

Sacred Stone and Silent Narratives: Jaina Antiquities for Bharatiya Jnana Parampara of Purulia District of West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the Jain cultural heritage in the Purulia district and how it will foster the Bharatiya Jnana Parampara. In this regard, researchers explored various historical sites in Purulia that still contain the ruins of a Jaina temple. Basically, researchers have first-hand information, as they belong to the Purulia district, and are motivated to select such a burning issue in the context of the NEP-2020 and Indian Knowledge Systems. In the process, extensive work on Jain sculptural and architectural remains has been recorded in the river valleys adjoining the Chotanagpur plateau region and the present-day district of Purulia, which remains the most important area for the provenance of these remains. Its noticed that the Jaina civilizations nourished and flourish places of Chotanagpur area and this the confluence of the tangible and intangible cultural meets of Manbhum (nowadays known as Jangalmahal forest land) followed by the development in the hills land of West Bengal, it was the Chotanagpur plateau and its adjoining regions (so far as Eastern India is concerned) that witnessed the rapid diffusion of this faith during the 9th to the 11th/12th centuries C.E. Still many ruins exist in the Daul Ghata and other places which show that the once Purulia is the land of Jaina. The archaeological evidence also shows that Jainism and its aesthetic sense still have many educational implications. In this regard, our humble attempt is to integrate Jainism's aesthetic sensibility with the Bharatiya Jnana Parampara. The objective of the present study is to document Jaina practices within the context of Bharatiya Jnana Parampara, align them with contemporary educational practices, and relate the reported specimens to the archaeological context. In this paper, the researchers analysed data to provide a coherent picture of the newly documented Jaina sculptural sites in the Damodar River valley, Purulia district, West Bengal. The present study has investigated the cultural heritage of a region during the early medieval and medieval periods, as well as its regional identity and the contributions of the Jain religious tradition. Using the observational method, the researcher collected data and proceeded to the findings. In the present paper, the researchers discuss the iconographic features of the newly discovered Jaina images in detail. Stylistically, these sculptures are similar to those reported from Santuri in Purulia, Tiluri from Biharinatha in Bankura, and Punchra in Paschim Bardhaman. This may be because, compared with other major Jaina art centres such as Pakbirra, Charra, Suisa, and the Visnupur region, the present study area used a different stone, whose carving produced an aesthetic expression that may be equated with a different art style. The region needs further intensive exploration to reconstruct the history of Jainism in this fringe area of the Chotanagpur Plateau.

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I. INTRODUCTION

India has a long intellectual tradition. Since ancient times, the Bharatiya Jnana Parampara has been enriched by a synthesis of diverse philosophies, religions, and schools of thought. One of the key branches of this Jnana Parampara is Jainism or Jaina philosophy (Majumdar & Bairagya, 2025). It is founded on the principles of human values and morality, Ahimsa Paramo Dharma (non-violence), and self-discipline. Rishabhanatha is revered as the first Tirthankara and the founder of Jaina philosophy. Subsequently, Mahavir organised and expanded this philosophy. The core teaching of Jainism is Ahimsa, which is not limited to refraining from physical harm but also teaches the principle of non-injury towards all living beings through one's thoughts, speech, and actions (Reading, 2019). Equally significant in this philosophy is the concept of Anekantavada – the doctrine of multi-dimensional truth, which posits that truth is not singular. However, it can be perceived in various contexts. This concept enhances a mindset of tolerance and coexistence within society. Conversely, the principle of Aparigraha (non-possession) teaches individuals to lead a life of moderation by renouncing excessive attachment to material comforts and wealth (Chaturvedi, 2012).

In Jain philosophy, the attainment of Moksh (liberation) fosters the cultivation of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct, which pave the way for an individual's spiritual evolution. These principles play an important role in establishing morality, and discipline is a matter of one's personal life (Abdul & Mondal, 2023). Jainism holds immense significance within the Indian knowledge tradition, having contributed to the development of ethical values, tolerance, critical thinking, and environmental awareness. A perspective of equality towards all living beings, coupled with a deep reverence for nature, constitutes a distinctive hallmark of Jainism, one that remains profoundly relevant in the modern world (Ameta, 2025).

II. JAIN EPISTEMOLOGY

According to Jain philosophy, the true concept of a matter or object is called knowledge. Knowledge arises as a result of the connection between the knower and the known. As mentioned earlier, in Jain philosophy, it is accepted that every living being has a soul and that knowledge is the natural attribute of the soul. Therefore, according to this philosophy, the soul is the real knower. Again, the nature of the soul is consciousness. The non-living or inanimate is devoid of consciousness. Consciousness is self-manifest and also manifests

other objects. If an object does not manifest through consciousness, it must be understood that it is obstructed somewhere. In Jain philosophy, it is said that every living being can be omniscient. However, the soul's omniscient nature is obstructed by past actions. True knowledge can remove that obstruction. In the theory of knowledge within Jain philosophy, knowledge is divided into two parts: indirect knowledge and Direct Knowledge. In other Indian philosophies, sense-based knowledge is called direct knowledge. However, in Jain epistemology, this idea is the opposite. According to this philosophical idea, the existence of inanimate objects in the external world is independent of knowledge, or the mind does not create them. Therefore, the knowledge acquired through the senses or the mind is not direct. This kind of knowledge is identified as indirect knowledge in Jain philosophy. This kind of indirect knowledge is not real knowledge; this kind of knowledge is practical knowledge. Two processes of acquiring such indirect knowledge are mentioned in Jain philosophy: 'Moti' and 'Shruti'. Moti is knowledge obtained through the mind and senses. In the general sense, all the knowledge that can be obtained through internal perception, external perception, memory and inference is called 'Moti Janana'. The knowledge that is obtained by relying on the words of others or on scriptures is called 'Shruti Janana'.

On the other hand, the knowledge that the soul directly perceives without any medium is called Direct knowledge in Jain philosophy. Direct knowledge is real knowledge. There are three types of direct knowledge in Jaina Epistemology: 'Abodhi', 'Manaparjai,' and 'Kebal'. The knowledge of something distant or subtle that is perceived by the senses or mind is called 'Abodhi Janana'. In general terms, it can be called foresight. Knowledge about the mental state of others, which can be obtained through insight, is called 'Manaparjai'. Transcendental knowledge is the 'Kebal Janana'. When all the actions that are obstacles in the path of knowledge are destroyed, when a soul frees itself from the bondage of all actions, only then can he possess knowledge. This knowledge is not bound by the boundaries of space and time.

Jain philosophy is similar to modern educational thought in various aspects. Firstly, a major feature of modern educational theory is its eclecticism. Child-centricity in education is the real

form of this eclecticism. If we review the history of the development of this ideal of child-centred education, we see that it has been shaped by a number of different doctrines. That is, in the field of education, the doctrines previously advanced by various thinkers have been indirectly recognised as partial truths within modern educational theory. This view of modern education is evidenced by the influence of Syadvad or Anekantavada. Secondly, education in the modern sense is the process of developing a child's inherent potential. In Jain philosophy, the soul is said to be the reservoir of infinite knowledge and power, while karma covers it. Only when the obstacles of karma are removed will the soul possess infinite knowledge, and the fulfilment of life will come. In other words, the effort to free oneself from the bondage of karma in Jain philosophy and the effort to develop a child's latent potential in modern education are the same. Thirdly, the rules mentioned as the code of conduct in Jain philosophy, such as right knowledge, right philosophy and right character, on the one hand help the individual to rise to a higher level as a living being, and on the other hand help to maintain overall social welfare and social harmony. Similarly, the co-selection of individual welfare and social welfare can be observed in the aim of modern education. Fourthly, God is not acknowledged in Jain philosophy. According to this philosophy, the one who has won in life is the 'Jin'; these Jins are ideal men and worthy of imitation. The common man can attain liberation by following their lives. The role of the teacher mentioned in modern education is in complete harmony with this principle of Jain philosophy. According to this modern view, the teacher is the embodiment of the student's philosophy of life; he is his friend, philosopher and guide. The teacher's work is not limited to imparting knowledge; his job is to unfold the true philosophy of life before the student through his own way of life. That is, the modern teacher is a personality worthy of imitation. Finally, in Jain philosophy, religion means perfection. In the modern era, all thinkers agree that education is the process of perfecting a person. Therefore, from an educational perspective, this core concept of Jain philosophy regarding humanism is very significant and logical in the modern era.

III. NON-VIOLENCE: GANDHIAN VIEW ON JAIN PHILOSOPHY

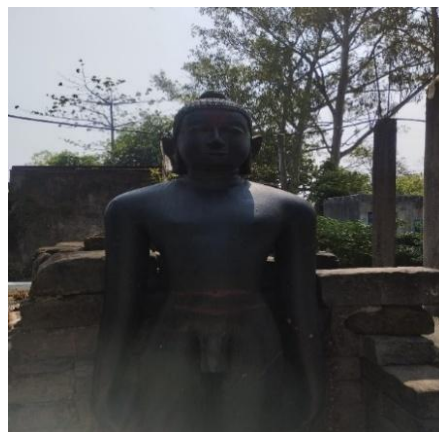
Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest advocates of non-violence in the modern world. His philosophy of Ahimsa (non-violence) became the foundation of India's freedom movement against British rule. Gandhi believed that truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa) were the strongest weapons for social and political change. He used peaceful methods such as Satyagraha, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation to fight injustice. The idea of non-violence in Gandhi's thought was deeply influenced by Jainism. Jainism teaches that all living beings are sacred and should not be harmed in thought, word, or action. The Jain principle of 'Ahimsa Paramo Dharma' (non-violence is the highest religion) greatly inspired Gandhi during his childhood in Gujarat, where Jain culture was strong.

Gandhi expanded the Jain idea of non-violence from a personal religious practice to a social and political philosophy. For him, non-violence was not weakness; it was a form of moral courage and compassion. He believed that hatred and violence could never create lasting peace. His ideas later inspired world leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela in their struggles for justice and equality. Thus, Gandhi's concept of non-violence reflects a strong connection between Indian spiritual traditions,

especially Jainism, and modern movements for peace and human rights.

IV. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF JAINISM IN PURULIA

Today's Purulia was once part of the undivided Manbhum district in the Chotanagpur plateau. The Acharanga Sutra, written in the 4th to 3rd centuries BCE, mentions the region of Radh. The present Purulia district was located within this region. At that time, this region was covered in dense forest. Ferocious wild animals and primitive tribal communities, or denotified tribes at present known as PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups), lived in this Chotanagpur Plateau. To bring these tribal people to the light of education and to propagate Jainism, Tirthankara Mahavir travelled to this region. Currently, this district is part of the state of West Bengal, with an area of 4147 square miles (approx). The renowned British historian, Colonel Dalton, collected information by observing the entire region and said that from the 9th to the 13th century, almost every village in this district had a huge Jaina temple, also known as a Deul and beautifully carved stone sculptures of the Tirthankaras. The temples of Purulia, which were established in the 9th century, were built by 90 percent of the Jains. The traders played a crucial role in establishing them (Khan & Sinha, 2024).



Picture 1–6: Archaeological evidence found at various sites of Purulia

V. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND SITE ANALYSIS OF PURULIA REGION

SL No.	Archaeological site of Purulia district	Archaeological Evidence	Times frame (approximately)
1	Telkupi Village, Ragunathpur-I Block	Famous Jaina Temple	10 th –13 th century
2	Banda Village, Ragunathpur-II Block	Jaina temples and Rostrum (Rekha Deul Architecture)	11 th – 13 th century
3	Para Village, Para Block	Stone sculpture of Jaina Tirthankara murtis	10 th – 13 th century
4	Deulghata, Baram Village, Jaypur Block	Famous Jaina temples	9 th – 10 th century
5	Gajpur, Purulia Barakar Road, Purulia	Yielding excavated stone temple remains and Jaina sculptures	10 th – 11 th century
6	Charra Village, Purulia-II Block	Ruins of Jaina sculptures and temple	11 th – 13 th century
7	Baramesya Village, Manbazar-I Block	Various meditative Jaina Tirthankara stone sculptures	10 th – 11 th century
8	Budhpur Village, Puncha Block	Various stone-carved Jaina sculptures and ruins murtis	11 th – 13 th century
9	Mahadevbera,	Stone sculpture of Jaina tirthankaras (<i>Rishabhanatha</i> & <i>Parshvanatha</i>)	11 th – 12 th century
10	Lauraha Village, Puncha Block.	Stone sculpture of Jaina Tirthankara murtis	9 th – 10 th century
11	Rakshatpur Village, Raghunathpur Block	A meditative Jaina Tirthankara, <i>Rsabhanatha</i> , stone sculpture	10 th – 11 th century
12	Rajnawagarh, Kenda Block.	Jaina Tirthankara <i>Rsabhanatha</i> stone sculpture	Not found
13	Lakhra Village, Puncha Block.	Broken Jaina temple and Stone sculpture of Jaina Tirthankara Mahabir	11 th – 12 th century
14	Sankha Village, Raguthanathpur-I Block	Jaina Tirthankara <i>Rishabhanatha</i> stone sculpture & damaged Jaina temple	9 th – 10 th century
15	Bhabanipur Village, Raghunathpur-II Block	Jaina Tirthankara <i>Rsabhanatha</i> stone sculpture	9 th – 10 th century
16	Chalka Village, Manbazar-II Block	Stone sculptures and murtis	9 th – 10 th century
17	Budla Village, Raghunathpur-I Block	Ruins Jaina Tirthankaras stone sculpture	9 th century
18	Ladhurka Village, Hura Block	Ruins of Jaina stone sculptures	9 th century
19	Podlara Village, Purulia-II Block.	Ruins of Jaina temples (Deul)	9 th – 10 th century
20	Burda, Baghmundi Block.	Ruins of Jaina Tirthankaras stone sculpture	9 th century

21	Pakbirra Village, Pancha Block	Famous Jaina Tirthankara Mahabir stone sculpture, Jaina temples, & various murtis	9 th – 10 th century
22	Tatari Village, Purulia-II Block	The ruins of the Jaina temple are visible at the site	11 th – 12 th century

VI. TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL CONFLUENCE

The concept of 'Sacred Stone and Silent Narrative' symbolised the core relationship between tangible archaeological sculpture and its intangible, or abstract, cultural relevance, particularly in the area where Jain traditions and local traditions and customs intersect. Sculptures not only function as visible symbols of religious devotion but also embody core philosophical ideas, environmental awareness, social values, and spiritual practices.

Stone as Living Heritage: Sacred stones or rock-cut sculptures, those found in the Deulghata, Pakbirra region of Purulia district of West Bengal, are not merely non-living objects that were created or used by humans in the Jain period but also serve as primary evidence for understanding ancient daily life activities, technology and religious beliefs. Those sacred stones or sculptures represent a 'living heritage' where ancient Jain icons are often integrated into local worship, becoming part of the 'silent narrative' of the community.

Dual Religious Attribution: In ancient times, particularly in these areas, local communities worshipped Jain icons (e.g., Tirthankaras) as local deities (e.g., Vairab), indicating a syncretic blend of Jain principles and thoughts with local practices.

Environmental Awareness and Spiritual Practice: The Jain tradition of non-violence (Ahimsa) aligns with local roots and rituals of worshipping nature and other living and non-living things, such as the Vata (Ficus) tree, and the maintenance of sacred groves, merging environmental conservation with religious practice.

Cultural Continuity: The 'silent narratives' are expressed through oral traditions, local rituals, folklore, culture, and traditions that are connected to the peoples of those areas. These narratives represent a continuity with past knowledge systems, in which communities, such as the Sarak in the Manbhum region, continue to follow principles

of non-violence even as formal Jain worship has evolved (Majee, 2026).

VII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Values-based Education: Jain principles such as non-violence and compassion align well with the broader goals of holistic education. By integrating these values into the curriculum, it is possible to foster ethical awareness and a sense of social responsibility.

Place-based and Experiential learning: Jainism and place-based learning are linked by a shared emphasis on experiential, or hands-on, learning, environmental awareness, and the belief that the surrounding environment is a 'moral theatre' where the educational process unfolds. Jain thought and principles encourage the educational process through direct engagement with the surrounding natural environment (Maes, 2021).

Culture-based learning: In the context of Jainism, it is an educational approach embedded in Jain philosophy, primarily Ahimsa (non-violence), Anekantavada (many-sidedness), and Aparigraha (non-possession). This approach focuses on holistic and moral development, combining intellectual knowledge with ethical conduct, often transmitted through family, culture and daily rituals.

Alignment with NEP-2020: The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) places significant emphasis on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems, or 'Bharatiya Jnana Parampara', into the educational process. Through this study, researchers clearly highlighted how local culture and heritage can be effectively leveraged as valuable resources in curriculum design.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The present study explored multiple dimensions to understand the historical, cultural, and educational significance of Jain antiquities and sculpture in the Purulia district. This study reinforces the idea that the Purulia region was an important centre of Jain activity during the early

medieval period. The sculptural and architectural ruins discovered at sites such as Deulghata, Pakbirra, and Punchra indicate the existence of a well-established network of religious and cultural centres. These sites were interconnected through trade routes, pilgrimage paths, and socio-economic and cultural exchanges, which contributed to the propagation and spread of Jainism within the Chota Nagpur Plateau and beyond. An analysis from an art-theoretical perspective reveals that these sculptures unveil a blend of unity and diversity. Although these iconographic forms adhere to the canonical norms of Jain iconography, i.e., the depiction of Tirthankaras in meditative postures, local variations are evident, influenced by local materials and craftsmanship. For instance, the use of local stone has given rise to distinctive craftsmanship and carving styles that set the sculptures of Purulia apart from those of other Jain centres, such as Bishnupur, and even from those of Western India.

This highlights the dynamism of artistic traditions, as they are shaped by interaction with the local environment and culture.

In this context, the concept of 'Sacred Stones and Silent Narratives' becomes relevant. The ruins of sculptures and temples are not merely inert objects; rather, they serve as carriers of thoughts and philosophies, embodying multifaceted forms of historical memory, religious belief, and aesthetics. Their silence is not absence but depth, inviting interpretation and engagement. If we analyse from the perspective of the Indian knowledge system, these ruins, sculptures, and stone cuttings can be seen as repositories of knowledge that rise as a hidden curriculum. Another significant part of this study is the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible culture. Purulia is one of the major areas of the Jangalmahal region, with its rich, vast tribal culture and traditions, which provide a unique backdrop for the interaction between indigenous practices and Jain wisdom. This shared connection is clearly manifested through harmony with nature, living within community, and moral and ethical conduct. These values are highly connected with contemporary issues regarding environmental sustainability and social cohesion.

In terms of educational significance, this study highlights several insights. First, it emphasises the importance of integrating local culture and traditions into teaching methodology. For example,

visiting archaeological sites can serve as a powerful educational tool, offering students the opportunity to connect their theoretical knowledge with the real world. Secondly, the philosophical principles of Jainism, mainly non-violence, pluralism, and self-restraint, can make a significant contribution to the education system and help to develop empathy, critical thinking, and ethical awareness among students. However, this study aligns with the vision of the NEP 2020, which promotes a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education. By incorporating elements of history, archaeology, philosophy, and the arts, this study demonstrates the relevance of the 'Indian Knowledge System' and how it can be effectively integrated into modern curricula. The present study also revealed that interdisciplinary research significantly bridges the gap between the humanities and the social sciences. Many of the archaeological sites in the Purulia region remain underexplored and face preservation challenges. Due to a lack of adequate knowledge, insufficient funds, and the failure to maintain proper documentation, conducting research and safeguarding important subjects becomes difficult. To preserve and care for this heritage, it is essential that researchers, local communities, and government agencies work together.

IX. CONCLUSION

The exploration of Jain sculptures and antiquities in the Purulia district of West Bengal reveals a rich cultural history and knowledge system that has mostly remained hidden. These sacred stones serve as silent witnesses to a rich cultural past marked by spirituality, craftsmanship, artistic excellence, and ethical and moral values. Through this study, researchers seek to give voice to these silent narratives within the context of the Bharatiya Jnana Parampara. Findings of the study showed that Purulia was not simply a marginalised area but also a significant religious and spiritual centre of Jainism, and during the medieval period, Jain activity was popularised in these regions. Archaeological remains, such as temple ruins and beautifully carved sculptures, show that Jainism once flourished in this region and became an important part of its social and cultural life. The designs and symbols seen in these artefacts follow traditional Jain principles while also incorporating local and traditional influences. This shows that culture was not fixed; instead, it changed and

adapted over time, creating a rich and dynamic expression in architecture and engineering. Beyond their historical significance, these antiquities also have deep cultural, spiritual and educational value. They teach us the importance of non-violence, living in harmony with nature, and leading an ethical life; these are very relevant in today's society. By incorporating this ancient knowledge system in modern education in the context of the National Education Policy-2020, we can help students to develop in a more holistic and balanced way, not just academically but also morally and socially. This study also contributes to the growing discussion on the significance and meaningfulness of Indian Knowledge Systems in 21st-century education. At the same time, it shows that there is an urgent need to preserve, protect and promote these traditions more deeply. Many of these sites remain neglected, and their value for learning and cultural awareness has not been fully recognised.

Future research should take an interdisciplinary approach by bringing together fields such as archaeology, history, anthropology, and education. This will help develop a clearer, more complete understanding of Purulia's rich cultural heritage. In conclusion, the sacred stones of Purulia district are not just witnesses of the past but also living symbols of the Bharatiya Jnana Parampara, which still inspires and guides us today. When we connect with these silent narratives, we not only understand our history but also begin to shape a better future for all by incorporating this knowledge system into education.

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