

Sculptural Art in Jainism: An Appraisal

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The Jain temple architecture of Western India is extremely rich in sculptural art as compared the contemporary Hindu Temple. The sculptures are also important from historical point of view as they help us tracing the evolution of architecture. Art historians have divided the sculptures of the Jain temples into various categories.¹ The first and the most important category is the sculpture of the Jinas to whom the temples are dedicated. These are the ones that are worshipped in the sanction and devakulikas, they also occur door tenets, pillars and ceilings and hence are most important numerous. These sculptures usually depict the Jina sitting in the dhyamudra and padmasana posture. Some are also shown in standing position. In these sculptures, the Jina is usually shown wearing a diaphanous dhoti and in beaded girdles. These are usually found in the svetambra temples. They generally have an umbrella or chatra over their head and also a parikara decord with the attendant figures like cauri-bearers, elephants, trumpeters, makaras. Sometimes the parikara displays of subsidiary Jinas and according to the number of Jina figures; they are called tritirthi, Panchatirthi. In these sculptures, Jina images are shown having a stocky body, column like limbs.

Another kind of sculptures are those which shows images of gods- goddesses. represent five auspicious events from the life of Tirthankar hours. They also depict Acharya giving religious discourse. These sculptures show boys and the figures have fluidity in their movement. Another kind of sculptures are those which shows images of gods and goddesses. These images are usually found on the pillars, pilasters and ceilings. These sculptures are roundish in form and our quite graceful which distinguishes them from the ordinary human figures. Their divine character is also shown in the fact that they have two arms and are usually in padmasana. They are shown wearing armllets, wrestles, anklets and loads of jewellery. For instances, the female figurines which represent goddesses wear long necklaces. The arch pediment is plain or carved. Sometimes the arch is formed by lotus of scrolls issuing from the mouth of Kirtimukha. The stelaes of these bracket figures are composed of boughs.

Another category of sculptures consists of the Apsaras. These are the most exquisite sculptures in Jain temples. These can be seen on the walls, pillars and ceilings. On the pillars,

they are independently shown in the usual frame. On the walls, they appear either as independent figure or as attendants. On the pillars, they are independent. These apsaras are usually bedecked with jewellery. These figures are exquisite in their beauty and are pleasing to the eye.

Another category into which the Jaina sculptures can be divided are the sculptures of Sravakas, Sravikas and Acharyas. Carved wholly in round or high relief, they are represented as standing. These sculptures depict everyday life. The women are usually shown wearing a kucabanda and on upper garment. Men are shown wearing Dhoti. Both men and women are shown wearing ornaments like earrings, necklaces, armbands, anklets. These sculptures are quite ordinary maybe because they are representing ordinary people carrying on with their everyday lives.

Another category is of Kinnars and Naigamesin. Naigamesin are half goat half human figures. The Kinnars are half human and half birds. Upper half like bird and lower half like Kinnars usually appear in the corner of ceilings. Kinnars are usually shown flying in the sky. Another category of sculptures is that of animals and birds. Animals and birds like elephants, horses, lions, geese and makaras etc. are often and depicted. Lion with his mouth open and showing creepers is one of the most common one. These animal figures are used on pillar capitals.

Horned lions are also quite common. They are usually found in almost all Jain temples of the early mediaeval medieval period. In some temples, these horned lions are usually shown as a small in size but in others they are shown in large sizes. Lions are generally shown in the profile. In some cases, they are shown sitting on hind legs. Makar or goats are also popularly employed on pillar capitals as bracket figures. They are also used as decorative figures. Animal sculptures in the form of Kirtimukhas became very popular starting with 10th-11th century and by the 12th century almost all Jain Temple contained animal figures as Kirtimukhas but after around 13th 14th century they are not so common. In fact we see a decline in the use of animal figures. Another category of sculptures consist of floral and vegetable designs and Geometrical patterns. Diamond shape, lotus flowers, frangipani flowers were quite common. In the temples built around 14th-15th century they are the most numerous sculptural patterns.

¹ Shah, U. P., Studies in Jain Art, Parsavnath Vidyapitha, Varanasi.

The sculptural art of the Jain temples reached its zenith in the 11th and 12th century but after that we see a decline in their quality. Aesthetically they are not as pleasing as the ones before them. The vigour of the previous entries is gone and they become more plastic. The sculptures became more and more ornate. These bodies of the human figures no longer graceful. The whole body appears stocky on the whole appearance is a rigid lacks the fluidity of the earlier period.²

Now we will look closely at the sculptures representing Jinas. The Jina images represent calm and inward looking meditational expression on their faces. A series of auspicious marks can be found on them which identify them as Chakravartin. The srivasta mark which is a sign of a physical and spiritual purity. Another frequently depicted mark is the wheels on feet which depicts the Jina to be Chakravartin.

In more complex and figural depictions of Tirthankara, the central Jina is surrounded by a large number of iconographic elements and attendants. These were referred to as pratiharyas and create complex sculptural compositions known as parikara of a Jina. Jain religious texts mention thirty four supernatural qualities associated with the thirthankara. A smaller group of these have been grouped as eight chief qualities or accompanying attendants of a Jina. These consist of his enlightenment tree or an Ashoka tree, a lion throne (Simhasana), a triple umbrella, and a radiating luster surrounding the head of the Tirthankara, flywhish bearers, and musicians. One also regularly finds representation of yaksha and yakshi knees usually positioned in the lower tires of the composition. Vidya herbs and other demigods beautiful heavenly minstrels sages and aesthetic like Narada surrounding the formal seated or standing central position of Das Jinnah.

There are also examples where multiple statues of the Tirthankaras have been sculpture. Particularly common order for four images in which four adorned figural representation of Ford maker, seated or standing face of the four directions. It appears to have been a common practice to place for figural representation or four card panels below scare secretary tree. In Jainism, the theme of a seated fourfold image facing the directions is connected with the mythological preaching auditorium of the Tirthankar as Bhavesh on which the boards construct or the ceremony of it Jinnah. In samavasaranas a connection with charity of vraksha has frequently been preserved and representation of trees regularly shelter the fourfold of the apex of the stylised teaching auditorium. When found in summer Barsana context the four images on to represent one and the same of Ford maker as according to the story, the gods created three replicas of the central Jinnah. The gods multiply the figure of the Tirthankar about to deliver his teachings, in order for him to face the audience of the listeners in four directions. In the representation of chaturmukhap

pratimas outside of the samavasaranas context, however it is more common for the four images to represent different Jinaa. Also common or joint representation of all four Jinas carved into one panel. Officially these are known as caturvimsati. Jina-pata and in brief caturvimsati. The colloquial term used for them is Chaubisi. Amongst the largest number of such multi image representation are composite arrangements of one thousand Tirthankaras sahasrakuta. Sahasrakuta is usually represented three dimensionally in the shape of pyramid a cone or a straight side block.

In Jainism image worship was introduced far earlier then it was introduced in Buddhism or Hinduism.³ In Jainism apart from figures that are worshipped, we also come across abstract and emblematic symbols that are worshipped. The most common example of symbol worship is the ayagapatas or the so called tablets of homage. These are also known as silapattas. Ayagapattas or silapattas are basically ornamental slabs. These tablets were meant for the worship of Jinas. Most of them are rectangular in shape but some are also octagonal.⁴ They are mostly decorated with animal and human designs. What we usually find is yaksha or a Jina figure which is surrounded by abstract object like wheel, a pair of fish or a swastika. The asta-mangala, the eight auspicious objects or symbols of Jaina religion. Evidence for their adoration stretches back to close to 2000 years. These eight auspicious images include Swastik, Srivatsa symbols, the nandyavarta diagram, a powder flask, a throne, a full vase, a mirror and either a single or a pair of fish. In the Digambara temples we can also see the kalasa and darpan. Other symbols are a vessel, a flywisk, a banner, a fan, a parasol and an auspicious seat. These asta-mangalas hours have been regularly been depicted on the ayaga-patas, where one of the symbols usually represent the central motif of a tablet.⁵ Usually of the symbols of asta-mangala is the central motif. In some case, the asta-mangalas have been depicted above the doorways, they were also used to decorate the offerings tables and also these asta-mangalas are positioned in front and at times side shrines of the Tirthankaras. The symbols are usually embossed into metal plates and trays made of silver and used for offering in the temple rituals with some ornaments.

Apart from asta-mangala, we also have dreams of Jina's mother. The representations of the dreams which the mother of a Tirthankara sees at the time of conception are venerated as auspicious symbol in Jaina temples. The belief in auspicious dreams and their interpretation have been associated with mothers of important figures and Tirthankaras. but most common is the dreams of Jinnah's mother. The Shwetambar believe there are fourteen dreams of the Jaina and the diagambaras believe there are sixteen dreams.⁶

³ Coonarswamy A. K., Elements of Buddhist Iconography

⁴ Nawab Sarabhi M, Jaina Citra Kalpadruma, Ahmedabad, 1936.

⁵ Bhattacharya B. C., Jaina Iconography, Lahore, 1939.

⁶ Sheth Chimanlal Bhaital, Jainism in Gujarat, Cosmo Publication.

² Sheth Chimanlal Bhailal, Jainism in Gujarat, Cosmo Publication

These dreams have been represented in symbolic form. At places these dreams are represented individually and at other places these dreams are represented as complete set. Usually we see these dreams painted on the walls of temples. Groups of fourteen and sixteen dreams are shown on the walls. Carvings of the dreams have often been positioned above the doorways leading to garbha grahas of Jaina temple. A very common symbolic representation is associated with pancaparamesthins, the 'five supreme one'. These consist of arhats, the siddhas, the acharyas and the upadhyayas and the sadhus. The arhants are twenty four tirthankaras, who still have a human body. The acharyas are heads of a particular group of monks, nuns and their devotees and the upadhyayas are monks who teach scriptures to others and are responsible for spiritual development of their followers. Finally, the Sadhus are ordinary monks. This group of five venerated ones is invoked in the highest incantation.

Translated into Jaina art, the five elements of the mantra have been arranged in diagrammatic form in the shape of an open lotus flower and an arhant is shown sitting in the middle of the lotus. In the Jaina art we also come across five individual elements which are represented called Parcaparamosthin. In this category, the Siddhas are most important. The Siddhas are entirely liberated souls. They are free from human bondage of any kind. So Siddhas are souls that are completely free from any embodiment. They represent a canundrum to Jaina artists who are meant to depict a state of nothingness achieved by former human beings.⁷ Jain sculptor represents them by taking a metal plate and cutting out the shape of a figure in the middle. In these figures the human shape formally held by the Siddha meaning the space once occupied by the human person, is still visible although the figures of themselves are bodiless. A unique representation expressing the abstract concept of siddha but in different iconographical form can be seen at Parsavnath Temple at Melesittamur. In this the Jinas are shown hovering above the ground, expressing their exalted state.

The ancient sign of swastika is also frequently seen in Jaina temples. According to A cara-dinakara, dating from the fourteenth century, the swastika emblem signifies Swasti meaning peace. According to conventional Jaina exegesis, the four corners of the swastika are believed to represent the four main states of existence (human, animal, God and hell being) and more rarely the four elements of a Jaina community (monks, nuns, layman and laywoman). A further symbol used in a similar way to Swastika was the images of the open palm of a hand representing the gesture of parlessness. This is also commonly called the abhaya-mudra. So another common symbol just like in Buddhist iconography is the lotus flower.

⁷ Singh, Harihar, Jain Temples of Western India, P. V. Research Institute

One also regularly finds representation of cosmic man or Loha Purush.

Another symbol closely associated with Buddhism as well is the dharma chakra. The Jinas are considered chakravartin or universal emperors. The wheel is either shown from the front with the rim facing the observer or from the side. Since Rishabhath is the first tirthankara, it is he who is usually depicted by the turning of wheel symbol. Another well-known symbol is that of Yantras. Yantras are magical in the form of abstract geometric diagrams commonly integrating religions symbols and writings into their design. Most ancient appears to be the nandya varta yantra, a holy symbol already encountered on the āyāga-patas. Another one is sruta- skanda yantra. So as the namaskara or pancha namaskara mantras were translated into visual shape in the form of pañcaparamesthin or the extended version in the form of Siddha Chakra or the nava-devata. There are other mantras which have been translated and are venerated in visual form. These mantras, sacred syllables words or phrases are believed by Jaina believers to be charged with sacred energy. The sacred syllables 'omand hrms' for instance are considered to be filled with the religions powers and are believed when manipulated in the right mythical way to exercise great influence. The sacred syllables representations created in colourful marble inlay in the mandapas of many Jaina temples.

Now if one looks at the Jaina art in Madhya Pradesh, the sculptural art of the mediaeval period is marked by a profusion of a peculiar liking for the colossus.⁸ The rise of the gommata cut was largely responsible for this notable example at sravanbelagola perhaps providing inspiration for this.

In central India, the plastic art is primarily marked by a sense of iconographic profusion. It is however not invariably devoid of aesthetic sense. Nandisvara-dvipa is known to both swetambaras and digambaras. It is the last of the numerous concentric island continents of Jaina cosmography.⁹ The Nandisvara is the land of delight of gods with gardens. In its central part are located four Anjana mountains of a black colour, situated in the four directions; Devaramana in the east, Nityodgota in the South, Svayamprabha in the West and Ramayana in the north. On the top of it are the temples of the arhat.¹⁰ Within the temples are jewelled platforms sixteen yojamas long and wide. On the daises are incense burners wreaths, bells and eight auspicious marks, banners, festoons, baskets, boxes and sixteen ornaments such as full pitchers etc.

There are gleaming entrance panihians (mukha mandapa) of the size of the temples, theatre panitians (prehsha mandapa) arenas. The plaques or patas representing 32 shrines on Nandisvara are extremely popular amongst both the sects.

⁸ Bajpai K. D., Cultural contribution of Jain Art of Madhya Pradesh.

⁹ Shah U. P., Studies in Jain Art, Parsavnath Vidyapitha, Varanasi.

¹⁰ Jain Jyoti Prasad, The Jaina Sources of History of Ancient India.

The Digambaras represent 32 small figures of the Jinas on a fourth tiered platform or in a miniature shrine, both the types being four faced as illustrated by T. N. Ramachandran.¹¹ The Shwetambaras plaque worshipped in the famous Caumukha shrine at Ranakpura depicts this. In this shrine the Jinalyas are grouped in a beautiful geometric pattern while the intervening spaces at four ends are filled with representation of Caitya trees. Another Pata of this dvipa, installed by Dhandhaka in 1230 A. D. is preserved in a cell in the main shrine on Mount Girnar. The Nandisvara dvipa has been held very sacred by both the sects who install stone and metal sculptures or plaques of it in Jaina shrines.¹² Both shwetambara and digambaras install stone and metal sculptures plaques of it in Jaina shrines.

Sthapana or sthapanacharya is a symbolic representation of his acharya or teacher. It is usually represented by a crossed wooden stand made of 2 or more crossed sticks which can be folded and carried easily. The sticks are tied with a string in the centre and when the stand is placed in position, a nice piece of cloth, often costly or ornamental one is placed on the top.¹³

A scripture was usually placed on it. The material used for stick is ivory or sandalwood with beautiful carvings at ends. The sthapana is an old practice amongst monks of both the sects and can be seen on stone sculptures also at Deogarh, Abu, Kumbharia and other places.

Sthapana is therefore an old practice referred by Ksamassamana and by the anuyoga dvaracurmi which mentions the accessories for a sadhu in the practice of dharma. They are sthapana, mutapathi, davdapainchanam, Japamalika. The stapanana is for practice of visual or showing respect to and obedience to elders.

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¹¹ Loddha R. M. and Jain P. S., Medieval Jainism Culture & Environment.

¹² Julia A. B. Megewald, Jaina Temple Architecture in India.

¹³ Loddha R. M. and Jain P. S., Medieval Jainism Culture & Environment.