

Conceptual link between Jainism and Iconography of Vimala Vasahi Temple of Dilwara Group in Mount Abu.

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Abstract

In the iconography of religion, the subject matter or the content consists of images, symbols, teachings and narratives related to religion belief and practices

of understanding to one's religious tradition. Iconographical interpretations reveal the intrinsic meaning or content of the symbolic values underlying in a work art. It conveys of how the human mind works.

Iconography deals with documents which man has created in . It literally means "writing in images". In order to study iconography one must began to read the meaning of the images. It is the subject matter which is of concern in iconography rather than form of art.

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Introduction

In the iconography of religion, the subject matter or the content consists of images, symbols, teachings and narratives related to religion belief and practices. The study of iconography of Dilwara Temple is a valuable example of the way in which history of this temple and religion are related. The study of iconography of Dilwara Temple is valuable as it provides a mode of understanding to one's religious tradition. Iconographical interpretations reveal the intrinsic meaning or content of the symbolic values underlying in a work art. It conveys of how the human mind works.



Courtesy – Dilwara Collection

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The pieces of Jain art belonging to different ages are scattered all over the country. Jains have mostly selected their sites atop mountains, far from habitations and worldly life and in the natural peaceful surroundings which are conducive to meditation and spiritual contemplation. This sacred environment gives added sanctity as if charged with spiritualism. The art in the Jain shrines show Jina image showing detachment and contemplation. These peaceful and spiritual surroundings make the pilgrim feel as if he is face to face with the divine. The places of Jain pilgrimage are store house of art. The Jain tradition rich and ancient has great system of philosophy, religion and ethics in its pilgrimage sites i.e. Tirthas.

The Jain shrine, Dilwara in Mount Abu deserves special monographs as it represents a typical provincial school of art which flourished in the mediaeval period of Indian history between 11th and 13th century AD.

Dilwara Temples of Rajasthan are popular for their artistic work. They are located near Mount Abu in Rajasthan. Mount Abu is beautiful and one and only hill stations of Rajasthan. Since there were many Hindu and Jain shrines in this area, the place was known in the ancient times as Devalapataka or Devakulapataka (A city of group of temples).



Courtesy – Dilwara Collection

It seems that formerly there were many Jain residents in Dilwara, it is authenticated by an image of Parsvanatha the 23th Tirthankara which was installed in c. 12th century A.D. by a Jain merchant living there. Secondly the famous inscription dated c. 13th century A.D. mentions that Jains of Dilwara were asked to celebrate the five auspicious events in the life of the Tirthankara Neminatha every year.

Dilwara temple is a famous pilgrimage of the followers of Jainism. The simple architecture of the temple reminds us of the virtues of Jainism. Set up amidst the picturesque hills the Dilwara temples has a striking use of marble. These temples are built during 11th and 13th century A.D.

In the huge temple complex there are five shrines:

1. **Vimla Vasahi temple**
2. **Luna Vasahi Temple**
3. **Pittalahara Temple**
4. **Kharatara Vasahi Temple**
5. **Mahavira Swami Temple**

Vimala Vasahi Temple

This temple was built in the year 1031 A.D. at the cost of Rs. 18 crores and 53 lakhs by Vimal Shah the Minister and commander in chief of king Bhimdeo, the ruler of Gujarat State. It was constructed by 1500 masons and 12000 laborers

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worked for 14 years to give shapes to this monument dedicated to Tirthankaras Adinatha .



From- Holy Abu, Shri Yashovijaya Jaina Granthamala

The outer parts of temple i.e. the Navachoki, Rangamandapa, cells in the court yard and (Bhamati) have exuberant carving and ornamentation in contrast to the inner sanctum which is plain i.e. the mula-garbha-girha and the gudha-mandapa to its front. The shikhara are also plain and simple and are built in two styles. This may be due to the Muslim invaders who destroyed the temples at Dilwara and in fact destroyed all the images of Tirthankaras in the inner sanctums. Hence in the later rebuilding the interior have no ornamentation and is simple and plain.

The main sanctum of the shrine called mula-garbha-grha has the magnificent and lovely image of Rishabdeva or Adinatha as the chief deity. This image is carved along with parikara (with attendant figures etc. around it) including figures of four other Jinas. The image is technically known as the sa-parikara – panchatirthi of Rishabhnatha Tirthankara. The Adinatha is seated in the padmasana and has srivatva mark on the chest and has a lanchana symbol on the pedestal.

In the same cell is the sculpture of Saint Shri Hiravijayasuri with the attendant monk standing on each side and below two pious laymen are sitting and on the top over the head of the saint are carved three Jina sitting in padmasana posture.

Gudhamandapa

In the gudhamandapa is a Parsvanatha image. On each side on each of

these sculptures are miniatures figure of otherJinas, there are also two attendants, two shravakas and two shravikas. Besides, in this hall there is other Jina image with or without parikara. There is also a marble slab called pata of Chovisi(with a group of 24 Tirthankaras carved on it. In Chovisipata there is a mulanayaka image shown in the centre and below is the dharmchakra symbol and has inscription. In this hall there are two images of shravakas and three of shravikas. In all in this mandapa these are thirty-fiveJina images and twoKyotasarga images of Parsvanatha.

Adjacent to the gudhamandapa is the Navachoki with two big niches closely attached to the walls. On the right niche has a Adinatha sculpture with parikara and another image without parikara with Jain devotees i.e. (sravakas and shravikas are seen). On the niche on the other side of entrance door the main diety is of Adinatha with parikara and a Yantric diagram is carved in stone.

On the back wall of the main sanctum on its outer region there are small niches, one on each direction with single Jina image placed in each.

Around all the four sides of the temple is a circumambulatory passage raised than that of Rangamandapa with the row of cells. The back wall of these cells is the outer wall of VimalaVasahi Temple. The Hastisala is outside it, in front of the main entrance.



From- Holy Abu, Shri Yashovijaya Jaina Granthamala

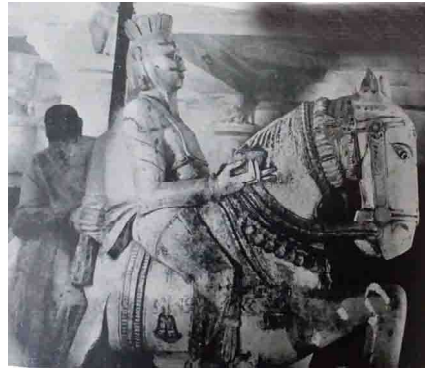
There are images of Tirthankaras installed in this row of cells which are on all the sides of the temple. These are fifty-four in number and contain images of the Tirthankaras in seated padmaasana posture.

Cells

The cells have the image of Tirthankaras as main diety with almost all the Jinas have parikara around them. The Jinas are seated in padmaasana and their respective cognizance is represented on the pedestal. The parikara is profusely carved. The dharmachakara is seen below the pedestal in frontal position and the goddesses Padmavati is seen under the pedestal in the niche. The elephants are represented in relief facing the front. The lions are on the either side of dharmachakra are carved in high relief. The flying gandharvas are also seen above the Jina. The miniature Jina is seen with Chatra who form the part of parikara. Nearly all the cells have the same type of handling which sometimes shows repetition of the content.

In one of the cells there are four images of Ambika Devi. In the cell no. 2 there is a stone pata showing mother of the twenty-four Tirthankaras sitting along with the infant Jinas on their laps. On top of the slab are carved figures of three Jinas in sitting posture.

Another cell has a Panch-Tirthi sculpture with parikara and one pata of Chovisi (24 Jinas). Asa-parikara sculpture of Sambhavanatha and Sumatinatha are seen in cell no. 6 and 10 respectively. Around the Sumatinatha image in cell no. 10, a pata of four Viharamana Tirthankaras of Jina mythology adorned with parikara carved round in the group.



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Another long stone plaque representing 72 Jinas of past, present and future are represented which is also called three Chovisi. Another pata carved in marble is

of Shravakas riding over elephants and horses. These shravakas seem to be men of position as there is umbrella over their heads.

There is another long rectangular slab with eight portraits of shavakas carved on it. In cell no. 10 one Pancha-Tirthika image of Chandraprabhanatha with parikara is seen. There are other Jina images in this cell but without parikara and one pair of foot prints is also there.

In cell No. 52 a Pancha-trithikasa-parikara sculpture of Lord Mahavira is worshipped as the chief deity. In cell no. 17 a representation of Samavasarana carved out in white marble on the top is the four sides miniature shrine (Chaumukha) with four Jinas sitting on each side in padmasana. They are Mahavira, Adinatha, Chandraprabhanatha and one cannot be identified as the name of is not carved below the figure.

The cell no.54 Tri-tirthi sculpture, with Adinatha as the main deity. There is an ornamental torana in front resting on two carved pillars. But the torana arch is lost only pillars are preserved. Apart from the above sculptures, the images of Jainaacharyas and donors are represented.



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Hashtishala In the Hashtishala stone 3D representation of 10 elephants and one horse is shown. There is also a representation of figure of minster Vimala with attendant umbrella bearers on the horse.

CEILINGS: The exquisitely engraved ceilings is teemed with right patterns which depict lotus buds, petals, flowers and elaborated scenes from Jain mythology including

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Panch-Kalnayak and Trithankara surrounded by flying demigods and riding the swans. The lotus symbol of enlightenment dispels the darkness of ignorance inherent in all living beings. The lotus symbol which originally gave birth to beings now carries the powerful wisdom of nirvana.

The ceiling in cell no. 9 shows a relief of five kalyanakas or chief auspicious events in the life of Jina. The auspicious events are:

1. Central Circle shows Jina in Samavasarana
2. Mother lying on cot seeing fourteen dreams
3. The birth bath of Jina
4. Diksha ceremony (pinching of hair)
5. Jina obtaining Kevalajnana

The first ceiling in cell no. 10 contains the scenes from life of Neminatha. Cell no. 29 first ceiling contains beautiful representation of Krishna subduing Kaliya snake. This scene is from Hindu mythology and it is also mention in Jain texts that Lord Krishna is the cousin of Neminatha Tirthankara.

On the beams are also carved figures of Tirthankara and Vidyadevis. Jain art and architecture closely resemble that of others sects prevalent in those times because the artists who were from independent guilds would serve any religion. Jain art is similar in style to Hindu & Buddhist art but with difference in iconography and theme.

The most common image in the cells of VimalaVasahi is the seated Tirthankara. This image is most often present in the cells of this temple and represents a meditative posture or dhyanamudra. The symbol of Srivatsa on his chest which represents the highest knowledge has manifested itself from the heart of the Jina, in the form of the Srivatsa, mark on his chest. Sri means beauty and vatsa means chest. Nearly all the Tirthankara in the VimalaVasahi temple has this symbol on the chest.

Jains believed that there are 24 Yakshas and Yakshinis respectively appointed by Indra to each Tirthankara. These are also called Sasanadevatas. They are represented usually in pairs on either sides of Tirthankara. These Yakshas and Yakshinis are the male and female super-natural guardians which are neither divine nor eternal and are similar to humans and protect true worshippers of Jainism on their path through life and spiritual enlightenment.

Jain art is highly embroidered as animal and nature play a central role in temple art. Jains believe that there cannot be human peace at the cost of harming nature and

animals.

The cell no. 17 which represents Samavasarana, a magnificent lecture theatre constructed by gods for the first sermon given by Tirthankara after attaining enlightenment. While Mahavira was sharing his knowledge all kinds of species joined and could clearly see Mahavira and understand the message in their own language. One of the virtues of Jainism is that all beings are alike, irrespective of their size, shape and form, so we should love and respect them. In this way he preached the universal love.

These architectural complexes at VimalaVasahi temple of Dilwara group with wealth of imagery and sophisticated carving dazzles the worshipper. These reflect the Jain philosophy and religion which is embellished in elaborated manner. The Jain philosophy of Akentavad or equality between living and non-living is rightly reflected by carving various plants and animals in this temple. In the samavasarana it is believed that, this philosophic discourse is equally shared by all beings. They reflect the message of Jainism and hence philosophy of Jainism is found in the iconography of VimalaVasahi temple of Dilwara group.

Conclusion

According to Jainism, visit to pilgrimage helps the person in crossing the ocean of samsara which is full of pain and misery and so attains salvation from the constant rounds of births and deaths. Hence the main aim of Jain pilgrimage sites is spiritual edification. So these pilgrimage places have artistic monuments and are as such are living reminders for the pilgrims visiting there. Hence for making these monuments really beautiful no pains or money were spared. So the spirit of Jain religion is reflected in its art. They are sober, sublime and give peace and aesthetic pleasure.



Plate - Dilwara Temple collection

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