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Vital Role of Jain Manuscripts painting in sacred typography of India

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Abstract: Jainism, an ancient Indian religion, has had a profound impact on the nation's culture. Stunning handwriting and intricate artwork in *Prakrit* and *Sanskrit* complement the texts' original insights into Jain philosophy, ethics, and cosmology. This study provides a thorough investigation of the chronological progression, cultural relevance, and typographic effects of Jain writings in India's sacred typography. By analyzing the preservation, substance, and influence of these texts, this study increases our understanding of Jainism's ongoing influence on sacred scriptures. The *Tirthankaras*, enlightened spiritual masters, are at its core, and it places a strong focus on non-violence (*Ahimsa*). Along with specific traits like *mudras*, white attire, and footprints (*Charan-paduka*), iconography also features religious symbols like the *Swastika*, *Om*, and *Jain Pratik Chihna*. Where as elaborate borders and letter style imply reverence, while vibrant hues represent purity. The sacredness of Jain texts is enhanced by accurate depictions of Jain mythology, moral lessons, and the use of ancient scripts. In essence, the spiritual depth and reverent portrayals of significant historical figures and cultural icons found in Jain writings make them sacrosanct.

Keywords

Typography, preaching, remembrance, documentation, Jain Manuscripts, and sacredness

1. Introduction

One of the earliest religions in India, Jainism, explores significant issues with existence and spirituality. It was established by *Mahavira* more than 2500 years ago and is a different tradition with roots in the non-Vedic, non-Aryan *shramana* tradition. (Doshi, 1985) Jainism places a lot of emphasis on overcoming earthly emotions in order to achieve spiritual victory, or becoming a "*Jina*." divided into the *Śvetāmbara* and *Digambara* sects.

Jainism includes a wide range of ethical, mythical, philosophical, and ceremonial components. The absence of a supreme deity distinguishes this religion from other major faiths. Instead, it centers on the idea of *Tirthankaras*, enlightened beings who help humanity to redemption by achieving spiritual enlightenment themselves. Fundamentally, Jain philosophy emphasises strict self-discipline and the search for freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The idea of karma, which is fundamental to Jain theology, is made up of imperceptible particles that bind the everlasting soul (*jiva*) to matter (*ajiva*) and keep the cycle of reincarnation going. According to the Jain worldview, positive deeds produce good karma (*punya*), while negative deeds produce bad karma (*papa*). Both kinds of karma build up and weigh the soul down, preventing it from being freed. To succeed Jainism was split into the *Digambara* and *Śvetāmbara* sects as a result. There were a number of controversies that led to the schism, including debates over the Jain canon's veracity and issues with how monks should have dressed historically. Both sects continue to maintain their unique identities within Jainism despite these divides. The significance of nudity in renunciation is one of the most important areas of disagreement between the *Digambara* and *Śvetāmbara* sects. The *Digambaras* place a strong focus on *Mahavira's* dramatic clothing renunciation since they believe it is crucial for all monks and a key part of his spiritual journey. The *Śvetāmbaras*, on the other hand, advocate a more progressive shift and permit monks to wear whatever they like to wear. These numerous viewpoints demonstrate the variety within Jainism and the various ways that renunciation is interpreted. The two sects' perspectives on women's ability for spiritual redemption are another significant point of distinction. While the *Śvetāmbaras* contend that both sexes are equally capable of attaining moksha, the *Digambaras* contend that women must be reborn as males in order to do so. Despite these distinctions, both sects adhere to the traditional teachings of Jainism and have shared religious beliefs and pilgrimage locations. Millions of followers of Jainism still practice it now in India and other countries.

Jainism has a long history of preserving its teachings in writing through manuscript tradition. For ages, the Vedic tradition predominantly used oral transmission, but Jainism saw the necessity to put its teachings down in writing as since the fourth century B.C. The Jain and Buddhist communities, concerned over opposing interpretations of their sacred texts, drove this change. Between the fourth century B.C. and the sixth century A.D., there is a significant gap in the written Jain manuscripts that have survived. This gap might be caused by the absence of well-coordinated transcription efforts and suitable preservation facilities at the time. Thanks to the efforts of local authorities known as

bhattarakas, Jain temple-libraries did not start to systematically preserve written texts until the eighth century. (National Museum NewDelhi, 2021) Jain religious leaders and adherents made major contributions to the piety of temple libraries by commissioning manuscripts. These books were rarely used for personal purposes because they were regarded as holy things or enjoyment. Both the *Digambara* and the *Śvetāmbara* sects have Jain temple libraries, with differences in the number, content, and aesthetic of their holdings reflecting different literary identities and historical growth.

Evidence from the 8th and 9th centuries shows that the Jains have a long history of miniature painting. Jain miniature paintings, which frequently featured religious and mythical subjects, were found in manuscripts, wooden book covers, and palm-leaf scrolls. In Gujarat and Rajasthan, for example, this artistic tradition flourished, producing outstanding masterpieces in the 11th and 12th centuries. Although there is disagreement among academics as to whether Jains or Buddhists were responsible for the birth of miniature painting, both traditions developed independently but were shaped by the same cultural causes. Even during Muslim invasions, Jain art continued, presenting a continuous tradition from 1050 to 1750, albeit with dwindling brilliance.

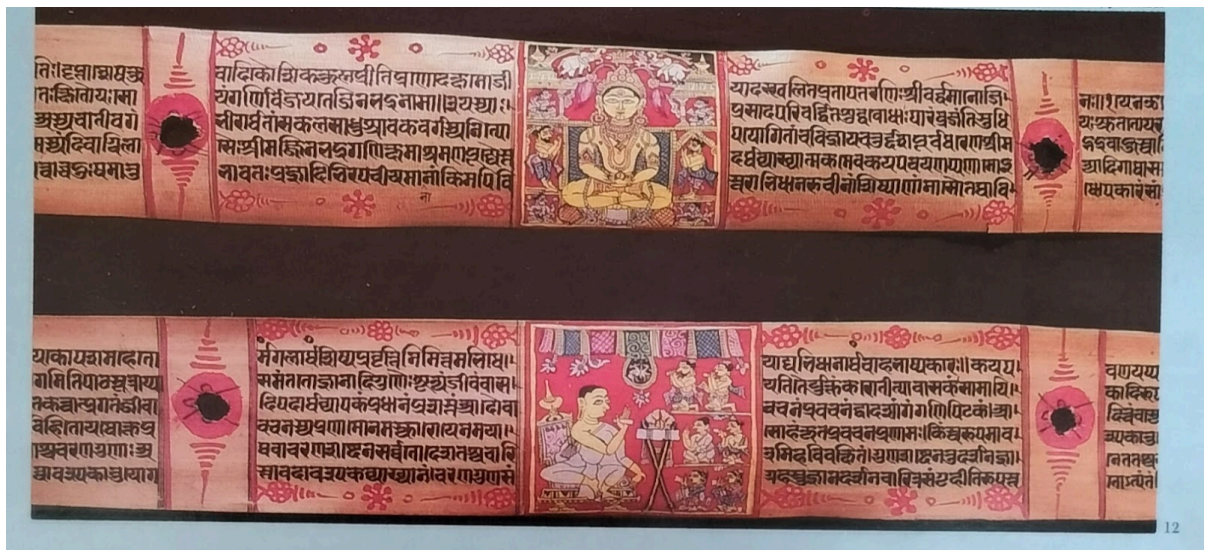
Overall, the intellectual depth, religious diversity, and dedication to preserving Jainism's teachings through both written texts and visual arts are all part of the religion's long past. Millions of followers in India and all around the world continue to be inspired by this distinctive and enduring spiritual tradition.

2. Sacred typography in Jain Manuscript paintings

From 1050 to 1350 CE, the early Jain manuscript painting period, is distinguished by the presence of decorated palm-leaf manuscripts and wooden book covers. This time period saw the creation and expression of Jain Painting. Before the Christian era, the practice of transcribing manuscripts probably existed, but it only really took off after the seventh century. Despite the fact that paper was readily available, these texts were created from palm leaves. The procedure entailed reducing the leaves into equal-sized folios after cutting, processing, burnishing, and trimming. The folios were divided into columns by the scribes, and the text were written from left to right with *cinnabar* pagination numbers.



Collection: Jain Trust,



Collection: Jain trust, Jaisalmer

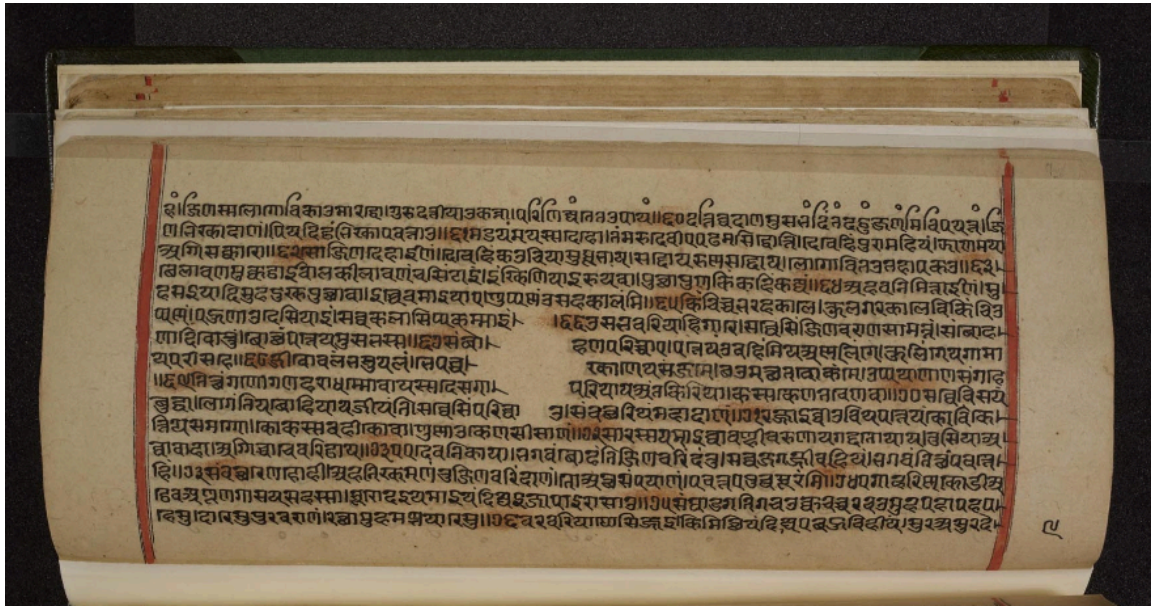
The palm-leaf manuscripts were bound in fabric, with more expensive textile wrappings used for the more valuable manuscripts. The Jain nagari script, known for its tidy and exquisite appearance, was used to write with ink and a reed pen. Few manuscripts from this time period had drawings, which were typically located in the opening or closing folios and frequently took the shape of square panels that filled the entire folio height.

Miniatures occasionally showed up in the margins or side columns. The earliest illustrated manuscript from this time period dates to A.D. 1060 and includes images of deities and ornamental elements. Its style is characterised by linear grace.

This manuscript also contains a version of the *Kalaka* narrative in addition to the *Kalpa-sutra*. The *Kalpa-sutra* narrative is followed in this tale. Notably, the manuscript was produced around 1434 CE, marking the beginning of Jain miniature painting, making it a priceless work of art and historical significance.

Here are a few instances of it.

2.1 Padhamā varavariā



Collection: The British Library Board, 1466, western India, Jaina Māhārāsī Prakrit, and Medium: paper

The Śvetāmbara sect principally adheres to the *Āvaśyaka-niryukti*, an important scripture in the Jain tradition written in *Jaina Māhārāsī Prakrit*. *Niryuktis*, which differ from conventional commentary in that they are *Prakrit* verse texts, are mnemonic aids for oral instruction that are frequently connected to certain Jain sutras. Due to its wide-ranging reach, which functions practically as a Jain doctrinal encyclopaedia, the *Avasyaka-Niryukti* is exceptional.

The work covers a wide range of Jain theory, including prescriptions for daily rituals and, most importantly, the crucial repentance (*pratikramana*) practise from the *Niryukti*. Similar to the *Sthavirāvalī* part of the *Kalpa-sutra*, it opens with a *Therāvalī*, a tribute to early Jain masters. The *Āvaśyaka-niryukti* also gives biographical details about the *Jinas* (spiritual winners), with a special emphasis on *Mahāvīra*, the 24th and final *Jina*, and *Rishabhanatha*, the first *Jina*. The 11 direct pupils of *Mahāvīra's* are represented by their philosophical stances in a famous part known as *Ganadhara-vāda*. Many of the lines in the text are word lists or proper names that might be used as the beginnings of stories. In prose commentary, such as *Prakrit cūrni*, *Sanskrit tīkās* or *vrttis*, and works in regional languages, these tales are further developed. The *Avasyaka-Niryukti* serves as a collection of Jain heroic tales as a result.

The final colophon states that this book was copied in 1466 CE (1523 VS), which is a relatively early date and makes it an important resource for studying Jain ideology, ceremonies, and storytelling.

2.2 Mahāvīra gives away his possessions



Source: The British Library Board, 1437, Patan, Gujarat, Ardhamāgadhī Prākṛit in Devanāgarī script, Medium: opaque watercolour and gold on coloured paper

The *Kalpa-sutra*, one of the most significant scriptures in the Śvetāmbara Jain tradition, is illustrated in this manuscript. It is recited by monks during the *Paryushan* festival, which is conducted every year from August to September.

There are three sections in the *Kalpa-sutra*: The lives of the Jinas are the main subject of the first section, with special emphasis on Mahāvīra, Pārśva, Nemi, and Rsabha. It tells the story of their birth, princely upbringing, renunciation, awakening, and independence. The second section, known as Sthavirāvali, contains laudatory statements about the early Jain masters. The third section, known as Sāmācārī, offers instructions on certain monastic regulations to be followed during the wet season. This manuscript also includes a version of the Kalaka narrative in addition to the *Kalpa-sutra*. This narrative is based on the *Kalpa-sutra*. The text is a priceless work of art and historical significance because it was produced in 1434 CE, marking the beginning of Jain miniature painting.

2.3 Prince Kālaka meets Gunamdharma



Source: Welcome Trust Library, Probably 15th to 16th centuries, Western India, Māhārāstri Jaina Prākṛit, Medium: Watercolor on paper

Scenes from this text show Prince Kalaka's interactions with Jain ascetics and his transition from a worldly to a spiritual life. The manuscript's specifics are as follows, with images to go along with the descriptions:

The text contains details about the life of Prince Kalaka but does not give a date. Prince Kalaka and a Jain monk are seen conversing politely in the scene at the top. The mouth cloth and cotton broom the monk is holding serve as symbols for his monastic garb. A sthāpanācārya, a tripod that stands in for the teacher and represents the Jain teachings, is situated between them. The image below shows a natural scene with a river. A different Prince Kalaka is shown in the bottom scene working with a horse. This scene captures liveliness and movement. The horse's appearance is expressive despite not being realistic. The document shows how Prince Kalaka changed from living in the world to becoming involved with Jain ascetics.

Other Important Components Due to a torn edge, this folio of the manuscript lacks a visible caption, though it is possible that other folios in the same book did. The paper has water stains and a little tear at the top. The folio number "1" may be seen in the lower right corner. At the beginning of the manuscript, a lucky symbol called a "bhale" may be seen inside red vertical lines, denoting the beginning of the document. This rendition of the Kalaka narrative is written in verse, with stanza numbers typically indicated between two vertical lines at the conclusion of each stanza. The three red circles along the central horizontal line serve as a visual allusion to the ancient practise of binding manuscripts with palm leaves. The book is written in the Jain Devanagari script, which has certain specific characteristics like the marking of the consonant sounds "e" and "o" and the use of red vertical lines to break up big phrases into smaller portions.

2.4 Bhaktāmara-stotra



Collection: The British Library Board, 1762, western India, Sanskrit, medium: paper

In the Jain tradition, this manuscript of the *Bhaktāmara-stotra* has great aesthetic and cultural importance. The hymn is highly regarded for its mystical qualities and connections to Jain tantric rituals utilising *mantras* and *yantras*. The book is notable for having a unique centre vignette on each page that shows figures or symbols thought to be auspicious. One of the eight fortunate symbols of Jainism, a full jar representing prosperity is shown in this particular painting. It has creepers rising from the top and a pink lotus blossom. Such jars are frequently depicted in Jain art with two eyes at the sides, maybe signifying clairvoyance or the all-seeing sun. Verse numbers are indicated in the manuscript between vertical red lines. There are also beautiful margins with floral and leaf patterns and geometric shapes with textual syllables. Even though these shapes are not specific to manuscripts of the *Bhaktāmara-stotra*, they do demonstrate attention to embellishment.

The *Jaina Devanagari* script, which resembles calligraphy and is used for Sanskrit writing, is the one that is used. Single lines denote the end of a verse section (*pada*), whereas double lines denote the finish of the complete verse. Red vertical lines (*dandas*) in the text are used to demarcate the various parts of a verse. In conclusion, this book showcases the mystical elements, creative depictions, and attention to detail in both the text and illustrations of the *Bhaktāmara-stotra* within Jainism.

3. Characteristics of artworks from the Jain Manuscripts

Jain manuscripts are renowned for their distinctive calligraphic features, which demonstrate accuracy, mastery, and spiritual value. They employ a variety of scripts, including *Devanagari* and *Ardhamagadhi*, which are inspired by custom and Jain sect doctrine. These manuscripts frequently have rich ornamental components and use red and gold ink to convey opulence and auspiciousness. It shows excellent competency when complex ligatures are used frequently. Special emphasis is placed on mantras and religious passages, highlighting their sanctity. The beginning is marked by the "*Mangalasutra*" intricate calligraphy. Jain diagrams and symbols are meticulously portrayed.

Consistency in script size and style improves readability and overall aesthetics. Jain calligraphers go beyond merely writing; they imbue their work with spiritual meaning through rituals of meditation and cleansing. Beautiful borders and scrollwork surround the text. Illuminated calligraphy is sometimes used in manuscripts to draw attention to key passages.

Calligraphy represents dedication and protects divine knowledge in Jainism, expressing a strong veneration for these holy scriptures.

4. Conclusion

Paintings from Jain manuscripts act as visual representations of Jain principles and spiritual teachings, inspiring people to live moral lives based on the ethical concepts of *ahimsa* and *satya*. These pieces of art feature Jain *Tirthankaras*, highlighting the importance of the Five Vows of Jainism and the route to spiritual freedom. They also serve as examples of the idea of karma, emphasising the need for moral behaviour.

Through religious imagery and symbols, these paintings help to uphold the sanctity of Jain temples and homes by introducing visitors to the heavenly qualities of Jainism. Some of them have prayer and mantra inscriptions, which deepen their spiritual meaning. The purity and majesty of Jainism are reinforced by these paintings, which are powerful tools for spiritual education and introspection in addition to their aesthetic appeal.

Although Howard Gardner's idea of multiple intelligences may not have been familiar to the scholars of Jain manuscript paintings, their method reveals a profound understanding of pedagogy, spirituality, and psychology. They made Jain philosophy understandable and compelling for a wide audience by utilising symbolism, storytelling, and aesthetics.

To connect Jain manuscript paintings to Gardner's intelligences, they might use language intelligence through inscriptions, logical-mathematical intelligence with geometric patterns, spatial intelligence in composition, and musical intelligence in Jain ceremonies. The physical skill required to produce these images corresponds to bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, even though debates and academic studies also involve interpersonal intelligence. While naturalistic intelligence makes it easier to understand Jain cosmology, intrapersonal intelligence promotes the discovery of spiritual and personal connections.

The holiness of Jain values is embodied in Jain manuscript art, promoting spiritual development. They bridge the gap between art, philosophy, and religion within Jainism and act as potent motivators on people's spiritual journeys. It's crucial to keep in mind, though, that sacredness in Jainism comprises a holistic approach to moral conduct and spiritual growth that goes beyond art.

Acknowledgement (if any)

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