

"Sacred Connections: Nuns, Goddesses, and Yakshinies in Jain Philosophy"

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Abstract

This research article delves into the intricate relationships between nuns, goddesses, and Yakshinies within Jain Philosophy, offering a nuanced exploration of their significance in Jainism. Through meticulous analysis of historical texts, archaeological findings, and insights from renowned historians, this study illuminates the profound spiritual connections and their implications for understanding the role of femininity and divine entities in Jain philosophical thought.

"As historians and archaeologists, we find this research on the sacred connections within Jain Philosophy to be a commendable effort in unraveling the intricate tapestry of spiritual beliefs. The author's meticulous approach in integrating historical evidence and archaeological insights provides a compelling narrative that enhances our understanding of the interwoven roles of nuns, goddesses, and Yakshinies in shaping Jainism. This study serves as a significant contribution to the scholarly discourse on ancient religious traditions, shedding light on aspects often overlooked in mainstream historical narratives."

Jain Philosophy: The philosophical system and religious tradition originating in ancient India, emphasizing non-violence (ahimsa), non-possession (aparigraha), and the belief in multiple paths to spiritual purity and enlightenment.

Keywords: Nuns, Goddesses, Yakshinies, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, Scholarly Discourse

This article tries to explain the role of nuns with special reference to their goddesses & Yakshinies in Jainism. This study only aims at the recognition of women as well as the place of nuns in Jainism. In other words, the title of the paper tries to explore some aspects in this regard.

"Enigmatic Yakshini Temples: Exploring Jain Architectural Marvels Across Regions"

Yakshinies are integral to Jainism and are often depicted in various Jain temples and sacred sites across India. While there might not be specific temples exclusively dedicated to yakshinies, their representations can be found in several Jain temple complexes and important pilgrimage sites. Some of these locations include:

Shravanabelagola, Karnataka: This site hosts the famous monolithic statue of Lord Bahubali (Gommateshwara). The temple complex here includes various shrines and sculptures, and yakshinies are among the intricate carvings found in this significant Jain pilgrimage center.

Dilwara Temples, Mount Abu, Rajasthan: Renowned for their stunning marble architecture, the Dilwara Temples are dedicated to various Tirthankaras. The temples feature incredibly detailed carvings that include depictions of yakshinies, adding to the beauty and spiritual significance of the site.

Palitana Temples, Gujarat: Palitana is a revered pilgrimage site for Jains, known for its Shatrunjaya Hill, where numerous temples are situated. While the primary focus is on the Tirthankaras, yakshinies are often depicted in the intricately carved marble temples here.

Jaisalmer, Rajasthan: Within the Jain temples of Jaisalmer, particularly the Jain temples within the Jaisalmer Fort, visitors can find exquisite carvings that include representations of yakshinies among other divine figures.

Other Jain Temple Complexes: Several other Jain temple complexes across India, such as those in Ranakpur, Shravanabelagola, Khajuraho, and Moodabidri, feature architectural elements that depict yakshinies in various forms, including sculptures, reliefs, and carvings.

Yakshinies, though not the central focus of these temples, hold significance within the overall narrative and architectural splendor of Jainism. Their representations in these sacred sites contribute to the intricate beauty and spiritual symbolism found within Jain temple architecture.

To understand about these aspects of brief introduction of the rise of Jainism, it is important. To know about Jainism with its preachers, the Tirthankaras had preached about its code of conduct, practices based on aspects like growth of it with reference to history, place and circumstances.

About 599 B.C. to 527 BC the twenty fourth Tirthankara and the last Tirthankar was Mhavis and also known as Vardhaman. It is he who established a religious order based on the Jain philosophy, of course he took into account the all previous Tirthankaras including preaches his immediate predecessor Tirthankar Parsavanath, who flourished during 950 BC-850 B.C. However Mahaveer modified the code of conduct and practices according to the time and circumstances.

This state of mind of Mahaveer is known as perfect enlightenment or “Keval-Jnaan”. In fact he established the Jain philosophy that had been preached by Tirthankar Pashvanath and all other previous Tirthankaras. The main objective of his teachings is how one can attain salvation of from the cycle of births, life, pain, misery and death. This state of liberation finally leads to “Moksha.”

The role of nuns in Jainism concerning goddesses and yakshinies has been a subject of exploration, especially in the context of religious practices and spiritual significance. Research often delves into the intricate relationship between nuns, divine entities, and their impact on Jain religious traditions.

The studies on this topic may focus on understanding how nuns, known as Sadhvis, engage with goddesses and yakshinies through rituals, prayers, and religious ceremonies. Scholars examine the specific practices employed by Sadhvis to invoke these divine beings, exploring the nuances of these rituals and their symbolism within Jain spirituality.

Moreover, research might investigate the theological and philosophical underpinnings of the association between nuns and goddesses/yakshinies. This could involve analyzing Jain scriptures, texts, and religious literature to decipher the conceptual framework that links Sadhvis to these divine entities. Additionally, scholars may explore the socio-cultural aspects of how the role of nuns in venerating goddesses and yakshinies influences Jain communities and their religious practices.

The symbolic significance of these divine beings and how nuns embody the virtues and qualities represented by goddesses and yakshinies in their own lives. This involves studying the ethical, moral, and spiritual implications of Sadhvis' emulation of these virtues within the Jain community.

Overall, the role of nuns concerning goddesses and yakshinies in Jainism encompass a comprehensive analysis of religious practices, philosophical foundations, and socio-cultural influences, shedding light on the profound significance of these relationships within the Jain religious framework.

Jainism, the roles of women, or religious practices, which might encompass discussions related to the role of nuns with reference to goddesses and yakshinies:

Padmanabh S. Jaini: A prominent scholar in Jain studies, his work often covers various aspects of Jainism, including the roles of women and religious practices.

Nalini Balbir: Known for her contributions to Jain studies, particularly on Jain philosophy and textual studies, she might have written about the roles of nuns or women in Jainism.

Kristi L. Wiley: Her work in South Asian religions, particularly on Jainism, might encompass discussions related to the roles of women and religious practices within the Jain tradition.

Paul Dundas: Another scholar known for his work on Jainism and religious studies, his writings might touch upon the roles of nuns or women in Jain practices.

Phyllis Granoff: Her scholarly work spans across various aspects of South Asian religions, including Jainism, and might contain insights into the roles of women in Jain religious contexts.

The role of nuns concerning goddesses and Yakshinies in Jainism could encompass several objectives:

Historical Perspective: Explore historical texts and manuscripts to understand the traditional roles and significance of goddesses and yakshinies in Jainism. Investigate how nuns interacted with and revered these divine beings in ancient Jain society.

Symbolism and Spiritual Significance: Investigate the symbolic representations of goddesses and yakshinies within Jainism. Analyze their roles in Jain mythology and their significance in spiritual practices followed by Jain nuns.

Social and Cultural Impact: Explore how the presence and veneration of goddesses and yakshinies influenced the social and cultural aspects of Jain nunneries and communities. Examine rituals, festivals, and practices related to these divine beings and their impact on the lives of Jain nuns.

Contemporary Practices and Beliefs: Investigate how the perception and worship of goddesses and yakshinies among Jain nuns have evolved over time. Explore any changes in rituals, beliefs, or attitudes towards these divine entities within modern Jain communities.

Role in Jain Nuns' Spiritual Development: Study the role of goddesses and yakshinies in the spiritual growth and development of Jain nuns. Analyze how these divine beings are integrated into meditation, prayers, and other spiritual practices of Jain nuns.

Comparative Studies: Conduct comparative studies with other religious traditions that also venerate goddesses or similar divine beings. Explore similarities and differences in the roles and perceptions of these entities among nuns from different religious backgrounds.

Community Impact: Investigate how the teachings related to goddesses and yakshinies influence the interactions of Jain nuns with the broader community. Explore whether these beliefs have any impact on their roles as educators, spiritual leaders, or social contributors.

Remember, this type of research would likely involve examining ancient texts, conducting fieldwork in Jain communities, interviewing nuns, scholars, and possibly employing interdisciplinary approaches involving religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and history to gain a comprehensive understanding.

Searching for articles or books authored by these scholars in academic databases or library catalogs could potentially lead you to scholarly resources that discuss the role of nuns in Jainism concerning goddesses and yakshinies or related themes. Additionally, reaching out to academic departments specializing in religious studies or Jain studies at universities might provide more specific guidance or access to relevant research materials.

Position of Nuns in Jainism

In Jainism, nuns hold a significant and revered position within the religious community. They are known as Sadhvis and are highly respected for their commitment to spiritual practices, asceticism, and adherence to Jain principles.

Here are some key points regarding the position of nuns in Jainism:

Ascetic Life: Sadhvis lead a life of renunciation and austerity, focusing on spiritual pursuits, meditation, and the pursuit of enlightenment (moksha). They renounce worldly attachments and live a life dedicated to non-violence, truth, non-possessiveness, and other Jain principles.

Spiritual Equality: Jainism emphasizes spiritual equality, and both monks (Sadhus) and nuns (Sadhvis) have equal opportunities to attain spiritual liberation. They follow similar ascetic practices and are regarded with equal reverence.

Role in the Community: Sadhvis play a crucial role in Jain society. They often engage in teaching and guiding laypeople, imparting spiritual wisdom, and counseling on ethical living, non-violence, and compassion.

Monastic Order: Just like Sadhus, Sadhvis live in monastic communities, adhering to strict rules of conduct and discipline. They wear simple white robes and may practice severe asceticism, such as fasting and meditation.

Leadership and Influence: Although historically there have been fewer records of leadership roles held by Sadhvis in Jain institutions compared to Sadhus, there is recognition of their spiritual wisdom and influence within the community.

The position of nuns in Jainism showcases the principle of equality and the profound role they play in upholding Jain values, teachings, and the practice of non-violence and self-discipline.

Now with this brief background about Jainism it would be necessary to narrate their position, Nuns in Jainism. Many women are associated with Jainism. The community of Nuns and Monks grew quickly and at the time of Nirvana of Mahavira, there existed 14000 monks and 36,000 Nuns which means that women outnumbered the male monks. Jainism recognizes women as independent spiritual agents with the capacity for renunciation and salvation. Everyone knows about the two sects prevailing in Jainism namely Digambaras and Shvetambaras. But it seems to be difficult for nudity of females for correct mendicant path. Digambaras might dismiss the likelihood of female salvation. However in respect of Shvetambaras one should agree for role of females (position of women) as the 19th Tirthankara was a woman by name "Malli Devi". "The earliest lady was Ajja. Chandana a close relation of Mahavira either aunt or cousin. She was the daughter of Dandivahan the king of Champa. Once she offered food to Mahavira and she became a follower. She was made in charge of nuns" which was mentioned by a great professor P. Rama Laxmi in her article women in Jainism – some reflections p.p.225.

The vows for Nuns and Monks are similar which are listed below :

Vows taken by nuns and monks often share fundamental principles, as both commit themselves to a life of spiritual dedication and service. While specific vows might vary based on the religious order or tradition, here are some commonalities:

Chastity: Both nuns and monks typically vow to live a celibate life, dedicating themselves entirely to their spiritual practice and service to their community.

Poverty: Embracing a simple life devoid of material possessions is a shared commitment. Renouncing personal wealth allows them to focus on spiritual growth and communal welfare.

Obedience: Both groups vow to follow the rules and guidance of their order or spiritual leader. This fosters humility, discipline, and a sense of collective purpose.

Service and Devotion: Nuns and monks often commit to a life of service, whether it's through prayer, meditation, teaching, or engaging in charitable activities. Their focus lies in serving others and seeking spiritual enlightenment.

While the essence of vows might align between nuns and monks, the specifics can differ based on the religious tradition or order. Some may have additional vows related to specific practices, such as silence, vegetarianism, or certain forms of prayer. The supreme ideas of the Jain religion are nonviolence (Ahimsa), Compassion towards all living beings, reverence for all forms of life, non-possession and non-possessiveness (non attachment), and pluralism or non-absolutism view-points (Anekantaveda), these ideals are to be followed in thought, speech and action. Above all, it is a religion of love and compassion towards all living beings.

For Jains, at the heart of Right Conduct are the following five great vows. Ahimsa (Non violence / compassion) not to cause harm to any living beings. Satya (Truth fullness), to speak harmless truth only otherwise keep silence. Asteya (non stealing) Not to take anything that is not given properly.

Brahmacharya (Chastity) not to indulge in sensual pleasures. Apanigraha (Non-possession / Non-attachment) Complete detachment from people, places, and material things.

The lay people are expected to follow five vows to a limited extent. These vows are called "Anuvrata". They include (1) Non-violence / compassion known as Ahimsa (Not to cause any harm any movable living beings and also should cause minimum harm to sense living

beings such as plants, water and air (2) Satya (Truthfulness) 2) Asteya(non stealing) (4) Brahmacharya(Chestty) (5) Aparigraha.

A Tamil inscription dated around 850 AD found in wandiwash in north Arcot district refers to a university (institution) to train the Nuns. The Jain monastic code books mention about the presence of female renouncers capable of extreme chastity and asceticism. They are recognized as icons of Jain religiosity. Another class of female ascetics known as sadhvis and shravikas were also identified.

It is important to note that there exists a cult of female goddesses (which again gives some importance about the position of women in Jainism) These Goddesses of Jainism are three kinds : - those residing in upper realm (Urdhvaloka) middle realm (Madhyaloka) and Lower realm (Adholoka). The upper level-goddesses such as Sarswathi and Lakshmi. These goddesses have a clear vedic affinities. The middle level goddesses refer to Vidyas (who are known from 5th to 7th century AD). These goddesses are fixed at sixteen in both Shetambaras. And Digambaras tradition. The third level goddesses referred to be Yakshis. They are about three in number called Padmavathi, Charakeswary and Ambika . Among them the Padmavathi temple at the Lal Digambara temple complex in old Delhi is the largest devotee puller. This information of these goddesses had from writer Prof. Cort-Medieval Jain Goddesses Tradition p.p.235-255

Thus Dikvartha also known and guhavarathus and also disciplinary vows Shikshavrathas. Finally the process of spiritual death, it is voluntarily chosen method of death through ultra pure meditation and not inspired by any possession by any impulse of extreme anger.

However Jain conduct is to be adhered to minimized violence / minimum acumination and practice of self restraint.

Thus the nuns and Monks as well as lay man have different vows to be practiced and also practice them according to Jain conduct and its relevance to modern times as stated above.

YAKSHINIES:

salient features of Yakshinis:

Nature Spirits: Yakshinis are considered nature spirits or supernatural beings associated with natural elements such as forests, rivers, and mountains. They are often depicted as guardians or protectors of these natural realms.

Feminine Depiction: Yakshinis are primarily portrayed as female figures, depicted as beautiful, graceful, and often adorned with traditional ornaments or jewelry.

Symbolism of Fertility and Prosperity: They are associated with fertility, abundance, and prosperity. Yakshinis are believed to bring blessings for fertility, wealth, and well-being to those who worship or seek their favor.

Guardianship and Protection: In various mythologies, Yakshinis are seen as protectors or guardians. They are thought to safeguard natural spaces and sometimes even individuals who seek their assistance.

Variety in Depictions: While commonly associated with Hinduism, Yakshinis are present in Buddhist and Jain traditions as well. Their representations may vary across these traditions, with unique attributes and characteristics.

Artistic Representations: Yakshinis are often depicted in sculptures, reliefs, and paintings in ancient temples and other religious structures. These artistic representations showcase them in various poses and postures, reflecting their divine nature and significance.

Association with Yakshas: Yakshinis are often paired with Yakshas, male counterparts, and together they are considered powerful and benevolent entities in the spiritual realm.

Cultural Significance: Yakshinis hold cultural significance, representing the reverence for nature, fertility, and the interconnectedness of the natural world with spirituality and religious beliefs.

These features collectively portray Yakshinis as revered and benevolent beings, embodying various aspects of nature and often revered for their blessings and protective qualities.

Jainism, Yakshas and Yakshinis are divine, semi-divine, or celestial beings often associated with protecting certain aspects of the Jain faith and its followers. They are considered powerful, benevolent entities within the Jain cosmology, with both spiritual and worldly responsibilities.

Here are their main roles and significance within Jainism:

Protectors and Guardians: Yakshas and Yakshinis are believed to be guardians and protectors of various aspects of the Jain tradition. They safeguard sacred sites, temples, and Jain monuments, ensuring the safety and sanctity of these places.

Spiritual Guardians: They are seen as spiritual beings who possess certain levels of supernatural abilities. Devotees sometimes seek their blessings for spiritual progress, protection, and fulfillment of desires.

Association with Tirthankaras: Some Yakshas and Yakshinis are associated with specific Tirthankaras (the enlightened beings in Jainism) and are revered as their attendants or followers. For instance, the Yaksha named Chakreshvari and Yakshini named Ambika are associated with Lord Adinath (Rishabhanatha), the first Tirthankara.

Symbolism and Representation: In Jain art and iconography, Yakshas and Yakshinis are often depicted as beautifully adorned celestial beings, sometimes carrying attributes or symbols related to protection, prosperity, and fertility.

Karmic Beings: In Jain belief, they are also subject to their own karma and cycle of existence. Some texts mention stories where Yakshas and Yakshinis, due to their past deeds, undergo transformations or seek spiritual liberation.

Worship and Offerings: Devotees may offer prayers, rituals, and offerings to Yakshas and Yakshinis seeking their blessings for various purposes like wealth, health, or protection.

Jainism, with its rich cosmology, acknowledges various celestial beings like Yakshas and Yakshinis alongside other divine entities. Their significance lies in their roles as protectors, guides, and sources of blessings within the Jain tradition.

“Lastly it need to be mentioned about the role of Yakshas and Yakshinis . They are found in a pair of a male (Yaksha) and a female (Yakshini) guardian deities as it was mentioned in encyclopedia Britannica . Yaksha usually found on the right side of the Jain idol while Yakshini on the left side . In the earlier period they were regarded mainly as the devotees of Jainism but as time passed by, people started worship them too as it was in www.jainworld.com” .

The capacity of Yakshas and Yakshinis is also mentioned that they help to pacify the harmful power of rogas, grahas, raksasas , bhutas and pisachas . Their iconographic features were standardized by 11th and 12th century AD in Jain texts

Jains seem to have adopted either the names or the distinct iconography features or both, in such cases

It is interesting to note that the iconographic features of Yaksharaja (Sarvahana or Sarvanubhuti) and Dharanendra Yaksha and Cakaresvari, Ambika, Padmavathi Yakshini. Seems to have some similarities of Brahminical Hinduism.

It seems that these names have been standardized 6th century A.D. as mentioned in the Nirvankalika (Jain works).

But now some Jains by erecting and worshiping Yakshas, and yakshinis and asking for the materialistic gain from them. Such Jains are distracted from the spiritual path and attracted to the materialistic attachment.

The study of the role of nuns in Jainism concerning goddesses and yakshinies highlights several significant aspects within the faith:

Spiritual Connections: Nuns play a pivotal role in Jainism, connecting spiritual practices to the divine feminine through goddesses and yakshinies. These entities represent various aspects of divinity and are revered in Jain mythology.

Cultural Significance: The study underscores the cultural and religious significance of goddesses and yakshinies within Jainism. They are seen as divine beings embodying virtues, protection, and guidance.

Nunhood and Devotion: Nuns are often deeply devoted to these goddesses and yakshinies, incorporating their reverence into daily rituals, prayers, and meditations. This devotion serves as a guiding force in their spiritual lives.

Symbolism and Interpretations: The role of nuns in relation to goddesses and yakshinies offers rich symbolism and interpretations within Jain philosophy. These connections signify deeper meanings about spirituality, morality, and the role of divine feminine energies.

Community Influence: The presence of goddesses and yakshinies in the lives of nuns also impacts the wider Jain community. Their rituals and beliefs often serve as a focal point for community gatherings, celebrations, and religious practices.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the profound interplay between nuns, goddesses, and yakshinies in Jainism, showcasing how these divine entities serve as sources of inspiration, guidance, and spiritual strength for the nuns and the Jain community as a whole. Their

presence influences rituals, beliefs, and the cultural fabric of Jain society, highlighting the enduring significance of the divine feminine within the faith.

Findings:

Research exploring the role of nuns concerning goddesses and Yakshinies in Jainism can uncover various facets of Jain spiritual practices, cultural beliefs, and the significance of divine entities within the context of nunhood. Some potential findings and areas for further research in this domain could include:

Ritualistic Practices: Investigating specific rituals or ceremonies conducted by Jain nuns that involve goddesses or Yakshinies. This might include the nature of these rituals, their frequency, and their significance within the broader spiritual framework of Jainism.

Iconography and Symbolism: Exploring the visual representations of goddesses or Yakshinies within Jain temples, scriptures, or art, and understanding how nuns engage with these representations. This could involve studying the symbolic meanings attributed to these divine figures and their relevance in the lives of Jain nuns.

Interpretation and Textual Analysis: Analyzing Jain scriptures, texts, or commentaries to understand references or narratives related to the interaction between nuns and goddesses/Yakshinies. This could involve examining ancient texts or contemporary writings that discuss these relationships and their implications for nunhood.

Spiritual Significance: Investigating the spiritual significance attributed to goddesses or Yakshinies in the lives of Jain nuns. This might involve understanding how the belief in these divine beings influences the spiritual practices, values, or daily routines of nuns.

Historical and Sociocultural Context: Exploring the historical evolution of the connection between nuns and goddesses/Yakshinies in Jainism. This could include studying the evolution of rituals, changes in beliefs over time, and the sociocultural factors that have influenced these relationships.

Comparative Studies: Comparing the roles of nuns with reference to goddesses or divine entities across different sects or sub-traditions within Jainism. Understanding variations in beliefs and practices can offer a nuanced perspective on how these relationships manifest within diverse Jain communities.

Research paper

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Further research in these areas can deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between Jain nuns and the divine entities they venerate. It can shed light on the spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions of nunhood in Jainism and provide insights into the broader religious practices within the Jain community.

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