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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 death¹. 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

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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.

Thus, death is identified by terms like *marana*, *Vigama*, *Vinasa*, etc. It is identified with a process, in which the matter (*pudgala*), called *anubhuyamana*, would separate from the soul (*atman*), 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 Sūtra*, represents the earliest known compendium of Jain doctrinal beliefs. The author of this massive work was the chief disciple of Lord Mahavīra, a man named Umāsavāti, 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 *Gunasthana* 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 *svayambhuor paramatma*, 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 fall under a couple of groupings. More succinct and meaningful lists are provided in the *BhagavatiSutra* and *BhagavatiAradhana*.¹⁰

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

The derivation *sat* (praiseworthy), *lekhana* (emasculating 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 *sallekhana*.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 *sallekhana* after a discussion of the *silavratas*; this is also endorsed by Hemachandra and others.¹⁴ While Kundakunda treats *sallekhana* as one of the *vratas*, others give it a place in the context of ritual death.¹⁵

In the *Sthānānga Vritti*, the Acarya Abhyayadevasuri said that *Sallekhana* is, “The activity by which the body is weakened and passions are overcome.”¹⁶ Other works give a slightly different linguistic allusion describing *Sallekhana* 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 Sallekhana*, while to overcome the passions of the body is *Bhava Sallekhana*. 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 to weaken these two entities in order to liberate the soul.

Sallekhana is a continuing practice aimed at weakening the body externally and the passions internally. Thus, *Sallekhana* 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 *Sallekhana* is then called *Santhara* or *Samadhimarana*. The fact that the preparatory act of *Sallekhana* is designed to end in the death of the aspirant is qualified in the texts by the adjective “*maranantiki*” or “ending in death”. This adjective thus sets it apart linguistically and conceptually from *Santhara* 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 *Samadhimarana* are is the act of dying an enlightened death. A third term, *Santhara*, 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 behavior 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 *diksaguru*. The initiation is not a formal ceremony, a mechanical fulfillment 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 *sallekhana*. 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 *YasastilakaCampu*, “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 *acamlavardhana*, 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 *sallekhana* 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 a successful fighter. If his training is incomplete 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 thorough and perfect, but who would panic in the battlefield (while observing the *sallekhana*-vow), defeat and humiliation are bound to be his only gains.²⁶

Thus, the *sallekhana*-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 Sallekhana*: The ritual of *sallekhana* falls into two parts – (1) *bahya-sallekhana*, relating to the external observances: (2) *abhyantara-sallekhana*, 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 the body without allowing the will-power to flag.³⁰ This process of flagellation of the body, in order to gain control over emotions (*ragas*), or passions (*kasayas*), is called *dravya-sallekhana*.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 *sallekhana* 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 *raga* and *dvesa*, (love and hatred), it may be regarded as an attempt to secure *kasaya-sallekhana*.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 *pancanamaskara* hymns until he breathes his last.³⁶

The final exertion should be devoid of *sallekhana-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 *sallekhana* 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 *vidya*, *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 *sallekhana*.³⁸ The ritual of *sallekhana* has been extensively discussed in the *kavya*-literature produced between the 9th and 14th centuries in Karnataka.

The *sallekhana*-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. *Srtamuni*, 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 *sallekhana*-vow. Though both accepted death in the 15th century, the strong

religious base at Sravana Belgola and the absence of such a base at Haduvalli, perhaps made this difference inevitable.

The *sallekhana*-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 *Dasavaikalika* 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 in the person looking back on a life of piety and therefore having no fear because they are assured of a good reincarnation.

The *Tattvārthasūtra* 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 *Sallekhana* 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. *Sallekhana* is a vow followed by an elaborate process; a ritualistic journey one embarks on to achieve *Samadhimarana*.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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3. *Dhavalā* 6-1, 7-1, 76-243, 477-22: cited in the *JainendraSiddhantakosa*, III. P.293.
4. *Rajavartika*, 2-53, 10, 158-8; cited in the *JainendraSiddhantakasa*, III, p. 296.
5. Glasenapp, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation*, p.126.
6. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*. P. 141.
7. *Ibid.* p. 141
8. *Acarasara*, X; *Sa. Dharma.*, VIII; *Ratna. Srav.*, 112-150; *Aca. Su.*, 1.7.8-7 to 23; *Bha. Ara.*, from v. 64 onwards. The most elaborate account on the subject, given by Sivakotyacharya in the last of these works, forms the basis of our study.

9. *Pravacanasara*, I; *Paramatma-yoga*, pp 9 ff; *Tattva.Su.*, IV in particular. Cf., Sogani EDJ., pp.237 ff. See also. “The Concept of the Deity”. By Malvania, D.D., In a *Aspects of Jaina Art and Architecture*, ed. By Shah, U.P., AND Dhaky, M.A., (Ahmedabad, 1975), p.4.

10. The *Bha. Su.* Identifies two main categories: *bala-marana* and *pandita-marana* (2, 1, 91) and lists the following twelve kinds under the *bala-marana*- (1) *valatah-marana* (loss of self-control, subject to senses, starvation); (2) *vasartta-marana* (tonnenting senses, overpowered by sensuous objects) (3) *antahsalya-marana* (allowing foreign material such as thom-pikes etc., in the body, or allowing passions to develop); (4) *tadbhava-marana* (fall from mountain top); (7) *jalapravesa – marana*(drowning); (8) *jvalana-marana* (entering into fire); (9) *Visabhaksana-marana* (gulping poison); (10) *sastravapata-marana* (killing oneself with a weapon); (11) *vehayasa-marana* (hanging from a tree); (12) *grddhaprsta-marana*(attacked by vultures, wild animals or sharp weapons). Under the *pandita-marana* it refers only to two kinds – (1) *padopagamana-marana* (firmly planted like a tree until death) and (2) *bhaktapratyakhyana-marana* (refusing food and drinks). Studies in the *Bhagawati sutra*, Sikdar, J. C., pp. 264 ff).

11. *Ratna. Sra.*, see commentary on 122, p. 517.

12. Acarya Umaswati, *Tattvarthadhigamasutra*, (SBJ, No II), ed, by Jaini, J.L., (Arrah, 1920), VII,22, p. 145

13. *Cartitra Pahuda* 25. 26-Cited by Sogani, K.C. EDJ., p. 91.

14. *Ratna. Sra.*, 92. 93; *Saga Dharma*, V, 25, 26; *Kartti.*, 368. Cited by Sogani, *Ibid*, p.93.

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16. “*Samlikhyatenayasarira-kasayadiiti Samlekhana*” – *Sthananga 2, Uddesaka 2 Vrtti*

17. “*Samlekhanamdravyatahsarirasthabhavatahkasayanamkrastapadanamsamlekh-samlekhaneti*” – *Vrhadvrtti*

18. Bandhuvarma, *Hari.*, X, *vacana* after v. 9, p. 211.

19. Nagavarma, *Va. Pu.*, VII, *vacana* after v. 35, p. 119.

20. Bandhuvanna, *Hari.*, X, *vacana* after v. 13, *Acanna, Va. Pu.*, XII, after, p. 199.

21. *Yasastilaka-Campa*, VI, 860; cf.’ *Sravakacara-Samgraha*, pt. III, ed. By Hiralai Sastri, (Sholapur, 1977).

22. Asadhara, *Saga. Dharma.*, VIII, 6; *Sra. Sam.*’ pt. III.

23. Asadhara, *op. cit.*, VIII, 5.
24. Sakalakirti, *op. cit.*, XXII, 13.
25. Santinatha, *Su. Ca.*, IX 5-14, pp. 148 ff. refers to this vow, which lasted for fourteen Years, seven months and five days.
26. Ayatavarma cited in Ratna. Sra., p.519, n. 1; Sakalakirti, Prasanottara-Sravakacara, XXII, 17; *Yasastilaka Campu*, VI, 866.
27. It is appropriately described as *antakriyakaranam-tapah-phalam-Ratna. Sra.*, 123, Cf., Sri *Kundakunda-Sravakacara*, XII, 4.
28. *Bha. Ara.*, 208
29. Sakalakirti's *Prasnottara-Sravakacara*, XXII, 30-33.
30. *Tattva. Su.*, IX, 20.
31. *JKS.*, 383; Cf., *Pancastikaya*, 173, 253, *Bha. Ara.*, 208-272.
32. *Tattva. Su.*, IX, 20.
33. Medhavi, *Dharmasamgraha*, VII, 31; *Sra. Sam.*, II, p. 180.
34. *JKS.*, p. 383; cf., *Pancastikaya*, 173, 253, *Bha. Ara.*, 208-272.
35. *JKS.*, p.383; *Bha. Ara.*, 208-272; Umasvami, *Sravakacara*, 453;
36. Padmanandi, *Sravakacara –Saroddhara*, 252-356.
37. *Bha. Ara.*, 248-50.
38. Settar, S. *Pursuing Death*, p.191.
39. *EC II*, SB 364.
40. *KII*, 49.
41. *EC II*, SB 77, *SII XX*, 52; *EC V*, (NE), Kn. 35.
42. “*Savvejiva vi icehantijiviumnamarijjiurh*” – *Dasavaikalika*, 6.10.
43. “*Maranantikim Sallekhanam josita*”- *Tattvarthasutra*, 7.22
44. Baya, *Death with Equanimity : The Pursuit of Immortality*, P. 43.



An Exquisite Dvitirthi Jaina Image from Odisha Preserved in the British Museum, London

Sreyashi Ray Chowdhuri*

During the research visit to the British Museum, London in 2022 the author came across a splendid collection of Jaina antiquities which span for about 2000 years. It comprises of stone and bronze artefacts, manuscripts, paintings and textiles of superb aesthetic value. Among this splendid collection the sculpture of our present discourse, that is, the Dvitirthi Jaina image from Odisha is a fascinating one both for its iconographic value and artistic richness. The present paper endeavours to unravel the iconographic details and stylistic features of the Dvitirthi Jaina image housed in the British Museum and ascertain its significance in the art heritage of the Jaina tradition.

Before delving into the image of our present study it is essential to understand the concept of Dvitirthi image in Jaina iconography. In this type of image there is the representation of two Jinas on one slab¹. However it is interesting to note that the reference of such images are hardly mentioned in the Jaina texts. Such images came into existence in the post Gupta period and became popular in central India. However some specimens of Dvitirthi type is also reported from Eastern India of which our present image is from Odisha. The Dvitirthi images usually exhibit three varieties².

- i. Two figures of same Tirthakaras carved on a common slab
- ii. Two figures of different Tirthankaras carved on a common slab without their respective symbols
- iii. Two figures of different Tirthankaras carved on the same slab with symbols of the respective Jinas depicted on the pedestal.

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Since the texts do not mention about Dvitirthi Jaina images the scholars have conjectured that its genesis lies in the innovations on the part of the artists and *acharyas* who probably wanted to carve composite images³ Professor Tiwari suggested the iconographic akinness of Dvitirthi and Tritirthi (representation of three Tirthankaras in one slab) Jaina images to the Brahmanical conception of Trinity where three gods are represented together with their attributes and mounts in a single pedestal. He further opined that the Dvitirthi Jaina images were probably inspired by the Hariharapitamaha images⁴.

It is generally accepted by scholars that the aim of chiseling such images was to worship more than one Tirthankara in one place. In such a conception majority of the Dvitirthi images showcase the representation of the figures of Tirthankara Risabhanatha and Tirthankara Mahavīra, that is, the first and the twenty fourth Jina.

Coming to the image of our present study it may be stated that it is undoubtedly one of the most superbly carved Dvitirthi sculpture of the Jaina artistic tradition. The slab on which the image is carved is considered to be a temple fragment from Odisha belonging to 11th century CE of the Eastern Ganga phase⁵. The sculpture is carved in schist and measures 69 cm x 36 cm. It is a significant artefact of the Bridge Collection which was gifted to the Museum in 1872. Presently it is kept under the safe custody of the Asia Department of the Museum with the Accession number G33/ dc57a/ S3.(Plate 1) It is an uninscribed image.

Coming to the iconographic and stylistic characteristic of our image it can be seen here that Tirthankara Rishabhanatha is carved on the left and Tirthankara Mahavīra on the right standing elegantly side by side in *kayotsarga* posture. The arms of both the Tirthankaras hang down vertically along the torso touching the thigh with their fingertips. Risabhanatha has a high *jatamukuta* arranged beautifully into spiral curls. A critical observation of Risabhanatha reveals the artistic rendering of the *kesavallari* which falls over his shoulder. On the other hand Tirthankara Mahavīra's hair is artistically arranged in curls with a prominent *usnisa*. Both the Tirthankaras have elongated ear lobes and long cylindrical arms reaching down to the knees. Both the figures display proportionate physiognomy. The broad shoulders with narrow waists seen in both the figures accentuate the anatomical charm of the image. The eyes are cast down probably intended to radiate calm peacefulness in the figures. *Sirascakra* without decoration surround the heads of both the Tirthankaras. On the top border of the back slab are tri-linear *cchatras*, *kevala* trees, drum and cymbals played by disembodied hands. The tri-linear *chhatras* are placed above the heads of the Tirthankaras. The tri-linear *chhatras* over the head of Tirthankara Risabhanatha is mutilated. Garland bearing *vidyadharas* on both sides of

tri- linear *chhatra* are yet another significant feature of this image. Though the Tirthakaras are carved on a common slab, they stand on artistically carved separate lotus pedestal. Both Risabhanatha and Mahavīra are flanked by male *chauri* bearers above the pedestal. Among them two are chiseled on the outer side of the back slab and two at the middle of the Tirthakaras. They stand in *abhanga* posture carrying *chauri* in one hand and display *katyavalambita* posture on the other. The pedestal of the image is very interesting. A couchant bull and a lion, the cognizances of Risabhanatha and Mahavīra are chiseled respectively on the pedestal. The centrally faced lion as the *lanchana* of Mahavīra is again flanked by two crouching lions. A tiny figure of Indra mounted on a elephant is carved beside the bull. Two devotees who can be identified as donor couple are visible on the extreme left of the pedestal.

The exquisite chiseling of our Dvitirthi sculpture probably indicates the religio - stylistic significance of the image .In order to investigate our proposed assumption a study of the image in the geo- religious spacial context may be attempted. In this regard it may be stated that Odisha, the place of provenance of our image, witnessed a continuous history of Jainism from its early days till atleast the medieval period. In Odisha it mostly spread to the North- Western parts of the state, that is, the districts of Balasore, Bhadrak, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Khordha, Puri, Boudh, Bolangir in Western Odisha and Koraput and Rayagada in Southern Odisha. Among jaina vestiges some Dvitirthi images have been reported from Odisha. A comparative analysis of the Dvitirthi images of Odisha with our image may be undertaken in order to situate our icon within the atelier of Dvitirthi Jain image from Odisha.

A Dvitirthi Jaina image from Pratap nagari in the district of Cuttack displays remarkable resemblance to our image⁶. Preserved in the Jain Heritage Museum Pratap nagari, the sculpture showcases standing Risabhanatha and Mahavīra in *kayotsarga* posture in one slab but on separate lotus pedestal just like the image of our study. The tri- linear *chhatra*, the garland bearing *vidyadharas*, *chauri* bearers, bull and lion cognizances and presence of donor couples are chiseled like our image. Similarity is also visible in the hairdress of the Tirthankaras, that is, *jatamukuta* for Risabhanatha and curly hair for Mahavīra. In addition to the iconographic similitude, the image exhibits stylistic resemblance indicating a common atelier. (Plate 2)

Another Dvitirthi image with Risabhanatha and Mahavīra on a common slab from Digambara Jain temple, Choudhury Bazar, Cuttack may be taken a note of. Here too Risabhanatha and Mahavīra are carved on a single slab with separate lotus pedestal and bull and lion as the respective Jina's cognizances. The other iconographic similarity with our image

in the British Museum is the presence of the tri- linear *chhatras*, *kevala* tree, flying *vidyadhar*, cymbals played by unembodied hands at the top. Though donors are visible on the pedestal, but they are carved at the middle instead of extreme left as seen in our image. The *chauri* bearers at the middle are carved in profile whereas our British Museum image show frontal position. Another deviation from our image is the presence of decorated back throne with mouldings and triangular fleuron. The image of Risabhanatha shows partial mutilation of the face which prevents us from ascertaining its facial expression. Stylistically this image too shows close linkage to our image. However, the Dvitirthi image of the British Museum collection shows a much-developed sense of refinement and sophistication⁷. (Plate 3)

A Risabhanatha and Mahavīra image from Adyashakti temple, Kantola Athagarh is yet another Jain Dvitirthi image from Odisha. It is in the district of Cuttack. Unfortunately the image is mutilated with the heads of the Tirthankaras missing. However, the carving of the bull and lion as *lanchanas* on the pedestal helps us in identifying the Tirthankara figures as Risabhanatha and Mahavīra. Like our image the Jinas stand on separate lotus pedestal with *chauri* bearers flanking them. *Astagrahas* are chiseled on the sides of the image. This iconographic element is absent in our image preserved in the British Museum. Unfortunately the mutilated condition of the image prevents us from undertaking further icono- stylistic comparative probe⁸.

Another icon of Dvitirthi Jaina conception is found from the temple in Sitalesvara village in Jajpur district of Odisha. Unfortunately, the upper part of the image is broken. From the *lanchanas* on the pedestal it can be surmised that the two Tirthankaras represented on the slab are Mahavīra and Parsvanātha. The Jinas are standing in *kayotsarga* posture. Thus the two Tirthankaras represented in the Jajpur image is different from our British Museum image. In the Jajpur image the defaced image of Parsvanatha is present, but the upper half of the figure of Mahavīra is broken. The pedestal is also differently carved than our image. The pedestal is divided into five segments of which two segments chisel lion and snake, that is, the cognizances of Mahavīra and Parsvanatha. The other segments are decorated with floral patterns. The highly abraded snake canopy over the head of Parsvanatha is extant. A defaced figure is visible on the left side of Parsvanatha. It may be conjectured that the figure possibly represent the *chauri* bearer. Since the image has suffered severe damage, it prevents us from delving into its stylistics. However, from the point of view of iconography the image is quite different from the Dvitirthi image preserved in the British Museum⁹. (Plate 4)

A detailed study of the Dvitirthi Jaina image from Odisha in the British Museum collection undoubtedly resonate to other Dvitirthi images from Odisha both iconographically and stylistically. However, our Dvitirthi image of British Museum collection definitely shows a developed sense of form, linear rhythm and sophistication. Though the date of our image coincides with the Eastern Ganga period, the absence of inscription on the image prevents us from unraveling the issue of origin and authorship, that is, the context of the image. However, the minutely carved iconographic features with refined aesthetics definitely speak of a strong atelier under supervision of which this magnificent artwork was produced. In fact, Jainism in Odisha, besides its religious significance, also contributed greatly to the cultural heritage of the region¹⁰ and our Dvitirthi image bear testimony to this.

Thus, in the concluding reflection it may be undoubtedly stated that the Dvitirthi Jain image from Odisha preserved in the British Museum, London is one of the finest known images of its kind. The well-proportioned physiognomy, iconographic precision, stylistic elegance - all speak of the mastery of the artist in chiseling this exquisite piece. The inward glance and serene expression are fitting artistic touch to the peaceful liberators, that is, the Jinas in this image. This can be considered a masterstroke, a purposeful attempt on the part of the artist to transcend the mere stony physicality of the image to the spiritual quest that the image stood for.

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Plates:



**PLATE 1: Dvitirthi Jain Image, Odisha, British Museum, London
(Photo Courtesy: British Museum)**



PLATE 2: Dvitirthi Jaina Image, Jain Heritage Museum,Pratap Nagari, Cuttack District (Photo Courtesy: Ashis Ranjan Sahoo, 2015)



PLATE 3: Dvitirthi Jaina Image, Digambar Jain Temple, Choudhury Bazar, Cuttack District (Photo Courtesy: Ashis Ranjan Sahoo, 2015)



**PLATE 4 : Dvitirthi Jaina Image, Sitalasvara, Jajpur District
(Photo Courtesy: Ashis Ranjan Sahoo, 2015)**



Anekāntavāda: A special Jain Episteme, Which can Shun Monoculturalism and Monolithic Understanding of the World

Muhammad Tanim Nowshad*

Guiding premises

“For sin is not one mere action, it is an attitude of life which takes for granted that we are not all essentially one, but exist each for his own separate individual existence.” – Rabindranath Tagore (1861 –1941)

Reality is created by the mind; we can change our reality by changing our mind. - Plato (428/427 or 424/423 – 348 BC)

Abstract

Anekāntavāda is a special orientation of the Jain movement, which is a great attainment of the Indian Śramaṇa tradition through the wisdom of the Jain Tīrthaṅkaras. Historically it played an important role in developing human being’s gnosis and insight. It is beneficial to create an overarching Weltanschauung that can motivate human beings to respect others’ beliefs and philosophies and shun monoculturalism and their parochial outlooks. The lack of this knowledge might have propelled human beings to misapprehend the sentient and non-sentient worlds. This paper wants to reexamine how this great philosophy once enriched Indian culture and heritage in such a manner that till now India is the abode of the highest number of different races and their varied religious and political ideologies. And we know that without some exceptions their abreast living is a peaceful coexistence as it was previously. The paper wants to delve into the fact again and enumerate the possibility of its capacity and scope, if the modern world wants to glean strategic benefit from it. The paper wants to reassess its ability to establish ‘global peace’ and change the monolithic prejudiced attitudes of people across the world.

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Introduction

Modern knowledge has a tendency to adopt the ancient understanding of the world. The reason is tangible; the ancient wisdoms and perceptions can be revised and regenerated to get outstanding outputs from their application in fixing strategy and management mechanics for statecraft, institutions and enterprises. Many times, some good outcomes have been yielded. The modern strategists are always the admirers of the War strategy of Sun Tzu (771–256 BC), a Chinese military general, philosopher and writer. He lived during the Eastern Zhou period. His masterpiece ‘the Art of War’ is still considered very relevant and worthy to be applied for military purposes. Chanakya (375 BCE – 283 BCE), a great Indian sage and polymath, also identified as Kauṭilya or Vishnugupta, was an advisor of the first Mauryan emperor Chandragupta Maurya and played a significant role to expand his empire successfully. He was also a great economist, strategist and political thinker. Chanakya served as the chief advisor to both Emperors Chandragupta and his son Bindusara. His book “*Arthashastra*” uplifted the quality of political science, economic policy and military strategy of the ancient India. Not only India and the Indians and other Asian secular and semi-secular intellectuals and scholars contributed to the practical arenas of knowledge, but also the spiritual mentors and leaders across the whole Asia. The Jain *Tīrthaṅkaras* played foremost roles in this regard. A lot of issues can be explored of the Jain knowledge and heritage, if I want to mention their contributions. Jain time cycle, architecture, logical understanding of the world, methodology to deduce and come upon logical solutions regarding various issues and subject matters - all are praiseworthy and remarkable.

Through their writings the Jains have enriched not only the ancient languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsa, but also many modern Indian languages, namely, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu.

We have known that a huge amount of this vast Jain literature continues to be stored in innumerable Jain temples and *Shastra bhandaras*, and remains unclassified and unpublished as yet (Bhargava 1968 : 226-55). Those should be explored meticulously.

Moris Winternitz (1863-1937), a renowned Indologist once opined that the contribution to languages and literature by the Jains is quite remarkable and praiseworthy. (Winternitz, 1946)

The Jain literature covers vast extent of knowledge world:

- a) *The Puranas* i.e. the mythology and legend oriented sacred literature,
- b) *The Charitiras* the characters and personas of important personalities,
- c) *The Katha* i.e. the stories,
- d) *The Prabandha* i.e. the essays,
- e) *The Kāvya*s i.e. the poems, and
- f) *The Mahākāvya*s i.e. the epics

All of the above fall within its ambit. It includes scientific as well as technical knowledge like astronomy, astrology and cosmology.

Simultaneously the Jains significantly contributed into the realms of mathematics, geography, economics, grammar, logic, philosophy, poetics, lexicography and so forth. One of the major interests of the Jains in this vast literature is to overcome the mundane misery and sufferings not only through rituals and conventions, but also through good moral deeds and self-correction.

The *Anekāntavāda* has been portrayed significantly with most of the above-mentioned precious gems of the Jain world. It correlated among the Jain logic, philosophy, cosmology, phenomenology, eschatology and soteriology.

We know that Jain epistemology developed on Triple “A”.

- *Anekāntavāda*
- *Aparigraha*
- *Ahimsa*

Actually, this Triple “A” play the propellers of all Jain knowledge oriented factors i.e. the Jain episteme, and finally the Jain philosophy and the Jain universe could embarked upon a gnosis to enrich humanity with a rationality, which bases holistically and give us an intelligible and very meaningful soteriology. However, it has some deeper meaning and significance, which is beyond the extent of the commoners and the ordinary minds.

Philosophically we can show the linear process of the Jain soteriology in the following way:

Knowledge from the known and the unknown worlds by applying the pure sense of cosmology + scrutiny through the lens of logic + understanding the outcomes with objective and rational perspectives through philosophical judgment especially by phenomenology and ontology = Jain soteriology

The goal of the above process is to be exempt from the Karmic bondage and attain the *Moksha*.

Here *Ahimsa* and *Aparigraha* help the omniscient man or the *Arihant* to develop inside *Anekāntavāda* and vice versa. If he is the elevated *Tīrthaṅkara*, with his own salvation he leads the path not only for the mankind but also for all the sentient and non-sentient beings for a *collective salvation*. But in the meantime, he opens the eyes of people through the real understanding of the universe and truth by means of *Anekāntavāda*. The *Arihants* and the *Tīrthaṅkaras* literally nullify the sense and judgmental attitude of monoculturalism, prejudiced rationality, religious bigotry and extremism. So, this paper wants to check the psychological, strategic and organizational benefits, if we pursue *Anekāntavāda* in order to establish global peace. I want to show that the philosophy of *Anekāntavāda* has an obvious and conspicuous ability to bring forth peace globally. It also retains an underlying motivational force to change our monolithic understanding of the world and our prejudiced attitudes. Our reality is self-derived and self-driven; *Anekāntavāda* can change it and transform us.

How logic and rationality construe the path towards *Anekāntavāda* in Jainism

Anekāntavāda has unveiled a profound truth, which was mainly and primarily propagated by the Jain *Tīrthaṅkaras*. The ultimate truth or reality is complex and unintelligible for the commoners because of its esoteric metaphysical existence. It has enshrouded the world in a varied and complex manner that the sentient and non-sentient beings that exist here cannot fathom it perfectly and entirely with their capacity of perceptibility. Therefore, reality appears here in many aspects. But we cannot or should not override anyone's belief or philosophy considering that to be banal or parochial as like them we all are finite beings. Any single statement or doctrinal proposition must retain the pitfalls to fathom the universe and reality. And it will be a parochial attitude to impose the understanding of someone upon another as we all are living with our limited understandings. The Jains believe that only he who has attained the *kevala jnana* i.e. the *Kaivalya* is an omniscient person, could develop his ability to understand the ultimate truth and the ultimate reality. So, it deals seriously with ontology and phenomenology. This premise has developed the basic philosophy of Jainism and its initial introduction that motivate us to know the Jain *Arihants* and the *Tīrthaṅkaras* and we can embark upon *Anekāntavāda*. Here we can remind that:

a. *An Arihant decides his own destiny, but a Tīrthaṅkara decides for all. An Arihant is omniscient. But a Tīrthaṅkara is omnipotent, who has already attained the level of omniscience and has become something more.*

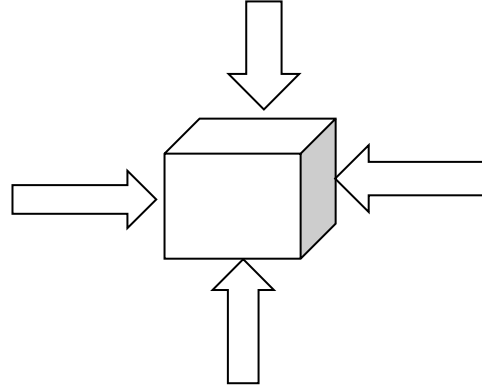
b. *An Arihant is conscious of his bondage and concerned for his liberation. He can liberate himself. As a Tīrthaṅkara is omnipotent, he is well competent to liberate himself and*

the whole universe as well. He is the liberator of both sentient and non sentient beings, conscious and unconscious.

Rationally we also need someone who knows the universe infiltrating our three-dimensional tangibility and perceptibility. We are encrusted with this three-dimensional tangibility and existing as 'finite beings'. We think that we know the universe, although we don't know even an iota. We are limited from a wider phenomenological perspective as we know some limited phenomena of the universe. The *Arihants* and the *Tīrthāṅkaras* are not limited. They have infiltrated this crust of three dimensions. What they did has a very logical conclusion that the Indian sages fathomed after their pensive enquiries through thousands of years.

Glancing on *Pratītyasamutpāda* philosophy of Buddhism, anchoring on *Anekāntavāda* – marching towards strategic benefit for peace.

When we realize that the reality we realize is due to our limited perceptibility is very shallow, we also come to the conclusion that the world we perceive is '*Mayik*' i.e. illusory. The *Maya* prevents people from embracing the reality within the ultimate cosmological, ontological and phenomenological spectra. The Jain says that the right belief i.e. '*Samyaktva*' can help us to know that to some extent. It at least propels people to jump over false beliefs – '*Mithyatva*'. We can compare it with Plato's depiction of his famous '*allegory of cave*'. In a shadowy world, the prisoners are realizing the reality from the obscurant phenomena. They create their own world depending upon this reality and discern everything depending on it. Jainism says that these limited and parochial beliefs and understandings also motivate to long for mundane pleasure and glory – '*Nidana*'. It brings forth '*Kashaya*' or passion in us, which is the generator of all judgmental understandings and perceptions that also creates *aham* and *maan* i.e. ego in us and all sentient beings. The peril of bigotry and monolithic belief emerges from it and the '*Pandora's box*' becomes open. The self-destructive as well as the world destructive monster gets unleashed. However, an *Arihant* is an over-conscious being, who knows what he perceives is beyond the capacity or ability of the commoners. He also realizes that if it is to discard one school of philosophy, all schools will be eliminated automatically. The ideologies anyway all are some deliberate processes to go to humanity. From this perspective, all ideologies are true from a partial understanding. An object can be observed from many angles; the many perspectives would be experienced and perceived. All are true from their certain (limited) perspectives and propositions.



Pic: An object has many sides; anybody can see only one side or some can more, only the Arihant can see all sides and absolutely ‘the whole’.

However, the limited understandings do at least minimal welfare for the society for a certain period as all the ideologues and philosophers are some great sages and great minds. This is the connotation of *Anekāntavāda*.

Hence, we can take a look at *Pratītyasamutpāda* philosophy from the Buddhist understanding. The very term *Pratītyasamutpāda* means ‘dependent origination.’ It means all new philosophies and ideas are the result of concatenation. From the religious point of view, the new denominations emerge from the previous ones. In fact it depicts the chain of causality of material and non-material functions and phenomena.

Can we smell the *Hegelian dialectic* here; I mean the chain of *Thesis-Antithesis and Synthesis*. It can be, because “*wise men think alike*”. The great Hindu adage: “*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*.” — “That which exists is One: sages call it by various names.”

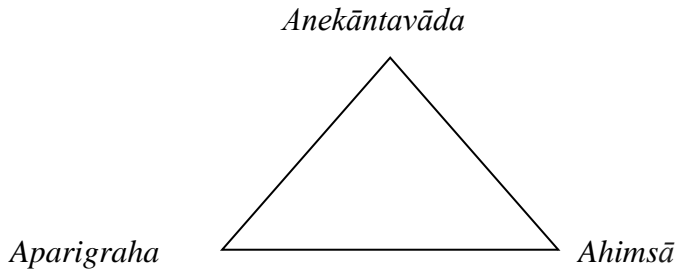
Does it also reveal *Anekāntavāda*? Yes, the *Tīrthāṅkaras* posit that one thing can be observed and one idea or statement can be manifested differently by different people. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886), the great Bengali sage and mystic, echoed the same thing through his assertion: “*Joto mot toto Path*”- so many doctrines, so many paths.

Although it is limited from the sight of an Arihant and a *Tīrthāṅkara* no doubt, it has also a certain strategic benefit. Different people have different tastes, proclivity or ways to accept the truth. The philosophy of *Tīrthāṅkaras* recognizes them all as people of different time and space understand the reality from their limited cognizance, tangibility and perceptibility. The more complexity cannot be attained and sustained by them. Rather, the limited vision and cognizance at least can ensure a ‘*status quo*’ for people and ‘*modus vivendi*’

can be sustained for regional peace and also for the global; which is a limited idea of peaceful coexistence, but better than none.

Aparigraha and *Ahimsā* for the Jains – who can herald the global peace

The above-mentioned strategy can be sufficient for others and for the time being; not for the Jain theologians and philanthropists. They certainly committed to do something more. The Jain monks and the philanthropists are fortunate to be influenced by the domino effect of the works done by the *Tīrthaṅkaras*. They have already learnt that this known world is superficial and perfunctory and also transient. The Karmic phenomena have immersed them into illusion and delusion at a time. The *Tīrthaṅkaras* have delivered three great instruments to the disciples; a) *Anekāntavāda*, b) *Aparigraha*, and c) *Ahimsā*



pic: The pyramid of triple “A”, the instruments of attaining Nirvana

In fact *Anekāntavāda*, *Aparigraha* and *Ahimsā* are synergetic for one another. They enrich one another’s faculty and capacity.

We know that *Aparigraha* is the virtue of non-possessiveness, non-grasping, or non-greediness as we have no intention to have anything from this superficial reality and to fall under the servitude of the Karmic bondage. As we are oriented to this profound understanding, we will feel the harm of *Himsā* or desire to be violent against anybody and will teach *Ahimsā* i.e. non-violence. From now on we will feel pity for all sentient beings and strong eagerness to guide them. However, it is to be noted that the Jain doctrines of relativity do not represent the form of *relativism* from the western viewpoint. A fully sighted person i.e. an omniscient Jina /a liberated great teacher and also one who has overcome his ego and conquered self and the universe is certainly capable of apprehending the true nature of anything. This is very different from the usual western relativism, which is deeply skeptical about the ability of a human being. The Western philosophy casts doubt if a human being really knows anything with certainty.

The omnipotent *Tīrthaṅkaras* ensure the fluxes of change. They can do that from their metaphysical stream and they actuate that among their followers. The number of *Tīrthaṅkaras* is fixed in every time cycle and that is 24. In Jain cosmology, the wheel of time is divided into two halves, the ascending time cycle is called *Utsarpiṇī*, and the descending half is *Avasarpiṇī*. The *Tīrthaṅkaras* appear in the third and fourth quarters of the both halves. They also indoctrinate to create *Jain Sangha* i.e. the Jain community and activate the Spiritual hierarchy to promote the personal spiritual goal and the global peace. The hierarchy can be sketched nowadays as follows:

1. **Arihant:** We have talked about the Arhants. They are the awakened souls who have attained *Kevala Jñāna* or absolute knowledge.
2. **Siddha :** They are the souls and beings, who have been liberated from the birth and death cycle. They are also those, who have attained *Siddhi* i.e. the power of performing paranormal capabilities (White, Dominik 2012: 34).
3. **Ācārya:** An *Ācārya* is the head of the ascetic order. Some of the noted *Achāryas* are Bhadrabahu, Kundakunda, Samantabhadra, Umaswami, Sthulibhadra etc.
4. **Upadhyaya:** An Upadhyaya is a preceptor or a teacher, who perceives and then teaches to enlighten his pupils.

We know that the Jain monasticism refers to the Jain *Munis* of major denominations: the Digambara and the *Śvētāmbara* and also others. They teach *Aparigraha*, *Ahimsā* and *Anekāntavāda*. They also simultaneously teach Satya (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), and Brahmacharya (Chastity). They help the people to unlearn violence and teach to be nonviolent. The Jain Relativism emerged from the *Anekāntavāda* will cultivate the mentality to accept all in the human mind. Historically we could embark upon a second doctrine, *Nayavāda* from the trail of *Anekāntavāda*. It is named the ‘*doctrine of perspectives*’ by Jeffery D Long. This is an epistemic corollary of the first one – the nature of knowledge complex in the complex universe; it resonates with the *Anekāntavāda*’s point. As the nature of reality is complex, anything may be known from a variety of *Nayas* or perspectives, which correspond to its multiple aspects. Hence this finally implies the third doctrine – *Syādvāda* or the ‘*doctrine of conditional prediction*’ (named by D Long, which literally means the ‘*maybe doctrine*’). According to this doctrine the truth of any claim that one makes about a particular topic is dependent upon the related perspective, or *Naya*, from which the claim has been made. A claim can be true in one sense or from one perspective (the technical meaning of the Sanskrit verb ‘*Syāt*’ from the Jain philosophical context), false from another perspective, both true and false

from another, although it may have an inexpressible truth-value from yet another etc (D Long 2009: 117). So, *Anekāntavāda* is very accommodative for all perspectives; but drives the pensive minds to the higher plane of rationality and decisions. Its philanthropic attitude can shun egoistic monoculturism and the audacity of the '*Realpolitik*' propagated by Hans Joachim Morgenthau (1904-1980) and his predecessors like Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 - 1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). This political realism with its cardinal engine Real Politik has influenced people to be self-centered and the modern man has become *homo economicus*. This philosophy has given human beings the excuse to be egoistic and selfish as these are rational to survive on this planet according to this doctrine. So, the occupation of other territories and plundering other lands are justified by this. *Anekāntavāda* can be a global panacea against this.

Concluding remarks through the propositions:

The Jains have to work globally to promote *Anekāntavāda* with two objectives.

1. They should disseminate their philosophy and literature across the world. We know *Tattvārthasūtra*, which is a quasi-canonical text, developed on the basis of *Anekāntavāda* written in Sanskrit by Ācārya Umaswami between 2nd to 5th centuries CE. The Jains should write more basing upon *Anekāntavāda* like this one relating the present world's scenarios.
2. The Jains can propose the UNO and other Supranational and International organizations to accept *Anekāntavāda* as a philosophical maxim for their peace mission and propagate it as a great sagacity and global heritage to establish a "*meaningful and sustainable global peaceful order*".

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Applying Anekāntavāda: A Jaina Perspective on Business Ethics Dilemma

Pinal Ajmera*

Abstract

In the present age, the businesses encounter myriad of challenges for its survival, with business ethics playing a pivotal role. While many businesses endeavor 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 businesses 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*, *Dravyāstika naya*, *Paryāyāstika naya*

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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. 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 standpoints 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*, *Samabhirūdhā 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. versatility 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 dr̥ṣṭi* 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 *mithya dr̥ṣṭi*. 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, in order 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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A Study on Jain Heritage and the Sarāk Community of Birbhum, West Bengal

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Abstract

Vardhaman Mahavīra (599-524 BC), the 24th Tirthankara and founder of Jainism, has profound ties with the geography of Birbhum district. According to the *Acarangasutra*, Mahavīra visited this area, with historical texts suggesting his significant presence in the Bengal region. Born in Kunda village to King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala, Mahavīra spent part of his life in *Panchapeeth Dhanya Punyabhoomi* Birbhum. Jainism's influence in Bengal is evident, with the presence of the 'Sarāka' caste, previously known as 'Sravaka'. The first Jain text was authored by a Bengali, underscoring Bengal's historical importance. Mahavīra's teachings, initially delivered orally, were later documented by disciples called '*Sruta Kevali*,' including Bhadravahu, who penned revered texts like the "*Dasavaikalika Sutra*". Jainism's spread in Magadha with Bengal as a crucial centre influenced non-vegetarian Hinduism, promoting non-violence and compassion. Birbhum's historical artifacts reflect Jainism and Buddhism's impact, though Jain traces are scarce. Jain research in Birbhum began post-independence, largely driven by religious community efforts. Local legends suggest Mahavīra attained enlightenment at *Yogipahari* in Birbhum. Several sites in Birbhum, including Sadinpur, Paikar, and Abadanga, are believed to have been visited by Mahavīra. Unfortunately, many Jaina religious centres have disappeared, with some, like a stupa in Mohammadbazar, destroyed despite protests. The 'Sarāk' community in Birbhum, descendants of Jain priests from Vaishali, has integrated into Bengali culture while preserving their religious identity. The region's history reflects Jainism's significant cultural and religious contributions, underscoring the need for preserving these historical sites and recognizing the Jain community's legacy.

Key Words: Vardhaman Mahavīra, Sarāk Community, Birbhum, West Bengal, Non-violence

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Jainism and its Historical Roots in Birbhum

Vardhaman Mahavīra (599-524 BC), the founder of Jainism, has significant connections with the geography of Birbhum district in the Indian state of West Bengal. According to the *Acarangasutra*, an ancient Jain text, Mahavīra himself visited this region. This connection between Mahavīra and Birbhum highlights the district's historical importance in the spread of Jainism.

The Tirthankaras and their Teachings

Mahavīra was not the first to bring Jainism to this region. The 22nd *Tirthankara*, Neminatha, is said to have preached Jainism in Anga and Bangladesh. Following him, the 23rd Tirthankara, Parsvanatha, spread the teachings of '*Chaturyama Dharma*' in Pundra, Radhadesh, and Tamralipta. Mahavīra, the 24th and last Tirthankara, preached extensively in the Radha Bengal area for many years, solidifying the presence of Jainism in this region. These Tirthankaras' efforts laid the groundwork for Jainism's establishment in Bengal.

Mahavīra's Birth and Early Life

Mahavīra, also known as Vardhaman, was born in 599 BC in Kunda village to King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala of the *Kshatriya* dynasty. Although born in Vaishali, his significant contributions to the spread of Jainism in Bengal are well-documented. His teachings emphasized non-violence, truth, and asceticism, principles that resonated deeply with the local populace.

Mahavīra's early life was marked by a profound spiritual journey. Renouncing his royal heritage, he embarked on a path of severe asceticism. For twelve years, he wandered through forests and villages, including those in the Birbhum district, engaging in intense meditation and self-discipline. His enlightenment under a *Sal* tree after these years of rigorous penance marked a pivotal moment in the history of Jainism. He became a *Tirthankara*, an enlightened being who has conquered the cycle of birth and death and helps others achieve liberation.

Jainism's Spread in Bengal

Mahavīra's teachings found fertile ground in Bengal, where the local population was receptive to new religious ideas. The Jain community in Bengal, including the *Sarāk* caste, played a crucial role in preserving and spreading these teachings. The *Sarāks*, formerly known as the '*Sravaka*' community, were devout followers who maintained Jainism's principles and rituals.

The influence of Jainism in Bengal is evident from various historical artifacts and texts. These sources provide insights into how deeply Jainism penetrated the cultural and religious fabric of Bengal. Jain temples, inscriptions, and statues found in different parts of Bengal testify to the region's significant Jain population.

Jain Texts and Scholars

Jain literature holds a wealth of information about Mahavīra's travels and teachings in Bengal. The '*Srūta Kevali*,' or enlightened disciples, played a crucial role in documenting these teachings. One of the most notable *Srūta Kevalis* was Bhadravāhu, who authored significant Jain texts such as the "*Dasavaikalika Sutra*". These texts are revered as primary sources of Jain philosophy and are studied across India.

The writings of Harishen in the "*Brihatakatha*" and Ratnanandi also shed light on the early history of Jainism in Bengal. These texts reveal that Bengal was home to several prominent Jain scholars and monks who contributed to the spread and preservation of Jain teachings.

Mahavīra's Travels in Birbhum

Historical records indicate that Mahavīra travelled extensively throughout Birbhum, visiting places such as Sadinpur (referred to as Siddharthipur in Jain literature), Paikar (Pattakalai), Sumarpur (Sumsumarpur), Saithia (Nandipur), Langalhata (Nangal), and Abadanga (Avartha). These travels were part of his mission to spread Jainism and its principles across different regions.

In each of these places, Mahavīra established religious centres and preached the core tenets of Jainism: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, chastity, and non-possession. These principles attracted many followers and helped Jainism gain a strong foothold in Birbhum. Today, these places are revered as significant sites in Jain history and continue to attract pilgrims and scholars.

The Jain Sites of Birbhum and the Almost Extinct Jain *Sarāk* Community

Birbhum, is home to several significant Jain archaeological sites, such as Ghurisha, Mallarpur, and Baragram. These sites, rich with Jain relics, offer a window into the ancient and medieval Jain presence in the region. They are particularly relevant to the history of the Jain *Sarāk* community, a group that once thrived in this part of India but is now nearly extinct.

Ghurisha: Echoes of the *Sarāk* Ancestors

The site of Ghurisha, under the jurisdiction of the Ilambajar police station, reveals a cultural sequence starting from the Black and Red Ware (BRW) level and includes the presence of an image of Pārśvanātha, the 23rd *Tīrthan̄kara* in Jainism. This suggests that Ghurisha was once a significant centre of Jain worship and activity. The *Sarāk* community, known for their adherence to Jainism, likely had strong historical roots in this area. The presence of Jain artifacts in Ghurisha provides tangible connections to the religious practices and cultural life of the *Sarāk* ancestors.

Mallarpur: Unveiling the Mysteries of *Sarāk* Worship

Mallarpur, located under the Maureswar police station, is known for the discovery of a seated image of an unidentified *Tīrthan̄kara*. This image, now kept near the Siddeswar Kali Mandir, indicates the historical presence of Jain worship in the region. For the Jain *Sarāk* community, which maintained Jain religious practices over centuries, such findings are crucial. They underscore the deep historical roots of Jainism in Birbhum and the continuity of Jain traditions that the *Sarāk* community preserved. The unidentified *Tīrthan̄kara* could potentially represent the unique local deities venerated by the *Sarāk* Jains.

Baragram: A Testament to *Sarāk* Religious Plurality

Baragram, an early medieval settlement located northeast of Lohapur railway station and east of Nalhati, has yielded a rich array of Jain, Buddhist, and Brahmanical artifacts. The diverse religious relics found at Baragram reflect the pluralistic religious landscape that the *Sarāk* community navigated. Despite being a minority, the *Sarāks* contributed to and coexisted within a broader tapestry of religious practices. The Jain sculptural remains identified in Baragram during recent explorations highlight the *Sarāk* community's significant role in the region's Jain heritage.

Jain Temples and Stupas in Birbhum

Evidence of Jain religious centres in Birbhum is abundant. Several Jain temples and stupas were established during Mahavīra's time and later. One notable site is the Jain Stupa-Temple in Khade-Mohammadbazar, identified using ancient Jain texts, local proverbs, place names, and folklore. This site was a significant religious centre during the pre-Christian era and for about a thousand years thereafter.

In 1970/71, a Chinaclay company began destroying a large Jain stupa in Mohammadbazar village, leading to protests from scholars like Bhojraj Parekh Mahashay. Despite investigations

by the West Bengal government, the stupa and its associated temple were not preserved, highlighting the challenges of protecting historical sites.

Similar neglect occurred in Sreepur Ghurisha village, where two Jain stupas identified in 1975 remain unprotected and face destruction. These sites hold immense historical value and offer insights into the Jain community's presence and influence in Birbhum. However, the lack of preservation efforts endangers these valuable artifacts.

The Role of the *Sarāk* Community

The *Sarāk* community, a Jain community living in Birbhum and surrounding areas, has played a crucial role in preserving Jainism's legacy in Bengal. This community, known as 'Sravaka' in Jain scriptures, descended from Jain priests who accompanied Mahavīra from Vaishali. Over time, they settled in Bengal, maintaining their religious identity while assimilating with the local culture.

The *Sarāk* community's lifestyle is characterized by simplicity and adherence to Jain principles. They are strict vegetarians and follow traditional Jain rituals and customs. Despite living in a predominantly Hindu society, the *Sarāks* have preserved their distinct religious identity and continue to practice Jainism faithfully.

Religious Practices and Lifestyle

The *Sarāk* community's lifestyle is characterized by simplicity, non-violence, and strict adherence to Jain principles. As vegetarians, they uphold the Jain tenet of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in their dietary practices, refraining from consuming any form of animal products. Their religious rituals and customs are deeply rooted in the *Shwetambara* tradition of Jainism, reflecting their commitment to maintaining their spiritual heritage.

Sarāks engage in regular religious practices, including the observance of Jain festivals, fasting, and participating in community prayers. Despite living in a predominantly Hindu society, they have preserved their unique religious identity and continue to practice Jainism faithfully. Their religious observances often include rituals like *Paryushana*, a significant Jain festival marked by fasting and penance, and Mahavir Jayanti, which celebrates the birth of Mahavīra.

Cultural Integration and Syncretism

While maintaining their distinct religious identity, the *Sarāk* community has also integrated into the broader cultural fabric of Bengal. They speak Bengali and have assimilated many local cultural practices. This syncretism is evident in their participation in regional festivals like Dol

(Holi) and Durga Puja, which are predominantly Hindu celebrations. This blending of cultural practices illustrates the *Sarāks'* ability to preserve their religious heritage while embracing the cultural milieu of their surroundings.

The *Sarāks'* interaction with the local Hindu population has led to mutual influences and shared cultural practices. For instance, the community partakes in local agricultural practices and festivals, contributing to the agrarian lifestyle prevalent in the region. This cultural integration has helped the *Sarāks* maintain harmonious relationships with their neighbours while preserving their distinct Jain identity.

The Influence of Jainism on Local Culture and Religion

Jainism significantly influenced the local culture and religion in Birbhum. The principles of non-violence, compassion, and asceticism resonated deeply with the local population, leading to the adoption of these values in their daily lives. Jainism's emphasis on vegetarianism and non-violence towards animals had a profound impact on the region's dietary and ritual practices.

Jainism's influence is also evident in the worship of deities like *Kalabhairava* and *Manasa* in Birbhum. Historians suggest that after the decline of Jainism, the idols of Jain saints, including Parsvanath, were reinterpreted as Hindu deities. This syncretism between Jain and Hindu practices illustrates the deep interconnections between these religions in Bengal.

The Decline of the Jain *Sarāk* Community

The Jain *Sarāk* community of Birbhum, once a thriving group with a distinct religious and cultural identity, has faced significant decline over the centuries. Factors such as social integration, conversion, and economic pressures have contributed to their dwindling numbers. Today, the community is almost extinct, with only a few remaining members preserving their unique Jain traditions.

The archaeological findings at Ghurisha, Mallarpur, and Baragram are vital to understanding the historical presence and cultural contributions of the Jain *Sarāk* community. These sites serve as silent witnesses to the once-vibrant Jain life in Birbhum, providing invaluable insights into the community's past.

The Jain archaeological sites of Ghurisha, Mallarpur, and Baragram are not just remnants of a distant past but are closely tied to the heritage of the Jain *Sarāk* community of Birbhum. As the *Sarāk* community nears extinction, these sites become even more crucial for preserving their

historical and cultural legacy. Continued archaeological research and preservation efforts are essential to ensure that the rich history of the Jain *Sarāk* community and their contributions to Birbhum's cultural landscape are not forgotten.

Challenges and the Need for Research

The *Sarāk* community faces several challenges in preserving their heritage. Many ancient Jain sites in Birbhum are under threat due to neglect, lack of awareness, and insufficient government support. The community's efforts alone are not enough to protect these valuable historical assets. There is an urgent need for comprehensive research and documentation of the existing Jain sites and artifacts in Birbhum.

Scholars and historians must conduct thorough field surveys to document these sites' historical and cultural significance. This research will help raise awareness about the importance of preserving these sites and advocate for their protection. Furthermore, collaboration between the *Sarāk* community, academic institutions, and government bodies is essential to ensure these sites' long-term preservation.

Government Support and Preservation Efforts

Government support is crucial for the preservation of Jain heritage in Birbhum. The West Bengal government, in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India and other relevant authorities, should take proactive measures to protect and preserve the Jain heritage in this region. This includes acquiring land around significant Jain sites, conducting excavations, and restoring damaged structures.

The government's involvement can provide the necessary resources and expertise to protect these sites effectively. Additionally, establishing dedicated preservation programs and funding initiatives can help support the community's efforts in maintaining their religious heritage. Public awareness campaigns and educational programs can also play a vital role in highlighting the importance of preserving the Jain heritage in Birbhum.

Conclusion

The *Sarāk* community of Birbhum has played a pivotal role in preserving the legacy of Jainism in Bengal. From maintaining religious practices and rituals to protecting ancient Jain sites, their contributions are invaluable to understanding the region's rich historical and cultural heritage. Despite facing numerous challenges, the *Sarāks'* unwavering commitment to their religious identity and heritage underscores their crucial role in preserving Jainism in Bengal.

Through continued efforts, research, and government support, the rich Jain heritage in Birbhum can be protected and celebrated for future generations. The *Sarāk* community's dedication serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of Jainism and its profound influence on the cultural fabric of Bengal. By acknowledging and supporting their efforts, we can ensure that this important aspect of India's religious and cultural history is preserved for posterity.

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