

Jain Icons and Idols in Pakistan: Examples from Sri Pārśvanāth Jain Svetambar Mandir Multan

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Abstract

This research paper encapsulates the Pictorial representation of Jain Gods, literary known as Tirthankaras, comprises major part of artistic features of religious edifices of Jainism. Most often more than single depiction of Jain idols is to be seen in a single Jain temple. Some of the popular tirthankaras are always depicted along with the main deity to whom the temple is associated. The present research paper is also about one of such Jain shrines where a significant number of Jain gods are depicted on façade of the main chamber. The temple itself is associated with Lord Pārśvanāth, the 23rd or the second last tirthankaras of Jain religion. The present research aims at highlighting various aspects related to figural representation of these divine beings including the way they are depicted in narrative art of Jainism in Pakistan. Furthermore, the research would help us to understand basic principles of Jain iconography followed by the community of Pakistan.

Key Words: Jainism, Jain, Tirthankara, Parsvanatha, Idols, Gods, Jain Temple

Introduction

Jainism is one of the ancient religions of India that have nurtured and influenced life and thoughts of the Indians through the ages. (Bhattacharya, 1971) Mahavira, the last Jain leader, is considered as the founder of this creed but it is claimed that it was offered during countless ages. The origin of the Jainism is going back to hoary past and it is considered older than Buddhism. (Bhattacharya, 1971) There are twenty-four saints, known as “Jinas” or “Tirthankaras”, Literally means “conquerors” or “leaders”. These Jinas occupy high places in Jaina temples as Hindus divinities do theirs and temples are specifically dedicated to them. (Brown, 1959) In later period Jainism divided into two sects, ‘Svetambara’ means ‘white-clade’ and ‘Digambara’ means ‘space-clad’ or ‘naked’. (Gupte, 1972)

Jainism, the atheist religion, have twenty-four Tirthankaras as mentioned above. Rishabh Natha is considered the first, mentioned in the *Visima* and *Bhugavata Puranasas* belonging to very remote past. Names of three Tirthankaras mentions in Yajurveda, includes Rishabh Natha, Ajita and

Arusthanemi. Jainas claimed that the 22nd Tirthankara named Neminatha, was contemporary of Lord Krishna and that he belonged to the Yadav family. However, they became powerful during the time of 23rd Tirthankara, Parsvanatha who probably lived in 8th century. (Gupte, 1972)

Bhattacharya states:

“The Jainas believe that right faith, right knowledge, right conduct and chastity lead the wayfarer along the path of salvation. Ultimate release from matter is, according to the Jainas, the ideal state of existence for the soul. As even the minutest being is believed to have life, the Jainas are very careful not to destroy it.” (Bhattacharya, 1971)

Origin of the Worship of Jaina Image

On the basis of archaeological evidences, the image worship, most probably assigned to the 3rd century BC, the Mauryan Age. That was the period of Samprati, the grandson of Asoka, who is said to converted into Jainism and given much royal support to Jaina Monks. The evidence of Lohanipur statue gives support to this. (Shah U. P.)

However, the literary sources of image worship in Jainism is concerned, available texts of Jaina chronicles which is said to have been following the text of second council at Valabhi which met at the later half of fifth century AD. There found a few references of image worship of Jina, their relics and shrines by gods and men and these are considered as old as Mathura council which met in the beginning of fourth century AD. But it is believed that attempts were made to worship of an image of Mahavira even during his life time. On the other hand, nowhere it is said that Mahavira visited a Jina shrine or worshipped image during his lifetime of any previous Tirthankara i.e. Parsvanatha or Rishabhathana. (Shah U. P.)

Identification of Tirthankaras

Upto the end of Kushana period, a Jina only identified with the name given in the votive inscription on pedestal, images of Tirthankaras has no specific recognizing symbol. We find evidence of very few tirthankaras during the Kushana period of Mathura. Those were Rishabhathana, Neminatha, Parsvanatha and Mahavira. It is interesting to note in Jaina Kalpasutra lives of only four Jinas described in detail and these were again Rishabhathana, Neminatha, Parsvanatha and Mahavira. And kalpasutra mentions no any special symbol to recognize these symbols. Tirthakara are said to be of different complexions namely white, golden, red, black or dark blue. The complexion and lanchhana (Ride) help us to identify the tirthankaras in paintings or Jaina image.

Tirthankara Depiction in Multan Temple

On the façade of the main chamber of the Parsvanatha Mandir of Multan, Tirthankaras are painted finely in rectangular panel. Almost all the images are in contact that they can be identified easily except two.

Mainly, the Multan temple, as shown by its name, dedicated to Lord Parsvanatha. So, we can say the main deity of the temple is Lord Parsvanatha. Parsvanatha is mainly depicted on two places of the temple one on the façade of the main chamber (See Fig.1) and other on the top most of the back wall of small chamber (See Fig. 3).



Figure 1: Façade of the Main Chamber



Figure 2: Depiction of the Five Tirthankara above the Main Chamber

Parsvanatha:

Parsvanatha is one of the great prophets of Jaina religion. Chronologically, Parsvanatha is 23rd Tirthankara. He is considered as the true founder of Jaina faith by some scholars. His influence has leading importance in Jaina religion. His emblem or cognizance is Snake and it seems to be everything with him. It is not only found as symbol with him but also found in the form of snake canopy over his head with three, seven, nine or eleven hoods. Serpent plays a very prominent role throughout his life and traditions. (Bhattacharya, 1971, p. 58)

His Yaksha is known as ‘Parsva’, ‘Vamana’ or ‘Dharanendra’ and his Yakshini is ‘Padmavati’. A King stands by his side as Chowri-bearer is ‘Ajitaraja’. (Bhattacharya, 1971, p. 58) His associated tree is known as ‘Dhataki’ or ‘Devadaru’ (Deodar) in Svetambara sect while ‘Dhava’ in Digambara sect. (Shah U. P., 1998, p. 76)

General Description of the paintings of Parsvanatha :

According to Jain iconography the central figure is the depiction of Sri Parsvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara. Crowned and bejeweled figure of Parshvanath is depicted in meditation pose. He is

seated under the canopy of nine heads of cobra snake. His prominent throne and radiating halo behind his head are also permanent features of the figural representation. Among the body ornaments include ear rings, necklace, armlets and bracelets. A snake is depicted under his throne and according to Jain mythology snake is his ride. All features are painted with black, golden and red color.



Figure 3: Depiction of Lord Parshvanatha in Small Chamber

Lord Parsvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara or the main deity of the temple is also depicted here in seated cross-legged pose on his throne, wears a head dress with nine serpents. He is also ornamented with jewelry including heavy collar, necklaces, mala, armlets and bangles. A snake, his ride is also sitting in front him. A Multicusped arch niche enclosed the deity and further in a rectangular frame of double line.

Detail of the depiction above the main chamber entrance

1. Pushpadanata:

Seated figure in the extreme left corner of the painting (See Fig.2), and also positioned at extreme left side of the central figure of the lord Parsvanatha, haloed figure of *Pushpadanata*, who is the 9th Tirthankara of Jainism, is depicted. He is seated in cross legged position or is mediation pose, on an elaborated throne. He is depicted wearing ornamental head dress or crown, ear rings, necklace, armlets and bracelets. Under his throne alligator or his ride is depicted.



Figure 4: Depiction of Pushpadanata

Mahavira:

Seated very next to the left side of Parsvanatha, the 24th Tirthankara of Jainism, Mahavir is depicted. Mahavira shares similar iconographical representation as he is also haloed and seated on a throne in cross legged pose and a he wears a crown. Like others Tirthankaras depicted in the painting, Mahavira also wears ear rings, bracelets, armlets and necklace. From Jaina cosmology, we know that his ride is lion and the lion is depicted under his throne.



Figure 5: Depiction of Mahavira

Rishabhathata:

This painting is on very right side of the main deity painting. From iconographical details and description of the deity in Jain mythology, we can identify that *Rishabhathata*, who is the 1st Tirthankara of Jain religion, is depicted here. He is shown haloed, seated cross legged on a throne and wears beautiful head dress. Painting also shows that he wears ear rings, necklaces, armlets and bracelets. A bull is depicted under his throne that is his ride.



Figure 6: Depiction of Rishabh Natha

Chandraprabha:

In extreme right corner of the painting and also of the main deity another Tirthankara is depicted, that is *Chandraprabha*, the 8th Tirthankara. His style of depiction is identical to rest of the Tirthankaras of the painting. He is haloed and seated cross legged on a throne, wears throne over his head. Same as others also wears necklace, ear rings, armlets and bracelets. A crescent is depicted under his throne that is his ride.



Figure 7: Depiction of Chandraprabha

As shown in (Fig. 1) the main entrance of the temples is set within a large rectangular frame. The frame is divided into various square and rectangular panels. All the panels are profusely decorated with different design. Five panels can be seen on each vertical side of the frame. Detail of the both right and left panel are discussed below:

Detail of right panel

Vasupujya:

Below the former square panel, the 12th Tirthankara, *Vasupujya* is depicted inside a rectangular panel. The rectangular frame is ornamented with lotus petals of golden color. The Tirthankara is shown seated on a throne, under a multifold arch niche. Spandrels of the arch are decorated with five petaled golden flowers while a three petaled flower is depicted at the level of key stone. Rest of the area is covered with leaves. The seated Tirthankara wears a head dress. He is richly ornamented with jewelry including ear rings, necklaces, armlets and bangles. A buffalo, his ride, is sitting under his throne.



Figure 8: Depiction of Vasupujya

Unidentified Naked Tirthankara with devotee

Third panel of the right vertical panle has similar frame and arch nich as mentioned above but the figural depiction is different. Here an unidnetified naked Tirthankara is painted in standing pose with straight arms. On both side of central naked figure, two figures are depicted, might be called devotees or followers. They weared a Mala and a lower drapery or Dhoti. Details of the painting are too fragmentary to identify the Tirthankara and two standing figures.



Figure 9: Depiction of a Tirthankara with Devotee

Padmaprabha:

The fourth panel, in descending order, once again rectangular in shape and has same style of framing and arch niche. *Padmaprabha*, the 6th Tirthankara of Jaina is shown. He is seated cross legged on a lotus throne. *Padmaprabha* wears a head dress and only one arm can be seen in the painting that is resting on his belly. From the central cusp of the arch niche a fanon is hanging over his head. A pink lotus that is his ride is depicted under his throne. Again, the details of the imagery are in very poor state of preservation.

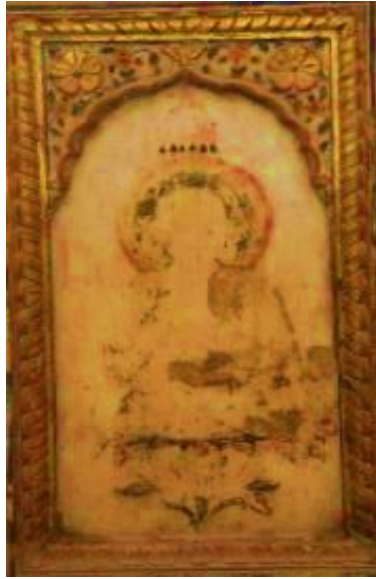


Figure 10: Depiction of Padmaprabha

Detail of left panel

Neminatha

The second panel's frame and arch niche is same as seen on the panel of the right side. However, in the center of the arch niche, the 22nd Tirthankara named *Neminatha* is depicted in cross legged position, seated on a throne. Haloed *Neminatha* wears a crown over his head, ear rings in his ears, necklaces and multiple mala in his neck, armlets and bracelets in his arms. His ride, *Shunk* is painted under his throne and a bell-shaped motif is hanging over his head.



Figure 11: Depiction of Neminatha

Unidentified Figure:

Third panel might be same as the right side third panel. Only a face with shaved head is seen in it.



Figure 12: Unidentified Figure

Unidentified Figure:

The fourth panel is again in rectangular shape. In this panel a Tirthankara is depicted in cross legged sitting posture on a throne. A serpent is painted on its right hand side and tripod under his throne. The painting and most of the details are damaged which making it difficult to identify exact subject depicted here.



Figure 13: Unidentified Tirthankara

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that the Tirthankara is a central figure in a Jain temple. Every temple is associated with one Tirthankara just like the Hindu temple traditions i.e. Shiva temple, Vishnu temple etc., which is the main depicted figure but the other Tirthankara are also depicted side by side the main one. Moreover, they are depicted in seated or standing pose and an emblem or ride, generally an animal is depicted below the seat of the Tirthankara which differentiate them from each other.

We can say, Jain art is stylistically similar to Hindu or Buddhist art although its themes and iconography are specifically Jain. From the above mentioned narrative art of Jainism as depicted in the temple, we must understand Jain religious art has deep roots in pictorial artistic traditions of Pakistan. Number of Jain icons and idols represented in single temple of Multan clearly indicate their prominent significance and religious hierarchy.

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