

A ROYAL SEAT



KANTI V. MARDIA ANALYSES THE STATUARY ART OF THE MOST SACRED OF JAIN IMAGES, A TIRTHANKARA

Jains have enriched Indian art and have been patrons of craftsmen and artists to an extent which is so great and varied that even Jains are not aware. There are infinitely many masterpieces of *Tirthankara* statues and further innumerable images are installed at extraordinary costs and 'speed' in honour of the *Tirthankaras*. We give here the standard example of a *murti*, a statue of a *Tirthankara*. We describe the symbols and various icons on its surrounding sculpture (*Parikara*), which play a central role in temples. It seems that originally, the introduction of *Parikara* has been based on the conception of the supernatural qualities (*atisayas*) of the *Tirthankaras* through the paraphernalia having various attendants, including demi-Gods. This complex also incorporates a theme of protecting the '*Sangha*' - the Jain followers! It has evolved in this form from the 6th century AD. The *murti* of a *Tirthankara* is used to aid the visualisation of an enlightened being so that one can awaken one's own divine qualities. The final goal of such worship is the supreme self-conquest leading to the blissful state. Our description is of the *Murti* of Rsabhadev, the 1st *Tirthankara*.

It is fairly certain that by the time of Samprati, the grandson of Ashoka, the Jain image, as a cult object, had already been introduced in Jain worship. However, the origin of a number of symbols is not clear, neither their dates. On the *murti* shown here, we have the following generic symbols: an auspicious symbol on the chest (*Srivatsa*, a sign of divinity), the conical crown head (*Shika*, the wisdom lump), a mark at the third Eye (*Tika*, a sign of a superhuman). Below the *murti* is the identification mark (*lanchhan*) of the particular *Tirthankara*, which in the case of Rsabhadev is a bull. The lowest layer consists of the nine planets in the following order, from left to right:

On the left: MOON, SUN, MARS, MERCURY, JUPITER,

On the right: VENUS, SATURN, RAHU, KETU.

In the middle of the planets is another structure consisting of the wheel (*Dharma Chakra*), which has a deer on its either side. The wheel has 24 spokes - one for each of the 24 *Tirthankaras*. The deers are taken as the symbols of peace. This wheel complex is placed sometimes at the top layer of the *Parikara*.

For Rsabhadev (see the Figure), the following icons are sculptured from left to right on the second layer; N.B. some icons are again generic but others are specific to Rsabhadev which we will mark by**.

Demi-God (a Yaksa, Sasshan Devi: Gomukha**), Lion, Elephant, Guardian Spirit (goddess, Prasad Devi), followed by again an Elephant, Lion, another Demi-God (Yaksani Sasshan Devi: Cakresvari**).

The third layer has the emblem (*lanchhan*) of the *Tirthankara* in the centre, the Bull ** here. For example, for Mahavir (24th *Tirthankara*), the *lanchhan* is a Lion. In Mahavir's case, the Yaksa and the Yaksani are Matang and Siddhaika respectively.

The main *murti*, (1) in the Figure, is in the *Padmasana* posture (a sitting posture for meditation). We now describe the symbols on the left and the right of the *murti*. On the right is another image of the *Tirthankara*, (2) in the Figure, but in the *Kayotsarga* posture (a standing posture for meditation), followed by a fly-whisk bearer (*ChamarDeva*). Just above this Attendant Deva, (A) in the Figure, is an Elephant which has a Lion above it. The left side is the mirror image of this arrangement.

Near the head of the Idol, we have on either side another Attendant with a garland (*maladev*) and a *Tirthankara* in

Padmasana posture; thus leading to five *Tirthankaras* in all and it is therefore named as *Panch-Parikara*. On either side is the face of a crocodile having on its top a Devi, namely (B)/(C) in the Figure, which could be dancing Gandharva or Lakshmi and Sarswati Devi in a standing pose, one on either side.

Right at the top section of the *Parikara* - just above the head of the main statue is a canopy. Above the centre of the canopy is a pitcher (*kalash*), around which seated is a Deva (Bhartendras: conch-blower) with a conch through which he is making divine sound (*divya dhawani*). He is part of this whole surround in the form of a triple arch/triple umbrella. Next to this central Deva are another Deva and Devi with a drum in one hand and a drum beater in the other. It depicts celestial drum beating (*sura-dundhubi*). On one side is an Elephant holding a pitcher (*kalash*) in its trunk, and on which are seated Hari Naigmeshi Deva (with another Deva) who perhaps is announcing the *Tirthankara's* birth (leading to the Janam Kalayank complex).

Above this arch, there is a circular row of swans followed by another arch of the leaves of Ashoka's tree. There is a circular row of lotus petals above it. On the topmost is a *kalash* with parrots on either side, which signifies the acknowledgement by the Devas of the Jina. The appearance of various animals and plants reinforces the point that the lower forms of life (*triyanch*) can also benefit from a *Tirthankara*. All in all, a *Parikara* contains an immense amount of information with mathematical precision and artistic beauty!

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PANCH-TIRTH PARIKARA

Murti of Rsabhadev, 1st Tirthankara

