interchangeable terms, both in the media and conversationally, in the literature they have

distinctly different grammatical and conceptual nuances. *Samādhimarana* is a state of being, a peaceful death and a dispassionate end. It is the experience of death itself, a singular point in time. *Sallekhanā* is a vow followed by an elaborate process; a ritualistic journey one embarks on to achieve *Samādhimarana*.[44]

At this juncture I must conclude by raising a question: what makes the Jain form of death different from the death followed in other religions of the world? The answer certainly will be- the Jain form of death gives an idea of exclusive death- it is the fine art of dying gracefully and with dignity.

A Jain may embark on the ultimate renunciation of his /her life by preparing for a cheerful, stoic and positive outlook on death after having sought all forgiveness and made every attempt to detach himself from all attachment of life like affection, grief, fear etc., in order to ensure a permanent ending from the eternal and unchanging life cycle of Karma. This is how Jain way of death differs from other religions of the world.

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from v. 64 onwards. The most elaborate account on the subject, given by Sivakotyacarya in

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27. It is appropriately described as *antakriyakaranam-tapah-phalam-Ratna. Sra*., 123, Cf., *Sri Kundakunda-Sravakacara*, XII, 4.

28. *Bha. Ara*., 208

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30. *Tattva. Su*., IX, 20.

31. *JKS.,*383: Cf., *Pancastikaya*, 173, 253, *Bha. Ara*., 208-272.

32. *Tattva. Su*., IX, 20.

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In searching for the Past and Present of Saraswati Worshipping among the Jain Community of Bengal and Jharkhand: A Historical Discourse

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In terms of religious variety and diversity in the cultural periphery of India, Jainism is one of those religions and sects that were able to steer the country's culture and tradition in a new direction. Historically, the era of the 24th Tirthankara Mahavira, i.e. the fifth century BCE (circa), is generally identified as the time of the emergence of Jainism or its popular-most variant[1], but many scholars acknowledged the existence of the Jainism and the Jain community from the time of Mahavira's first ancestor, the first Jain *Tirthankara Rishabhadeva* or *Ādideva*[2]. However, it is widely accepted that since the early days of Jainism, the Jain community lived in the ancient *Anga* and *Vanga mahajanapada*s of Eastern India and this community was known as *Shrāvaka*s. A distorted pronunciation of the word 'Sravaka' is '*Sarāk*'[3], by which this early Jain sect is better known today. There is an opinion, though controversial, that the Sravaka community played a key role in the spread of new civilization and craft culture in the aforesaid regions[4]. Even the matter about early arrival of copper[5] and iron[6] culture in the prehistoric Bengal region has been attributed to them by many historians. The existential references of this community are also found in mediaeval Bengali literature[7]. In the modern era, several British officials and field surveyors have described the original and contemporary behavior of this *Sarāk* or *Srāvaka* community in their accounts. Today, this historical community can be seen living in some selected areas in *Rādha* or *Lādha* region of West Bengal, Bhum region of Jharkhand and several places of Odish[8]. In this paper, an attempt has been made by the author to understand Saraswati worshipping and its ancient traditions among these communities by revisiting archaeological findings, studying some literary works and conducting fieldwork in selected parts of Jharkhand and West Bengal.

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Saraswati, younger daughter of lord Shiva and Parvati, is a very popular goddess in Hinduism, who is generally worshipped as the goddess of wisdom, knowledge, speech (*Vāk*), music and learning. Saraswati is considered an important Goddess in Jainism also.

A group of historians and scholars claimed that in Jainism, the Goddess became known as "*Saraswati*" or "*Srutadevatā*" during the Kushana era, approximately circa 200 CE[9]. The wisdom and divine power of the Goddess are proclaimed by the *Jina Purusha* and *Kevalajnāni* or Kevalins in the sacred Jain Agama texts such as *Vyākhya Prajnapti* and *Paumacharya*. Apart from these, references to '*Srutadevatā*' or ``'*Saraswati*' are found in *Pannabagaran* (Pali pronunciation of *Pancha Vyākarana*), *Bhagavati Sutra*, *Mahānisithasutra*, and many other Jain scriptures also. The Jain tradition describes the twelve Jain *Angasutra*s as the limbs of the Goddess and the fourteen *Purva*s as her ornament[10]. In the Jain text '*Ratnasāgara*' it is said in praise of Goddess Saraswati-

Kundēndu-gōkṣīra-tuṣārabarṇā
sarōjahastā kamalē niṣannā.
Bāgīśbarī pustakabargahastā
sukhāẏa sā na: Sadā praśastā.[11]

In the same book, Goddess Saraswati is also referred to as '*Vishwarupini*'. Jain scriptural writers refer to Goddess Saraswati by a total of sixteen names, including *Bharati, Sārada, Bāgishwari, Brahmani, Brahmavādini, Bratcārini* etc[12]. Goddess Saraswati was initially worshipped as the embodiment of wisdom and purity, but from the 10th century CE she was also worshipped as the Goddess of music[13] in Jain culture.

The Jain sculptures of the Goddess Saraswati belonging to the early period that are found across India have two hands[14]. In some sculptures she is seen with a rose in one hand and a lotus on the other. In others, she is seen with a water-pot (*kamandalu*) and a rosary (*japamālā*) in her two hands[15]. Later sculptures, especially from the 10th-11th centuries CE, are four-armed, with ladle and book in the two upper hands and rosary and vessel in the lower two. But in both cases the swan is present at her feet, as the vehicle (*vahana*) of the Goddes[16]. One of the sculptures of the Goddess Saraswati was discovered inside a dilapidated *pancāyatan* temple in Wari village under HarishchandraPur police station of Malda[17]. In this sculpture, the Goddess is seated in *Lalitāsana* or *Ardhaparyankasana*. Although the Goddess is represented as multi-handed in the sculpture, all the arms of the sculpture are in a damaged state i.e. there is nothing left of the original. However, many experts have speculated that the number of hands in the sculpture could be either eight or ten. An inscription was found on the pillar of the statue itself, which was later deciphered by renowned epigraphist Dinesh Chandra

Sircar. The inscription states that this sculpture of Goddess Saraswati was installed by honorable Padmagiri, in his (Padmagiri's) place of worship (*Param ārādhya*) (temple?) built of baked bricks, who is isolated from all external world. However, the fact is that the sculpture has ten (or eight) hands which create confusion in the minds of researchers about the real identity of the deity. Because, until this discovery, almost all the Hindu and Buddhist canonical scriptures usually identify the Goddess Saraswati with two, four or at the most six arms. In addition, the determination of the actual period of the statue or the writing is not historically conclusive. On the other hand, researcher-professor Bijan Mandal during his research fieldwork observed several different figures of Goddess Saraswati[18]. One of these figures, founded in Golahat village in Burdwan, is currently worshipped as ``*Jaymangalā*" outside the new temple structure as per the beliefs and demands of local people. Another figure found at Ghazal in Malda district of West Bengal is similar to the previous one. In both cases, the "buffalo rider" or *mahishavāhini* form of the goddess is seen, which is also an exception. These exceptional figures, according to Dr. Mondal, are representation of local traditions and beliefs of Devi's worshipping[19]. On the other hand, it is surprisingly true that the earliest Jain Saraswati figure was discovered from the Kankali Tila in Mathura, but later, most of the Jain Saraswati sculptures were found in western and central India and some places in the southern India. Several temples of Baroda in Gujarat, Udaipur in Rajasthan, Mount Abu Pahar, Bikaner, Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, especially the Parswanath temple, are noteworthy in this regard.

The figures found at all these places bear some resemblance to the previously discussed Saraswati figures of indeterminate style found in Bengal. Here, the style of holding the veena, the presence of rosary (*akshmālā*) in the right hand, the water pot in the left hand, the physical adornment etc. are noteworthy. In this matter, it may not be unreasonable to assume that the Jain style of sculpture of western India has an influence on all those declassified sculptures of Bengal mentioned earlier. However, it is not yet appropriate to declare the figures to be solely Jain Saraswati idols.

Although the Jain community of Bengal is mentioned sporadically in mediaeval literature and some colonial writings, there is almost no information about their religious rituals, especially about worshipping of Devi Saraswati. Nowadays, several researchers have worked on various aspects of *Sarāk* life, such as socio-economic status, culture, rituals etc., but they have almost ignored the tradition of Saraswati worshipping among that community. The fact is, a clear and healthy deviation can be observed in the religious practices of the *Sarāk* Jain community nowadays, in which mainly the influence of Hinduism is seen to a

greater extent. Therefore, many scholars and researchers may have noticed the matter of Saraswati worshipping in the community, but they have avoided it by simplifying it as an effect of Hindu influence.

The present author conducted surveys in Belut[20] village in Bokaro district and Rangalia[21] village in Dumka district of Jharkhand basically for a project funded by Indian Council for Social Science Research. The author conducted similar surveys in Gobag[22] and Lachia[23] villages in Purulia district of West Bengal also. All of those villages in which the present author did surveys are predominantly inhabited by the Jain *Sarāk* community. The presence of Saraswati temples is observed in each of these villages. During the surveys, some older members of the community told the author that the tradition of worshipping Devi Sarasvati in a structured building or temple has been continuing since time immemorial. Although Saraswati is one of the eminent goddesses of Hinduism, her permanent temple is not seen in the niche of Hindu culture, especially in Hindu areas of West Bengal and this is where it differs from Hindu culture. Besides, through various interviews conducted during the survey phase, it is known that such temples exist in other Sarāk -inhabited villages around the region. Therefore, it can be considered as a distinct form of Saraswati worshipping of the *Sarāk*s living in those areas mentioned before.

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Applying *Anekāntavāda:* A Jaina Perspective on Business Ethics Dilemma

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Abstract

In the present age, the businesses encounter myriads of challenges for its survival, with business ethics playing a pivotal role. While many businesses endeavour to operate ethically, they constantly face dilemmas that challenge their commitment to ethical conduct. In today's globalized world, characterized by heightened connectivity and interdependence, the businesses are under persistent increased pressure to visibly conduct business in a way to balance between its economic interest and ethical principles. The doctrine of *Anekāntavāda,* cornerstone of Jaina philosophy, is the tool through which the Jaina philosophers are able to contend that reality has multiple characteristics. *Anekāntavāda* is the approach of mind which forbids it from viewing any problem or solution from partial view in order to adopt comprehensive view of reality. Where Jainism is known as a one of the religions with ethical principles, this paper is an attempt to investigate how a modern-day business can resolve business ethics dilemmas in a peaceful manner by incorporating the theory of *anekāntavāda*. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersections between ancient wisdom theory and contemporary ethical issues, offering wider insights in the field of business ethics.

Keywords: Business ethics, Jaina philosophy, Truth, *Anekāntavāda, Nayavāda, Dravyāstikanaya, Paryāyāstika naya*

Introduction

Business ethics is the set of moral and ethical values that guide the actions and behaviour in the business environment. There are two important factors which regulate the conduct of business viz. mandatory laws and regulations established by the regulator as the framework within which business must operate and internal policies developed by the business to regulate its relations with internal as well as external stakeholders.

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It is the picture of how the business operate on a day-to day basis and maintain relations with all its stakeholders along with compliance with corporate regulations and legislations. Internal policies are more subtle and create room for misunderstandings. These internal policies reflect mutual expectations regarding each other's roles, responsibilities, and ethics. If we look at the past, there was time when business and ethics were considered as opposite poles.

The only motive of business was to earn profit. But the time has changed completely, now business cannot survive without ethics. However, the fact remains that the relation between profits and ethics is quite tenuous. More often it happens that stakeholders have presumptions that businesses cannot run ethically and therefore most of them would be unethical. One of the most important reasons for such a notion is the ambiguity relating to what actually is ethics. The term ethics may mean differently to each and every individual and depends on individual's view point.

Business ethics therefore plays most important role not only in the survival and success of the business but also for mental peace and satisfaction of the stakeholders. However, most of the times business as well as stakeholders are not entirely satisfied because they differ in their view on what is right and what is wrong. In reality, truth is a very complex notion and has many realms. On one hand, Absolute truth gives clear and precise understanding of the thing itself by discarding any doubts which comes at the cost of repudiating its contrary. Whereas Relative truth is based on the individual's understanding of it. Relativism and absolutism thus have their own merits and demerits. The doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* often cited as the differentia that represents the Jaina philosophical position, is the tool that describes that reality has multiple characteristics. This theory of non-absolutism believes that a particular thing or an object will look differently from different angles but is ultimately same. A particular problem will look different from different perspective from which it is seen. *Anekāntavāda* proposes that reality has many forms as seen by various individuals and all must respect the reality perceived by one-another and thereby helps in resolving conflicts and increasing tolerance.

Understanding Jaina doctrine of *Anekāntavāda*

Though there were traces of the doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* in the texts composed before Ācārya Siddhasena Diwākara, he was perhaps the first one to use the term *anekāntavāda* and identifying the Jaina position with it. Ācārya Samantabhadra, a stalwart in

Jaina logic and epistemology, is credited of having employed the doctrine of *anekāntavāda* to quite a few debates across all the branches of philosophy. The term '*anekāntavāda'* consist of '*aneka'* which means multiple or more than one, '*anta'* which means aspects or qualities and '*vada'* which means theory. Any entity has three aspects viz. *dravya* (substance), *guna* (attributes) and *paryāya* (modes) which means any substance has innumerable attributes which undergoes constant modification. It is not possible for any ordinary person to know all of attributes of any substance or entity at any given point of time. To know all the aspects of any substance at all times is achieving omniscience. *Anekāntavāda* consists of many-sided approach to the study of the problems. It lays emphasis on many-sidedness of the truth. *Anekāntavāda* refers to evaluating a situation or thing from every possible standpoint and fostering a mindset conducive to such analysis. Reality can be viewed from various view points and every viewpoint has an element of truth, and we can get to know the truth only when all viewpoints are amalgamated.

Naya is the valid knowledge of one part, aspect or quality of the reality and since any reality can be viewed from many angles there are multiple *naya* or standpoints. The theory of *Nayavāda* classifies the various viewpoints broadly into seven categories viz. *Naigama naya, Samgraha naya, Vyavhāra naya, Ṛjusūtra naya, Śabda naya, Samabhirūdha naya* and *Evambhūta naya*. However, Ācārya Siddhasena Diwākara in the third verse of Sanmati Tarka states that the Dravyāstika naya and Paryāyāstika naya are the two fundamental viewpoints that cover the general and the particular viewpoints of the things. All the other analytical methods of inquiry fall under these two methods only. This also suggests that there are many kinds of views i.e. versitality of aspects however, the same is broadly classified in the abovementioned two views. Dravyāstika naya refers to the perspective that considers the substance or the actual nature of things, while Paryāyāstika naya pertains to the viewpoint that focuses on the aspects or attributes of things. Whenever a person thinks or speaks it either consider the actual nature or the similarity or the present aspect or difference. The exposition of the two nayas and their mutual reconciliation is *Anekānta.*

As stated earlier, any entity has three aspects viz. *dravya* (substance), *guna* (attributes) and *paryāya* (modes). The substance is permanent, constant and unchanging, the modes undergo constant modification and attributes enables a substance to assume any particular form or mode. From the viewpoint of Paryāyāstika naya all the things necessarily born and perish whereas from the viewpoint of Dravyāstika naya all the things exist eternally without any birth or decay. So, there cannot be anything devoid of modification of birth and death as

well as there can be no modification in the absence of the existence. Therefore, birth, decay and continuity are the three characteristics of any substance. The three characteristics must be considered in harmony to understand the truth holistically and to vanish the drawbacks which are attached to every viewpoint severally. If any of these are considered individually it would be incorrect representation or representation of partial truth. Thus, any theory when not based on *Anekānta ḍṛṣti* can never ensure perfect or complete knowledge. When all the viewpoints are considered in synthesis it results in broadmindedness rather than narrowmindedness. Therefore, both the viewpoints need to be considered together to arrive at the truth by the method of *Anekāntavāda.* However, the problem arises when one considers only one viewpoint without regard to the other.

Business ethics and its Dilemma

According to Britannica, the term ethics may refer to the philosophical study of the concepts of moral right and wrong and moral good and bad, to any philosophical theory of what is morally right and wrong or morally good and bad, and to any system or code of moral rules, principles, or values. It can be said that ethics deals with social values which makes distinction between what is good or bad. When the term business is prefixed to it, the two collectively refer to right and wrong of the businesses.

Business ethics is thus a form of applied ethics which deals with application of ethics to overall conduct of business including various issues faced by itself and its stakeholders. The object is to prevent unethical business practices, both deliberate and inadvertent. Some unethical practices evade law enforcement. Unlike personal ethics, company rules and regulations are intricate and its non-compliance may result in the organization suffering huge losses. Business ethics includes but is not limited to corporate responsibility, personal responsibility, social responsibility, fairness, respect, reliability and technology ethics. It emphasizes customer loyalty, reputation and employee retention. However, the problem arises because the meaning of the term differs from person to person and organization to organization and everyone has their own view. The application of ethics highly depends on personal ethics of the top management of the business because what is good or bad depends on the policies and procedures developed by them.

Application of *Anekāntavāda* in Business Ethics dilemmas

The application of the doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* in day-to-day life facilitates reconciliation of the multiple views of reality. The scope of business ethics is quite wide as

ethical problems and phenomena arise across all the functional areas and at all levels within an organization. To prevent any unethical issue, the business organization need to first of all know who are its stakeholders (internal as well as external), know their claims and expectations, weigh their expectations, ethically decide on the action required. Therefore, the task before the business organization is to understand these multiple expectations which may be sometimes conflicting and prioritise amongst them. Again, these expectations are to be weighed against the goals, vision and expectations of the business itself of return on investment, profit, expansion, goodwill, productivity, optimum utilization of resources, healthy cashflow, etc. thus, adopting an approach of holistically considering all the requirements and expectations at various level helps in having broader vision and better decision making.

The decision-making process adopted by the business organization for fulfilling the expectation while running usual business is usually unstructured or only loosely structured which leads to problems. This may lead to stakeholders' dissatisfaction and invite unnecessary problems for the business organization like damage to its reputation, potential negative impact on customer retention and loyalty, negative publicity, wide-spread loss of motivation and low productivity amongst employees**.** *Anekāntavāda* is the approach of mind which forbids it from viewing any problem or solution from one angle or with partial view as one sided angle cannot give comprehensive view of reality and lead to breeding of discontent and hatred. Its states that any affirmation or judgement is true in its own limited sense and is not absolute. Thus, it is imperative for the top management adopt multidimensional approach as a core leadership attribute in order to effectively manage stakeholders with diverse personalities, abilities, expectations, and inclinations.

Also, one of the other important theories which needs attention is the theory of '*Samvāya'* which is the theory of causation. Every action that takes place have deep connection with five main causes together known as *samvāya*. 1) Time (*kāl*), 2) Own-nature (*svabhāva*), 3) *Karma*, 4) Fate (*niyati*) and 5) Self-effort (*prushārtha*) that are responsible for all the things that happen in this universe. Looking at any one of the five causes while considering any event or situation is considered as *mithyā dṛṣti*. When all these causes are considered on a common ground of synthesis, the cause behind any event become true and significant. However, when any cause is considered in isolation, there is contradiction and imperfectness. Therefore, it is pertinent to consider all the causes while looking at any issue and making decision over it.

As a basic notion, every individual has restricted vision wherein it develops *rāga* (attachment) and *dveṣa* (aversion) leading to irrational and sentimental preferences and prejudices while handling any situation. This stops that individual from looking at the situation neutrally considering all the aspects of reality. The task of *Anekāntavāda* is to lead the individuals specially the top management free from *rāga* and *dveṣa* towards more rational way of thinking and decision making.

Further, it is true that although the broad framework remains the same, meaning of the term ethics differs from person to person and organisation to organisation. The goal of each and every stakeholder is different and some are conflicting and non fulfilment results in hatred, depression, mental stress, loss and other negative impacts. But when a stakeholder or business considers all possible views of other stakeholders each of which is true and limited in its own way, and post that takes any decision or action, it will result in satisfaction amongst atleast majority if and not all stakeholders. This does not necessarily mean that views of all stakeholders are valid as *anekāntavāda* states that each view is a partial truth and therefore *anekāntavāda* will only aid in being broad minded and consider different views before coming to any conclusion. This will help in resolving a lot of conflicts beforehand.

Conclusion

The stability of an organisation is put to risk when any unexpected problem occurs and India has been increasingly witnessing turmoil in business and corporate world. Some of the high profile corporate fiascos include that of Satyam Computers, Ketna Parikh's fraud, Harshad Mehta's fraud, Kingfisher Airlines, Jet Airways and so on. False accounting entries, money laundering, fraudulent trades for profit inflation, disclosure of price-sensitive information and such negative activities are growing rapidly. Looking at the case history it can be determined that personal ethics of higher management team and decision making process were some of the important causes of such frauds. Thus, inorder to combat such unhealthy practices it is beneficial that higher management team design internal policies and code of conduct for the organization keeping in mind the doctrine of *Anekāntavāda*.

Sometimes, it may happen that we might not agree with everything and everyone, but the idea is to be tolerant. We may have our own mind but at the same time we respect and recognize view of others. One must stand for their own beliefs and opinions if that they are based upon rational observations, but tolerate those of others to have their own. *Anekāntavāda* can greatly be helpful in cultivating such an attitude.

The concepts and theories of Jainism have practical importance in shaping strong ethical business model. Jainism is not just about attaining liberation but it shows various ways and gives direction for the same. This paper brings out the importance of Jaina concept in building healthy ethical model for any business organization which may also result into mental, economic, physical and spiritual well being to individuals. This paper was an attempt to lay down a basic framework on the application of Jaina theory to resolving business ethics dilemma. However, future study can focus on specific key issues faced in business ethics by the top management and skillful application of Jaina theory of *Anekāntavāda* as well as other Jaina values.

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Socio-Economic and Cultural Conditions of Jaina *Sarāk* Village Laxmanpur of Bankura District: A Field Study

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Introduction

The *Sarāk* community boasts a rich and enduring historical presence in the regions of Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, tracing their origins back several millennia. Historically, they were an influential group, leaving their mark on regions such as Burdwan, Birbhum, and Medinipur. However, over time, their geographical concentration shifted, and today, the *Sarāk* population is primarily found in districts like Purulia and Bankura in West Bengal; Ranchi, Dhanbad, Bokaro, and Dumka in Jharkhand; and Baleshwar in Odisha. Despite their diminished numbers and geographical dispersion, the *Sarāk* people continue to preserve their distinct socio-cultural identity and traditions, which are intricately woven into the fabric of their everyday lives.

The village of Laxmanpur, located within the Saltora block of Bankura district in West Bengal, serves as a small yet significant representation of the contemporary *Sarāk* community. Positioned approximately 5 kilometers from Shushunia on the Chatna-Shushunia road, Laxmanpur provides a unique vantage point to observe the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of this historically significant community. The village is home to a small cluster of 10 *Sarāk* families, comprising a total of 44 individuals. This microcosm offers valuable insights into the challenges and adaptations faced by the *Sarāk* people in modern times. This village in the Bankura district holds significant importance as it serves as a central gathering point for the surrounding *Sarāk* community. The *Sarāk* residents of this village practice Jainism, adhering to its rituals and traditions. They are devoted followers of Digambara Jainism and disciples of Acharya Gyansagar Maharaj.

This field study aims to provide a detailed analysis of the *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur, focusing on their social structures, economic activities, cultural practices, and overall way of life. By delving into the lived experiences of these families, the report seeks to highlight the evolving identity of the *Sarāk* people and their efforts to navigate the complexities of contemporary society while maintaining their historical and cultural legacy.

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Objectives of the Study

The primary goal of this field survey was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Jaina *Sarāk* community residing in Laxmanpur village. The study sought to delve into various aspects of their lives, including their demographic, socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural realities. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. **Demographic Profiling**

   To compile a detailed demographic profile of the *Sarāk* families in Laxmanpur, focusing on key parameters such as age distribution, gender, religion, caste, ethnicity, and profession. Physical metrics like height and weight were also recorded to provide insights into health and nutrition trends within the community.

2. **Analysis of Socio-Economic Conditions**

   To examine the socio-economic environment in which the *Sarāk* families live, focusing on housing conditions, basic infrastructure, dietary habits, and patterns of livelihood. Special attention was given to cultural aspects such as marriage customs and religious practices to understand their role in shaping community life.

3. **Health and Sanitation Awareness**

   To evaluate the community's awareness and practices regarding health, hygiene, and sanitation. This included assessing their access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, and healthcare services, as well as examining issues like addiction habits and the prevalence of savings practices for health emergencies.

4. **Financial Patterns**

   To assess the monthly income and expenditure patterns of the *Sarāk* families. This included analysing spending on essential needs such as food, education, healthcare, and cultural ceremonies to better understand their financial priorities and challenges.

5. **Livelihood Sources**

   To identify and document the primary and secondary sources of livelihood for the *Sarāk* families. This objective also aimed to evaluate the sustainability and challenges associated with these income-generating activities.

6. **Socio-Economic Infrastructure**

   To investigate the availability and accessibility of socio-economic infrastructure in the region, including schools, healthcare centres, markets, banks, and transportation networks. This was intended to gauge how these facilities impact the quality of life and opportunities available to the *Sarāk* community.

7. **Educational and Employment Opportunities**

   To analyse literacy rates among the *Sarāk* families, with a particular focus on women's education and their access to employment opportunities. This aspect aimed to highlight the role of education in improving socio-economic mobility within the community.

8. **Cultural Practices**

   To document and study the cultural practices of the *Sarāk* community, including rituals and traditions associated with key life events such as birth, marriage, and death. This exploration sought to understand how these customs contribute to the preservation of their unique cultural identity.

By addressing these objectives, the study aimed to provide a holistic overview of the *Sarāk* community's current status, challenges, and aspirations, laying the groundwork for future interventions and support mechanisms tailored to their needs. The field study done from 8/11/23 to 10/11/23 and 15/11/24.

Demographic Profile

The *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur consists of 10 families, with a total population of 44 individuals. The community's family structures are varied, reflecting the typical household composition and generational dynamics within the village. Below is a breakdown of the family sizes and the composition of the households:

- 4 families consist of 4 members each.
- 3 families have 5 members each.
- 1 family comprises 3 members.
- 1 family, the largest in the village, has 8 members.
- 1 family is the smallest, with just 2 members.

Example Families:

1. **Largest Family – Umapada Maji's Household**

   This household represents the largest family in Laxmanpur, with a total of 8 members. The family includes multiple generations, showcasing the traditional multi-generational living arrangement typical in rural areas. This large household reflects strong family ties and continuity across generations. With several younger family members, this family also showcases a mix of age groups living together, from the elderly couple to young children.

2. **Smallest Family – Kartik Maji's Household**

   The smallest family in Laxmanpur consists of only 2 members, representing a more nuclear family structure. The couple represents an older, self-contained family unit in comparison to the larger, extended families in the village. The smaller size of this family might indicate a shift in family structures over time.

Caste and Religion:

The *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur identifies as belonging to the *Sarāk* caste and normally follows Hindu customs and deities as well as in some cases Jain rituals and religious practices like *Pryushan Parva, Mahāvira Jayanti, Daslakshna parva, Diwāli* etc. Their religious practices and beliefs align with the broader Hindu tradition, with a focus on local deities and village-centric rituals. All the surveyed *Sarāk* families belong to the OBC-B (Other Backward

Class–B) category, which influences their socio-economic positioning and access to government schemes designed for social upliftment.

Physical Characteristics:

The physical profile of the *Sarāk* people reveals a generally average to healthy stature, with the following common characteristics:

Height: The majority of individuals in the community are between 5'4" and 5'8", reflecting a relatively uniform physical build.

Weight: Body weight ranges between 48 kg and 70 kg, with no extreme variations, suggesting a moderately balanced diet and lifestyle.

Blood Groups: The two most common blood groups in the community are B+ and O+. However, many individuals are unaware of their blood group, which indicates a gap in basic health awareness and education.

The demographic profile of the *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur provides a snapshot of their living arrangements, social structure, and physical health characteristics. The diversity in family size and generational composition reflects both the traditional values of the community and the changing dynamics in modern rural India.

Socio-Economic Information

The socio-economic conditions of the *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur village provide valuable insights into their standard of living, lifestyle choices, and sources of livelihood. These conditions reflect both traditional practices and the gradual shift toward modern living, offering a snapshot of rural life in contemporary India. The following provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic features observed during the field study.

Housing

The housing conditions in Laxmanpur *Sarāk* village vary, with most families living in relatively stable and durable structures. A majority of the families, specifically eight out of the ten, reside in pucca houses. These houses are constructed with brick walls, concrete cement roofs, and cement floors, making them durable and more resistant to weathering compared to traditional mud houses. Among these, two families have houses that feature marble floors, which indicate a higher level of financial capability and a preference for more aesthetic and durable flooring options. Two families live in partially pucca houses. These are structures built with brick-and-mud walls, asbestos roofs, and cement floors. While these homes are sturdier than traditional mud houses, they still lack the full benefits of a completely pucca structure. The use of asbestos roofing suggests affordability and accessibility to low-cost materials. Mud houses were not observed in the village. The absence of mud houses indicates a shift towards local economic progress.

The village's choice of cooking fuel reflects a mix of tradition and modernity, highlighting a gradual shift toward cleaner technologies. Kartik Maji's family exclusively uses wood and dry leaves for cooking, a traditional method that is labor-intensive, environmentally taxing due to deforestation, and poses health risks from indoor air pollution. This practice remains common in areas where modern fuel options are either inaccessible or unaffordable.

In contrast, Gunamoy Maji's and Swapan Maji's families use a combination of wood and LPG gas. This hybrid approach marks a transition, where traditional fuels coexist with cleaner, more efficient options. LPG gas offers faster cooking, greater convenience, and reduced health risks, making it a practical step toward modern energy use.

The other seven families have fully adopted LPG gas as their sole cooking fuel. This shift indicates better economic conditions, improved access to modern fuel, and possibly the impact of government initiatives promoting cleaner energy. The widespread adoption of LPG enhances household health, reduces deforestation, and signifies the community's progress toward sustainable living.

Animal Husbandry

Animal husbandry is another aspect of the community's socio-economic life, with several families engaging in the rearing of domestic animals for both economic and social purposes.

Four out of the ten Sarāk families rear cows as part of their household activities. This practice is deeply embedded in the rural economy, where cows serve multiple purposes such as providing milk for consumption and sale, as well as serving as a source of dung for fuel and manure. The presence of cattle in these households reflects a degree of self-sufficiency and an agrarian lifestyle that relies on livestock for both sustenance and economic support.

Food Habits

The food habits of the *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur reflect both traditional dietary practices and a gradual shift toward more contemporary food choices. While some of the community's food practices are shaped by cultural and religious beliefs, the dietary trends have evolved significantly over time, particularly in terms of the introduction of meat, fish, and other non-vegetarian items. The following details provide insights into the dietary practices and trends observed within the Sarāk families of Laxmanpur and the wider Bankura district.

Dietary Practices

Traditionally, the Jain Sarāk community adhered to strict dietary restrictions due to their religious beliefs, particularly influenced by Jainism's emphasis on non-violence (ahimsa). These restrictions prohibited the consumption of certain foods, including:

- Underground vegetables like onions, garlic, and potatoes
- Fish, meat, eggs, and other animal-based products

However, over time, these dietary practices have become more flexible. Although some families still follow these customs, they are not universally observed among all Sarāk households in Laxmanpur. The community's dietary choices have become more diverse, with many families incorporating foods that were traditionally restricted.

Currently most Sarāk families in Laxmanpur now include a variety of foods in their daily diet. A few families still maintain some of the traditional dietary restrictions, particularly regarding the consumption of fish, meat, and eggs. These families tend to focus on vegetarian foods, especially when it comes to items that grow above ground, such as vegetables and grains.

Monthly Food Patterns

The monthly food consumption patterns of one representative *Sarāk* family in Laxmanpur illustrate the variety of foods consumed in their households. This example highlights the types and quantities of food items that are central to their diet:

Monthly family needs (aprox)

Rice	Wheat	Pulses	Vegetables	Fish	Meat	Oil	Milk
18 kg	8 kg	2 kg	26 kg	-	-	2.5 L	23 L

In this household, the monthly food consumption is characterized by a relatively high intake of rice, vegetables, and milk. The family does not consume fish or meat, suggesting that they may still adhere to Jain traditional dietary restrictions. The significant quantity of milk (23 ltrs) indicates its importance as a staple, likely used for daily consumption and perhaps for making dairy-based products like curd or sweets. This trend of vegetarianism is also evident across the Bankura district, where *Sarāk* families have gradually aligned with Jain customs while embracing more diverse dietary practices.

Marriage Practices

Marriage practices within the *Sarāk* community of Laxmanpur reflect a blend of traditional customs and evolving societal influences. The *Sarāk* community predominantly practices endogamy, meaning that marriages are traditionally conducted within the *Sarāk* caste. This practice ensures the preservation of cultural identity, caste ties, and familial connections within the community.

Dowry

Historically, the *Sarāk* community refrained from the practice of dowry, viewing marriage as a social and familial bond rather than a financial transaction. However, a recent survey revealed that dowry has become prevalent in Laxmanpur and other villages in the Bankura district. This shift can be attributed to changing social pressures, the influence of broader societal norms, and economic factors that have normalized dowry as part of the marriage process. Despite this trend, a few families in Bankura continue to reject dowry, reflecting adherence to traditional values. These exceptions highlight that dowry practices are not universally enforced and often depend on individual family beliefs and socio-economic circumstances.

Age of Marriage

The *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur places significant emphasis on adhering to legal and social norms concerning marriage. All *Sarāk* families ensure that girls are married only after the age of 18, in compliance with the legal marriage age established by the Indian government. This reflects a growing awareness of legal requirements and a commitment to safeguarding young girls from early marriage. The absence of child marriage within the community is noteworthy, especially given that it remains a pressing issue in many rural parts of India. This practice aligns with national efforts to promote women's education and empowerment, highlighting the community's prioritization of the well-being and future prospects of their daughters.

While traditional values like endogamy continue to dominate, modern influences are gradually shaping marriage practices. Although dowry has become more common, some families still resist it, reflecting varying adherence to this custom. These shifts demonstrate a blend of tradition and modernity within the *Sarāk* community.

Customs and Traditions

While the *Sarāk* community adheres strongly to Jainism, certain Hindu social customs also play a role in their lives. Birth Ceremonies and marriage rituals are performed in a manner that blends Jain and Hindu traditions, with particular emphasis on purity and blessings.

Health Awareness

The health conditions and awareness within the *Sarāk* community of Laxmanpur are relatively good, with minimal health problems reported among the 44 individuals in the village. While the overall health status is positive, certain chronic conditions are present, particularly among the elderly.

Health Status and Issues:

The majority of the community leads a healthy lifestyle, with only 10% reporting health concerns. Common issues include high blood pressure and diabetes, primarily affecting middle-aged and elderly individuals. These conditions are often linked to lifestyle factors such as diet, stress, and lack of physical activity, which are common in rural areas. Additionally, Gunamoy Maji suffers from heart problems and filariasis, a parasitic infection caused by mosquito bites that can result in complications such as limb swelling.

Healthcare Practices:

The *Sarāk* families adopt a mixed approach to healthcare, relying on both allopathic (modern medicine) and homeopathic (alternative medicine) treatments. Government hospitals and local clinics are the primary sources of allopathic care, while private practitioners are consulted when needed, depending on the severity of the condition and the family's financial resources.

Homeopathy is a popular choice within the community, valued for its gentle and non-invasive methods. A Jain organization in Laxmanpur plays a vital role in promoting homeopathy by providing free weekly treatment sessions. This service extends to neighboring villages, ensuring access to affordable healthcare for even the most remote areas.

Sanitation and Water supply:

The *Sarāk* community places significant importance on sanitation and clean water access, key factors in maintaining public health. Proper sanitation facilities and clean water usage practices contribute to the overall well-being of the community and help prevent the spread of waterborne and infectious diseases.

Access to clean and safe drinking water is vital for the health and well-being of the Sarāk community in Laxmanpur. Most households in the village have private wells or tube wells within their compounds, providing convenient and consistent access to potable water for daily needs. These private sources reduce reliance on external systems and ensure steady water availability.

Two families in the village lack private water sources and depend on government tube wells located within 100 meters of their homes. This proximity minimizes inconvenience and ensures they have access to clean drinking water. Overall, the village demonstrates strong water infrastructure, essential for maintaining health and hygiene in rural settings.

Role of Jain Organizations:

Jain institutions have a long-standing tradition of offering social services, including health care. The free homeopathic treatment offered by these organizations plays a crucial role in maintaining the health of the *Sarāk* community. This facility ensures that individuals have access to medical care regardless of their economic status, helping to improve overall health outcomes in rural villages like Laxmanpur and nearby villages.

Sanitation Facilities

The *Sarāk* families in Laxmanpur village maintain a high standard of sanitation, as evidenced by the universal availability of toilets in every household. This indicates a strong community commitment to hygiene and health. All 10 households in Laxmanpur have privately built toilets, which suggests that the community has a strong sense of responsibility for managing their own sanitation. The self-construction of toilets is a significant achievement, particularly in rural areas where sanitation infrastructure might often be limited or inaccessible. The toilets are not only for convenience but also contribute to reducing the risk of waterborne diseases and maintaining health standards within the village. The survey found that none of the residents engage in open defecation, which is a critical indicator of sanitation awareness within the community. Open defecation can lead to contamination of water sources and the spread of diseases, making its absence in Laxmanpur a notable success. The community's commitment to using private toilets reflects increased health consciousness and aligns with broader national efforts to eliminate open defecation, particularly under government schemes like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Addiction Habits

Despite the traditional prohibition on addictive substances in the *Sarāk* community, no *Sarāk* individuals in Laxmanpur have developed habits of consuming tobacco, bidis, and cigarettes. Historically, the *Sarāk* community adhered to strict norms regarding addictive substances, in line with their Jain beliefs, which promote healthier lifestyles and prohibit the use of intoxicants. These norms discouraged practices like smoking and the consumption of tobacco-based products.

Monthly Income and Expenses

The financial situation of the *Sarāk* families in Laxmanpur village is influenced by several factors, such as family size, income-generating occupations, and education costs. The survey revealed a wide variance in both income and expenditure across different families, which provides insight into the community's economic challenges and financial strategies.

General Trends

The general financial patterns across the *Sarāk* families can be summarized as follows:

- Higher Income Families: Families with members employed in government jobs tend to have higher incomes compared to those in the private sector. These government

jobs provide stability and regular wages, allowing such families to maintain a relatively comfortable lifestyle.

- Smaller Families and Fewer Dependents: Families with fewer dependents (especially those with fewer children) are generally able to save more because they have lower educational expenses and minimal caregiving costs.
- Larger Families and Education Costs: Families with more children or members pursuing education tend to face higher expenses, particularly related to school fees, books, uniforms, and other educational resources. As a result, their savings are often minimal, and in some cases, they may find themselves living paycheck to paycheck.

Detailed Income and Expense Analysis:

One representative family of four members in Laxmanpur has a total monthly income of Rs. 20,000. Their expenses are as follows: Food: Rs. 7,000, Clothes: Rs. 1,000, Education: Rs. 5,000 (for children), Medical: Rs. 500, Festival: Rs. 600, Other (miscellaneous): Rs. 4,000, Addiction: None, Total Expenses: Rs. 18,100, Monthly Savings: Rs. 1,900 (calculated by subtracting expenses from income).

Key Observations:

1. Savings Capability:

   This family demonstrates strong financial management by saving Rs. 1,900 monthly despite high education and miscellaneous expenses. Their income allows them to meet essential needs while maintaining a surplus, reflecting careful prioritization.

2. Income and Expense Balance:

   Families with fewer members and lower education costs, such as those without school-going children, tend to save a larger portion of their income. Conversely, families with multiple children in school face higher financial pressure due to significant education-related expenses, limiting their ability to save.

3. Economic Dependence:

   The survey highlights the importance of stable employment, whether in government jobs or privately managed enterprises, as a foundation for financial stability. Savings are crucial for managing emergencies, but families with high education or healthcare expenses may still require external support or loans to cover unexpected costs.

The *Sarāk* families in Laxmanpur strive to balance income and expenses, influenced by factors such as family size, education costs, and job stability. While some families achieve consistent savings, others face financial strain, reflecting broader economic trends in rural India.

Main Occupations of the *Sarāk* Community in Laxmanpur Village

The *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur demonstrates a diverse economic profile, balancing traditional livelihoods with modern occupations. Their primary sources of income include business, government jobs, private sector employment, and teaching.

1. Business and Shops:

   Business forms the backbone of the community's economy. Laxmanpur's proximity to a market makes it ideal for trade, with many *Sarāk* households operating small shops or businesses. These shops provide essential goods and services, such as groceries, clothing, and other daily necessities, catering to both local residents and neighboring villages.

2. Government Jobs

   A small portion of the community holds government jobs, like, Govt teachers, railway employees, Indian postal services etc which are valued for their stability, regular income, and benefits like pensions and healthcare. These positions also enhance the social standing of the families involved, reflecting their prestigious nature within the village.

3. Private Sector Employment

   Some *Sarāk* families are employed in the private sector, including roles in oil mills, factories, and other businesses. While less secure than government jobs, private sector work provides a vital income source for families without access to government employment.

In this way, the *Sarāk* community of Laxmanpur has successfully diversified its economic base. While shopkeeping remains dominant, government and private sector roles contribute to financial stability, reflecting their entrepreneurial adaptability and resilience.

Socio-Economic Infrastructure of Laxmanpur Village

Laxmanpur village, though modest in population, boasts a diverse range of socio-economic infrastructure that meets the essential needs of its residents. Spanning education, healthcare, banking, communication, and trade, these facilities form the foundation of community life. However, certain infrastructural challenges, especially regarding healthcare and transport, remain significant.

Educational and Civic Amenities

1. Primary School and Library

   The village has its own primary school, a vital resource that ensures children receive basic education in literacy and numeracy. Additionally, the presence of a library supports learning for both children and adults, offering access to books and other educational materials.

2. High School Access

   Secondary education is accessible at the high school in Khatmara, just 500 meters away. This proximity allows students to continue their education beyond the primary level without long commutes, promoting higher education within the community.

Health Infrastructure

Healthcare in Laxmanpur has limitations. A nearby health centre in Barkona, 1 km away, provides basic medical services like vaccinations and outpatient care. For specialized treatment, residents must travel 12 kms to Saltora, where the main hospital is located. This distance poses significant challenges during emergencies or for individuals needing frequent care, highlighting the need for improved local healthcare services.

Banking and Financial Services

Laxmanpur benefits from the presence of two banks and ATMs, offering savings, loans, and remittance services. These facilities are essential for business owners and individuals, providing convenient access to financial resources without the need to travel to distant towns.

Communication and Postal Services

The nearest post office, located 3 kilometers away in Lachmanpur, facilitates mail services, parcel delivery, and access to public schemes. While it serves the village effectively, closer proximity would enhance convenience.

Market and Trade

The village hosts a thriving market with around 60 shops offering groceries, clothing, household goods, and other essentials. This market not only meets daily needs but also drives the local economy, with several families running businesses in the area.

Challenges in Infrastructure

1. Healthcare Access: The 12-kilometer distance to the Saltora hospital delays medical care during emergencies and poses difficulties for individuals with chronic conditions.
2. Limited Health Facilities: The Barkona health centre is ill-equipped to handle severe cases, necessitating costly and logistically challenging travel to larger facilities.
3. Educational Resources: While the primary school and library are beneficial, opportunities for higher education are limited, requiring students to travel to nearby towns, which may strain families financially.
4. Transport Limitations: The absence of robust public transportation infrastructure compels reliance on private vehicles, which may not be affordable for all residents.

Laxmanpur village has developed a strong socio-economic foundation, with facilities supporting education, healthcare, banking, and trade. However, addressing gaps in healthcare access, transport, and higher education opportunities is critical to improving the quality of life and ensuring equitable access to services for all residents.

Population and Literacy Rate in Laxmanpur Village

Laxmanpur village, home to the *Sarāk* community, exhibits a high level of literacy and educational achievement, contributing to the overall development and socio-economic prosperity of the village. The population of the village consists of 10 *Sarāk* families, totalling 44 individuals, and the literacy rate among these residents reflects significant progress over time, especially among younger generations.

Overview of Literacy in the *Sarāk* Community

Population Breakdown: Laxmanpur's *Sarāk* community includes 10 families with a total of 44 individuals, out of which the majority are literate. The literacy rate in the village is remarkably high, with a focus on education across all generations. Most adults are literate, and young boys and girls are regularly attending school. Illiteracy is primarily confined to a small segment of the population, especially elderly individuals above 65 years of age. These individuals, who may not have had access to formal education opportunities in their younger years, account for a small portion of the village's population. But, for the younger generation, literacy is nearly universal. Both boys and girls are actively enrolled in schools and receive education, contributing to the development of a skilled and informed community.

Educational Qualifications in the *Sarāk* Community

The educational qualifications of the residents of Laxmanpur demonstrate a wide range of achievements, from basic schooling to higher education degrees in various fields. Nearly all villagers have completed at least Madhyamik (secondary education) or Class VIII, creating a strong educational foundation within the community. The younger generation is now pursuing higher education, including college and university studies.

Gender Equality in Education

Equal Educational Opportunities: The *Sarāk* community in Laxmanpur demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality in education. Girls in the village enjoy the same educational opportunities as boys, with no restrictions on their schooling. This progressive outlook ensures that both genders can achieve their educational aspirations.

Progressive Attitudes Toward Gender Equality: The educational system in Laxmanpur encourages both girls and boys to attend school regularly and pursue their academic goals. While the educational levels of girls still slightly lag behind those of boys, the community is actively working towards bridging this gap.

Equal Employment Opportunities: Beyond education, girls and women in Laxmanpur are also provided equal opportunities in employment. Many women are engaged in various occupations such as business, teaching, and other forms of employment, which reflects the community's positive stance toward gender equality.

The *Sarāk* community of Laxmanpur village stands as an example of a highly literate, progressive, and socio-economically active community. With a strong emphasis on education and gender equality, the village is fostering a generation of young individuals who are well-prepared for the challenges of the future. Although literacy rates are high, efforts to improve higher education for girls and better healthcare access remain areas for future development. The community is steadily advancing, supported by its educational achievements and progressive social values.

Religious Practices in the *Sarāk* Community of Lakshmanpur Village

The religious practices of the *Sarāk* community in Lakshmanpur village are an intricate blend of Jainism and Hindu traditions, reflecting their diverse spiritual heritage and evolving identity. These practices, rooted in the community's devotion to Jain Tirthankaras, especially

Mahavir, shape their daily lives, rituals, and social activities. Below is a detailed exploration of the religious life of the *Sarāk* people.

Religious Identity

The discovery in this village is unique and noteworthy. Upon surveying, it was found that out of the ten families living in the village, two families are entirely Jain in their dietary practices, adhering strictly to vegetarianism. These families are committed to a lifestyle where they refrain from consuming any kind of non-vegetarian food, which sets them apart from the other families in the area. This kind of complete vegetarianism was not observed in any other nearby village, making it a distinctive feature of this village.

Moreover, a significant religious aspect of the village was uncovered. All of the village elders follow the Digambara Jain tradition, which is one of the two major sects within Jainism. The Digambara sect is known for its strict ascetic practices, and its followers believe that the path to spiritual liberation requires renouncing material attachments, including clothing in some cases. The elders of this village have all embraced the discipleship of Gyanasagar Ji Maharaj, a revered figure in Jainism, and they closely follow his teachings and spiritual guidance.

This adherence to Digambara Jainism and the discipleship of Gyanasagar Ji Maharaj is remarkable because it reflects a deep commitment to the Jain philosophy of non-violence (*Ahimsa*), self-discipline, and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. The village's unique religious identity and dietary practices underscore the influence of Jain principles on their daily lives and the ways in which they differentiate themselves from surrounding communities. This discovery could potentially offer valuable insights into the spread of Jainism and its practice in rural areas, as well as the preservation of traditional practices in a modern context.

Jain and Hindu Identification: The *Sarāk* community exhibits a unique approach to religious identity, as their spiritual practices intertwine with both Jain and Hindu elements. When asked about their religion, some individuals identified as Jain, asserting their deep faith in Jainism, while others preferred to identify as Hindu. A few respondents, however, expressed uncertainty about whether they should classify themselves as Jain or Hindu. This ambiguity is primarily due to the community's historical fusion of Jain and Hindu traditions.

Clan Affiliations: The *Sarāk* people trace their ancestry to two primary clans: *Adideva* or Lord Rishabhadeva (8 families) and Lord Parswanatha (2 families). These affiliations serve as a means of spiritual and social cohesion within the community.

Devotion to Lord Mahavira: Among all respondents, there was a unanimous reverence for Lord Mahavira, the 24th *Tirthankara* in Jainism, with idols and pictures of Lord Mahavira and other *Tirthankara*s prominently displayed in many households. This devotion is an important marker of their Jain identity.

Religious Practices and Pilgrimage

Religious devotion among the *Sarāk* people is exemplified by their active engagement with pilgrimage practices and visits to sacred sites:

Pilgrimage Sites: The most frequented pilgrimage site by the *Sarāk* community is Madhuban in Jharkhand, a prominent Jain site. Approximately 80% of the villagers have visited this site

at least once. Organized trips to Jain pilgrimage sites across India are common, with Jain organizations such as Raj Parivar and Samekit Group facilitating these trips. These groups often cover the travel expenses, making pilgrimages accessible to the entire community.

Other Pilgrimages: Besides Sikharji and Madhuban, villagers like Pradeep Maji, Jitendranath Maji, Gunamay Maji, Gayaram Maji, Swapan Maji, Arati Maji and others have visited other significant Jain pilgrimage locations in Rajasthan, Agra, and Madhya Pradesh. While Bankura district sees frequent pilgrimages, such practices are less common in neighbouring regions, where limited access to resources and pilgrimage opportunities restrict such activities.

Role of Jain Organizations

Jain organizations play an instrumental role in enriching the religious, social, and educational lives of the *Sarāk* community:

Raj Parivar and Samekit Group: These two Jain groups actively support the community by organizing religious events, health services, and educational programs. Some of their key contributions include:

Health Services: The Jain temple in the village offers free homeopathic treatment once a week, facilitated by Dr. Pradeep Maji, a community homeopathy doctor.

Educational Support: Free tuition and teaching sessions are provided at the Jain temple, particularly for children and young learners.

Religious and Social Aid: The Jain organizations also fund pilgrimage trips and organize community events, fostering a sense of unity and spiritual commitment among the villagers.

Notable individuals who contribute to Jain religious activities are:

Gayaram Maji – President of the Bankura District *Sarāk* Samaj Unnayan Sanstha, a key social and religious organization.

Pradeep Maji – Homeopathy doctor and an active member serving at the Jain dispensary.

Festivals and Rituals

The *Sarāk* community celebrates a range of Jain festivals with immense zeal. These festivals form the cornerstone of their religious and social life:

Das Lakshman Parva: This 10-day festival is one of the major celebrations held at the Jain temple in the village. It attracts participants not only from Laxmanpur but also from other *Sarāk* villages in Bankura district.

Paryushan Parva and *Mahavira Jayanti*: These important Jain festivals are celebrated both at the Jain temple and within individual homes, involving rituals, prayers, and community gatherings.

Diwali: The *Sarāk* community observes Diwali not only as a festival of lights but as a Jain celebration commemorating the *Nirvana* (enlightenment) of Mahavira. The festival is marked by religious rituals and festivities, both in the temple and at home.

The Jain temple in Laxmanpur serves as the centre of these religious events, hosting community prayers, gatherings, and social activities during festival times.

Observations and Conclusion

The *Sarāk* community of Lakshmanpur village showcases a deep-rooted commitment to Jainism, while simultaneously embracing certain Hindu traditions. Their devotion to Mahavir, frequent pilgrimages to sacred Jain sites, and active participation in Jain festivals are key aspects of their spiritual life. Jain organizations such as Raj Parivar and Samekit Group play a vital role in supporting the community's religious, social, and educational well-being.

Despite some ambiguity among villagers regarding their precise religious identity, this blend of Jain and Hindu practices has fostered a unified community. Their openness to both traditions demonstrates a dynamic religious practice that values inclusivity, community service, and spiritual devotion. The *Sarāk* community of Lakshmanpur stands as an example of religious harmony and cultural richness, preserving their Jain heritage while integrating aspects of Hindu customs.

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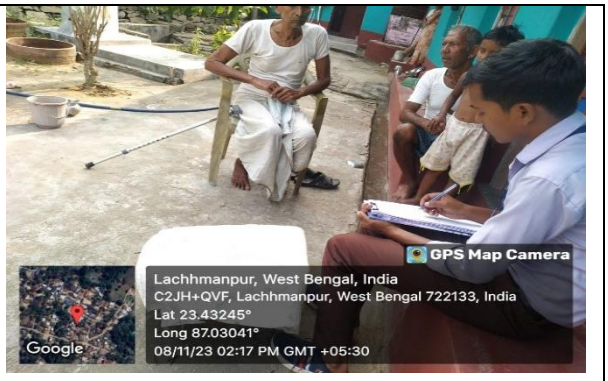
Photographs

Laxmanpur Sarāk Village, Bankura



Interview with village elders at Laxmanpur on 08/11/2023

Interview with village elders at Laxmanpur at Laxmanpur on 08/11/2023

Field Study at Laxmanpur

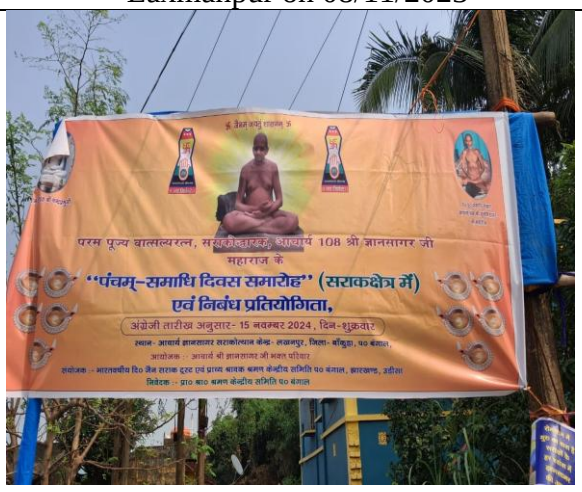
Field Study at Laxmanpur on 08/11/2023

Field Study at Laxmanpur on 08/11/2023

Interview with village woman at Laxmanpur on 08/11/2023

Interview with village man and children at Laxmanpur on 08/11/2023

Flex and banner for Acarya Gyansagar ji Samadhi Samaroh and reunion of *Sarāk* community



Flex and banner for Acarya Gyansagar ji Samadhi Samaroh and reunion of *Sarāk* community

Participation of *Sarāk* women devotees to Acarya Gyansagar Maharaj Ji's Samadhi ceremony

Sarāk community from surrounding areas organizes Acarya Gyansagar Maharaj Ji's Samadhi ceremony

With the Members of *Sarāk* Samaj Unnayan Samiti, Bankura at Laxmanpur

The great reunion of the *Sarāk* community

Arrangement of Puja Dali for worshipping Tirthankaras by local *Sarāk* women

Homeopathy treatment centre for the *Sarāk* community at Laxmanpur.

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