

New Developments in Aniconic Jaina Iconography

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There are two principal ways in which the two main objects of worship in the Jaina tradition, the liberated Jinās and mendicants reborn in heaven, are materially represented: statues, *bimbās*, *pratimās* or *mūrtis*, and footprint-images, *caraṇa-pādukās*. Numerous publications have been devoted to the study of Jaina portrait statues and temples. However, the significance of footprint images and other features of aniconic Jaina iconography in contemporary Jainism has not been seriously investigated.¹ U.P. Shah (1955), in his classic work *Studies in Jaina Art* does not even mention *caraṇa-pādukās* in the context of his examination of aniconic symbols in Jainism, nor does K. Bruhn (1994) in his article “Jaina, Iconografia”.²

In this brief report I will review the development of aniconic iconography in the originally anti-iconic or protestant Śvetāmbara Jaina movements that emerged from the 15th century onwards: the Loṅkāgaccha, Sthānakavāsī and Terāpanth Śvetāmbara traditions. While the role of aniconic representations in the early history of Jaina religious art remains uncharted territory, and probably will continue to be, the re-emergence of selected forms of image-worship in the aniconic Jaina traditions can be reconstructed. There is no doubt about the explicit prohibition of *mūrtipūjā*, image -or idol- worship, in all three protestant Jaina traditions.³ However, only few sub-sects of the Sthānakavāsī tradition remain anti-iconic in their practice to this day. The surviving segments of the Loṅkā tradition, now almost extinct, the Terāpanth, and many Sthānakavāsī traditions re-introduced forms of aniconic iconography such as *stūpas*, footprint images, empty thrones or sacred texts into the religious cult, which resembles the repertoire of early Jaina and Buddhist aniconic art. Sthānakavāsī mendicants, such as Ācārya Vijāyānandasūri (1837-1897), who reverted to full iconicism were absorbed into the Mūrtipūjaka tradition.

In the history of the protestant Jaina traditions a development from charismatic to routinised forms of religion is noticeable. It is characterised by a progressive replacement of a radical anti-iconic – though never iconoclastic – orientation by a doctrinally ambiguous aniconic cult with focus on non-anthropomorphic ritual objects. Broadly three phases can be distinguished: (1) The dominance of anti-iconic movements between the 15th to 18th centuries; (2) the consolidation of a physical infrastructure of *upāsrayas* or *sthānakas* and isolated funerary monuments in the late 18th and 19th centuries; and (3) the full development of sectarian networks of sacred places and



Fig 1 Samādhi Sthal of Tapasvī Sudarśan Muni (1905-1997) and other “Great Gurus” in Ambālā

of an aniconic Jaina iconography, including the internet, during the revival of Jainism in the 20th and early 21st centuries. The following observations focus on the unprecedented construction of *tīrthas*, places of pilgrimage, in contemporary aniconic Jaina traditions.

Burial ad sanctos

A most remarkable development of the last hundred years, not yet recorded in the literature, is the emergence of the phenomenon of the necropolis in the aniconic Jaina traditions, which in certain respects serves as a functional equivalent of the temple city in the Mūrtipūjaka and Digambara traditions, though on a smaller scale. For aniconic Jaina traditions, which by doctrine are not permitted to worship images and to build temples, the mendicants are the only universally acceptable symbols of the Jaina ideals and the focus of religious life. It is not surprising, therefore, that in those aniconic traditions that permitted the erection of *samādhis* for renowned mendicants sacred sites with multiple funeral monuments developed. Two contemporary examples will suffice to demonstrate how the Jaina cult of the *stūpa*⁴ can become the seed of an aniconic cult of the *tīrtha*.⁵

The Mahān Gurūo Jain Samādhi Sthal next to the Mahākālī temple in Ambālā features no less than twenty-five *samādhis* for Sthānakavāsī mendicants of which at least ten are dedicated to *sādhvīs* (some are unmarked). The suspicion that most of the *samādhis* are relic *stūpas* is supported by a plaque which records that the cost of the relic vessel, *kalaśa*, and the dome, *samādhi gumbad*, was paid for by an Osvāl from Ludhiyānā in memory of the virtues, *punya smṛti*, of his deceased wife. This is also common knowledge and orally confirmed by local Jains. The *samādhis* are tightly packed together, forming a melange of different architectural styles. Four architectural types, reflecting developmental stages, can be distinguished. Twelve smaller solid or hollowed out shrines

1 In the Study of Religions the term “icon” refers to an artistic representation of a sacred being, object or event. The term “aniconic” is often used as a synonym of the words “anti-iconic” and “iconoclastic” which designate the rejection of the creation or veneration of images, and the destruction of images of a sacred being, object or event. In Art History, the word “aniconic” is used in a less loaded way as a symbol that stands for something without resembling it. Because of these ambiguities, the specific attributes of an “aniconic tradition” therefore need to be identified in each case.

2 Bakker (1991: 23, 28, 30) traced archaeological evidence for (*viṣṇu*) *padas* from the first centuries CE.

3 Flügel (2008: 221ff.). There is no evidence of Islamic influence.

4 See Flügel (2010).

5 Cf. Schopen (1994:362).

with niches for oil lamps or offerings, some of them with domed *chattrīs*, all painted in pink and red, form a stylistic ensemble. According to inscriptions, most of them were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. The two oldest and most important shrines, of Tapasvī Lālcand, a native of Ambālā, a poor shoemaker from a low caste who became a Sthānakavāsī monk under Muni Uttamcand of an unknown Sthānakavāsī lineage and died in 1843 through the religious rite of voluntary self-starvation, *santhārā*, and of “Pañjāb Kesarī” Ācārya Kāṃśīrām (1884-1945), one of the most important leaders of the Pañjāb Lavjī Ṛṣi Sampradāya, were renovated in the same modern style in which the funerary monument of Kāṃśīrām’s monastic great-grandson disciple, *prapautra*, Tapasvī Sudarśan Muni (1905-1997) was constructed. (Fig.1) These modern buildings are not solid structures but feature interior shrines with *carāṇa-pādukās*; in the case of Lālcand a two-storey marble-clad building with spaces for circumambulation of the footprint-image on the upper floor and of prints with detailed instructions on the mode of worship and its “miraculous” benefits on the ground floor. The perceived importance of the deceased is reflected in the relative size of the *stūpa*. Some older unmarked smaller shrines, painted in white, the third type, were integrated in the shrine of Kāṃśīrām with a new common roof. The three most recent relic shrines, for Tapasvī Sādhvī Svarṇa Kāmtā (1929-2001) and two of her associate nuns, are marked by small interconnected platforms, *cābutarās*, made of shiny marble and attached posters with their photos and biographical data. The combined shrine is covered with a roof made of corrugated iron.

Key to the site are the enduring belief in the miracle working power of Muni Lālcand and of his remains, and the connection with the line of the Pañjāb Lavjī Ṛṣi Sampradāya of Ācārya Kāṃśīrām and his disciples, for whom the Hariyāṇā town of Ambālā, the “Gate to the Pañjāb” with its strategically important *upāsraya*, be-

came a preferred place for performing the Jaina rite of death through self-starvation, known as *sallekhanā* or *santhārā*. Many mendicants of the Pañjāb Lavjī Ṛṣi tradition came to spend their old age in Ambālā in the auspicious presence of Lālcand in order to benefit from his “good vibrations”, as the present writer was told, that is, to derive inspirational strength for the wilful performance of a good death, *paṇḍita-* or *samādhi maraṇa*. Though cremations are now performed outside the sprawling city, the bone relics of the mendicants are buried *ad sanctos* next to Lālcand. In this way, a veritable Jaina necropolis emerged over the last century. It is a significant development in the Jaina tradition, nowhere more evident than at this site in Ambālā, that an increasing number of *sādhvīs* are honoured with funerary monuments, reflecting changing social values.

The second example is a site known as Samādhi Bhavan, located at Pacakuriyām Mārg in Lohā Maṇḍī, a small town which is now part of Āgrā. The site is owned by the local Jaina Agravāl organisation, which from the eighteenth century onwards was closely associated with the Sthānakavāsī Manohardās-Tradition, and still serves as a cremation ground for both laity and mendicants. Laity is cremated in a large dugout called *svargadhām*, heavenly paradise, that is fortified with bricks, and their remains are discarded in the Yamunā River, while mendicants are incinerated on a permanent raised platform constructed on the lawn in the small park adjacent to the main cremation ground. Their remains are entombed on site. Seventeen *samādhis* are currently identifiable, many of them unmarked. At least two are dedicated to named nuns Sādhvī Campakmālā (1904-1995) (Fig. 2) and Sādhvī Vuddhimatī (died 1997). The name of the site is derived from the 1947 renovated shrine of the principal local saint Muni Ratnacandra or Ratancand (1793-1864), a well-known scholar born in a Rājput family near Jaipur who held debates with European Jesuits and members of other religions. He belonged to the Nūṇakaraṇ line of the Manohardās Sampradāy. Since the male line of this tradition, which for a while was well integrated into the Śramaṇasaṅgha, has now died out, the necropolis is an enduring monument to its memory (even if some of the few unmarked monuments may have been built for mendicants of other Sthānakavāsī lineages). All *samādhis* feature *carāṇa-pādukās*. The recently renovated *samādhis* additionally display portrait photographs and supplementary texts and/or colourful reliefs which narrate the life story of the saints. The *samādhis*, renowned for their wish-fulfilling qualities, are venerated daily by individual members of the local Sthānakavāsī community. However, since the funerary park is distant from the main Bāzār area where many Jaina Agravāls still live, a small commemorative shrine, a glass cabinet containing a printed reproduction of a painting of Ratancand and a *rajoharaṇa* was created in the main *sthānak* of Lohā Maṇḍī. The colourfully painted assembly hall of the *sthānika* features an empty throne, *gaddī*, made of marble and an imposing Namaskāra Mantra relief as the main aniconic objects of veneration. This seat is not



Fig 2 Footprint image of Sādhvī Campakmālā (1904-1995) with Namaskāra Mantra and photo at the Samādhi Bhavan site in Lohā Maṇḍī

a personalised “relic of use”, like the surviving *gaddīs* of the Loṅkāgaccha *yati* Ācārya Kalyānacandra (1833-1887) or of famed Sthānakavāsī *ācāryas* in Gujarāt, but a generalised symbolic object, explicitly dedicated to the five Jaina *parameṣṭhis*.

Like in Ambālā, in Lohā Maṇḍī the development of the necropolis as a sacred site is historically linked to the attempt of a locally dominant monastic sub-lineage to establish durable institutional roots in a dynamic sectarian milieu. A motivating factor is the belief in the continuing powers of a deceased saint and the ensuing practice of burial *ad sanctos*. While avoiding outright idol-worship, two-dimensional iconic images and three-dimensional aniconic images are systematically used for this purpose. Most significant are the footprint-images which only mark cremation or burial sites in the aniconic traditions. They are rarely openly displayed, but housed in shrines of different shapes and sizes - sometimes older structures being wrapped in layers of later, grander structures through successive renovations. The shrines are generally worshipped individually once a day through informal rituals involving touch, bowing and silent prayers or meditation. Occasionally, worship –performed both for soteriological and for instrumental purposes or simply out of habit- involves the application of flowers, but despite many parallels, there is never an elaborate *pūjā* ritual as at the *dādābārtis* of the Kharatara Gaccha tradition studied by J. Laidlaw (1985: 60f.) and L. A. Babb (1996: 127).

The structural relationship between *sthānaka* and *samādhi sthal* in the two examples selected from the great variety of aniconic Jaina traditions resembles the relationship between *upāśraya* and *mandira* in the idol-worshipping Jaina traditions. But in contrast to the image-worshipping traditions, in the aniconic Jaina traditions the main symbolic representations of the Jaina ideals remain the living mendicants rather than anthropomorphic statues of the Jinās (photos or drawings of Jina statues are widely used by followers of the aniconic traditions but peripheral to their religious culture). A problem for the cult of the *samādhi* and of the multi-shrined necropolis is that it invokes primarily the example, values and powers of a particular deceased mendicant and of his or her lineage or monastic order, not of the Jaina tradition in general. This limits the potential for symbolic universalisation within the aniconic traditions and propels them back toward either idol-worship or imageless meditation – or both.

Pilgrimage Places

One of several new ecumenical shrines intended to serve as a common reference point for all branches of the Sthānakavāsī and Mūrtipūjaka Śvetāmbara traditions in the Pañjāb, which seems to underscore these conclusions, is the Ādiśvara Dhām that is currently under construction in the village of Kuppakalām next to the Ludhiyānā-Māler Koṭlā highway. It was inspired by the late Vimalmuni (1924-2009), a politically influential modern monk



Fig 3 Portrait statues of renowned Pañjābī Sthānakavāsī monks and of Ācārya Vijayānandasūri inside the Ādiśvara Dhām in Kuppakalām

of the Sthānakavāsī Pañjāb Lavjī Rṣi tradition, who after leaving the Sthānakavāsī Śramaṇasaṅgha received an honorary *ācārya* title from Upādhyāya Amarmuni at Virāyatan in 1990. The unique design of the religious site was agreed in 1992 with Ācārya Vijaya Nityānanda of the Mūrtipūjaka Tapā Gaccha Vallabha Samudāya II and Ācārya Dr Śivmuni of the Śramaṇasaṅgha, the leaders of the two main rival Jaina traditions in the Pañjāb, who both supported the project. The main shrine combines a traditional Ādiśvara temple in the Mūrtipūjaka style on the first floor of the tower of the main shrine, *prāsāda*, with a large Sthānakavāsī style assembly cum meditation hall (which is usually situated in a *sthānaka*). The first floor of the hall features a “*mūrti* gallery” which also holds an image of the *īrthanākara* Sīmandhara Svāmī “currently living” in Mahāvīdeha, and a plate with the Trimantra of the Akram Vijñān Mārg.

The design of the shrine is quite unusual. Though based on classical paradigms in the *Śilpaśāstras*, in this case the *Śilpa Ratnākara* by Nardā Śāṅkara, creative modifications were introduced. Vimalmuni insisted on a disproportionately large temple hall, *maṇḍapa*, which dominates the tower, *śikhara*, housing the main shrine. The allocation of the *garbhagrha* with the Ādiśvara image to the first floor further changed the symmetries of the classical paradigm. Yet, the key innovation is the construction of two additional underground levels not found in any other shrine. Located below the central *pravacana* hall is a large meditation hall oriented toward a covered aperture at the centre. A barely visible flight of stairs, locked with iron gates, leads to a second underground level, the so-called *guru mandira*. The visitor arrives first in a square antechamber, facing two rows of quasi naturalistic portrait statues of six famous Pañjābī monks of the last two centuries, four of the Sthānakavāsī Lavjī Rṣi Sampradāya, one of the Sthānakavāsī Nāthurām Jivrāj Sampradāya, and one of the ex-Sthānakavāsī Mūrtipūjaka *ācārya* Vijayānandasūri. (Fig 3) An adjacent platform features portrait statues of three renowned *sādhvīs* of the Pañjāb Lavjī Rṣi tradition, amongst them Sādhvī Svarṇa Kāmṭā. From the antechamber, a meandering passage leads to the central shrine, a medium-sized

spherical room located right underneath the central point of the meditation hall above to which it is connected with an oblique round opening in the ceiling. In a series of niches along the wall from left to right eleven portrait statues of Sthānakavāsī monks are displayed. The first of the five *ācāryas* of the Pañjāb Lavjī R̥ṣi Sampradāya are followed by the three deceased Śramaṇasaṅgha *ācāryas*, including two non-Pañjābīs, and finally three further renowned Pañjābī Sthānakavāsī monks. On the marble pedestal at the centre of the room, containing a collection box, are portrait statues of Vimalmuni's three immediate predecessors presented underneath the opening towards the meditation hall above. The two underground chambers housing this unique ensemble of statues are constructed in such a way as to amplify sounds in order to invite meditative humming in front of the statues. The sound travels through the opening in the ceiling from the bedrock of the shrine upwards to the larger meditation hall. *Pūjā* is not to be performed.

This so-called *guru mandira* was inaugurated on 18 May 2005 by Ācārya Dr Śīvmuni and Ācārya Vimalmuni. Next to the Ādiśvara Dhām are four other buildings: two administrative blocks, one vast *upāśraya* which will serve as a “retirement home” for old nuns, and a Dhyāna Sādhana Sādhū-Sādhvī Sevā Kendra, constructed on request of Ācārya Dr Śīvmuni for the practice of meditation as outlined in his books. Plans for a *samādhi* for the late Vimalmuni await approval from Ācārya Dr Śīvmuni.

Ecumenical shrines such as this were first devised by the Jaina Diaspora (which also contributes funding for the Ādiśvara Dhām). Yet, few iconographic innovations were introduced by NRIs. Already half a century ago, if not earlier, it became customary in most aniconic traditions in India to display photographs of prominent monks and nuns in *upāśrayas*, *samādhis* and in the homes of disciples for commemoration if not for worship. Often photographs of deceased saints are displayed in conjunction with a two or three-dimensional aniconic cult object, such as an empty or occupied “lion throne” or *siṃhāsana*.⁶ The ensuing controversy over the religious status of two-dimensional representations such as photographs, line drawings and reliefs still divides the aniconic Jaina traditions. Yet, three-dimensional statues such as those displayed in the subterranean vaults of the Ādiśvara Dhām presenting recently deceased monks and nuns as objects of meditative worship were previously only produced by the Mūrtipūjaka and Digambara traditions.⁷ Despite protests, in the last decade portrait statues were set up of the Sthānakavāsī Upādhyāya Amarmuni (1903-1992) at Vīrāyatan in Rājagṛha (Fig 4) and of the Terāpanth Ācārya Tulsī (1914-1997) in Bikaner (in a hospital) and in a commemorative shrine at New Delhi. The three portrait statues of Sthānakavāsī nuns in Kuppakalām may be the first stone images of female mendicants in the aniconic tradi-



Fig 4 Portrait statue of Upādhyāya Amarmuni (1903-1992) at Vīrāyatan in Rājagṛha

tions. Physical worship is prevented in all cases across sects by either encasing the images with glass covers or making access as unattractive as possible. In reply to the question of the legitimacy of worshipping photographs, *citra*, and other physical representations of Sthānakavāsī mendicants, Jñānmuni (1958/1985 II: 366f.), a leading intellectual of the Śramaṇasaṅgha, in his book *Hamāre Samādhān*, Our Solution, stated the following view. From the historical perspective, *aitihāsik dṛṣṭi*, such images are of great benefit, *bare lābh*. But venerating, *vandana*, and worshipping, *pūjā*, is not right. If this is not done and pictures are used only for spreading information then even from a scriptural point of view, *saiddhāntik dṛṣṭi*, there is no fault: “The Sthānakavāsī tradition is not opposed to images but to image-worship” (*sthānakavāsī paramparā kā virodh mūrti se nahīm hai balki mūrtipūjā se hai*) (ib., p. 367).

Conclusion

Originally, all Lonkā, Sthānakavāsī and Terāpanth Śvetāmbara traditions explicitly rejected image worship, and many still do. The Jñānagaccha or the Kacch Āṭh Koṭi Nānā Pakṣa and other Sthānakavāsī traditions in Rājasthān and Gujarāt, though reliant on a network of *sthānakas*, remain orthodox in their rejection of all “lifeless” material representations, including all print publications. I have therefore used the term “idol-worship” advisedly as contextually a more appropriate, albeit old fashioned, translation of *mūrtipūjā*, given that many originally anti-iconic traditions came to accept and worship certain aniconic images, such as relic shrines, empty thrones or stylised footprints, that is, real or simulated relics of contact, and hence have become, to varying degrees, “image-worshipping” traditions in their need and desire to establish networks of abodes and of sacred sites, whether labelled *tīrtha*, *dhām* or *aitihāsik sthal*, as durable institutional foundations. This is often done in the

⁶ The *chatrī* of the indoor “Ānanda Siṃhāsana” shelters a four-sided pillar featuring a portrait photo and inscriptions of the Namaskāra Mantra, etc., in memory of Ācārya Ānandṛṣi's *cāturmāsa* in Māler Koṭlā of 1968. On conventional Jaina *siṃhāsana* iconography, see Hegewald (2010: 11ff.).

⁷ For examples of *guru mandiras*, see Hegewald (2009: 82-7).



Fig 5 *Tīrtha kalaśa* in front of a painting of Ācārya Ātmārāma (1882-1962) in the Ātma Smṛti Kakṣa, Jain Dharmasālā, in Ludhiyānā

name of material security in particular for nuns and old mendicants, the stalwarts of the Śvetāmbara Jaina tradition. Without an institutional base supported by devout laity, even the potential alternative to image worship of an aniconic cult of the holy book is difficult to realise. When in 1930, the strategically placed first book publication featuring images of Mahāvīra and Bāhubalī wearing Sthānakavāsī *mukhavastrikās* appeared (“Picture for Information, Not for Veneration”),⁸ the resolution for the creation of a nationwide institutional framework for all Sthānakavāsī mendicants taken at the Ajmer Sammelan was only two years away. In one respect the cult of the sacred text is the most significant innovation in the repertoire of aniconic Jaina iconography. In all shrines of the aniconic traditions physical representations of the Namaskāra Mantra are centrally displayed, carved in marble, cast in bronze, painted or printed, on the wall or on a stele. Increasingly popular is the use of the so-called *tīrtha kalaśa*, which elsewhere is known as *maṅgala kalaśa*, or auspicious pot. (Fig 5) It is a silver vessel inscribed with the Namaskāra Mantra and sealed with an auspicious silver coconut, representing the fruits of Jaina practice both in the other world and in this world. It is portable, like the Jina statues used for processions, and can be utilised as a tangible cult object in variable contexts. Only in combination with the “Navkār Mantra” relic shrines, footprint images or photographs of individual Jaina saints can gain universal appeal and become potential *tīrthas* or crossing points over the ocean of suffering.

⁸ Śaṅkar Muni (1930).

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