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Depiction of Yaksha and Yakshi's in Jainism

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Jainism, one of the oldest living faiths of India, has a hoary antiquity in Karnataka. No doubt, this religion took its birth in North India. However, within a couple of centuries of its birth, this religion is said to have entered into Karnataka. Jaina tradition ascribes III C.B.C. as the date of entry of this religion to south India, and in particular to Karnataka. After this period Jainism grew from strength to strength and heralded a glorious era, never to be witnessed in any part of India, to become a religion next only to Brahmanism in popularity and number. Though Jainism was spread over different parts of south India within the first few centuries of the Christian era, its nucleus as well as the stronghold was southern Karnataka. In fact, it is the general opinion that the history of Jainism in south India is predominantly the history of that religion in Karnataka. Such was the prominence that this religion enjoyed throughout the first millennium A.D.

Liberal royal patronage extended by the Kadambas, the Gangas, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Rashtrakutas, the Nolambas, the Kalyana Chalukyas, the Hoysalas, the Vijayanagar rulers and their successors, resulted in the uninterrupted growth of this religion in southern Karnataka. The growth, spread and popularity of Jainism in Karnataka is best illustrated by the beautiful monuments that the Jains constructed in different parts of the State. In the general pattern of architectural and art forms, they, nevertheless, adopted or followed, the contemporary Brahmanical architectural style prevailing in Karnataka. That is to say during the early period their architecture was similar to the Dravidian temple forms as practiced by the Gangas, Chalukyas, Pallavas etc. During the Hoysala period, they conveniently followed the traditional Hoysala as well as Dravida styles. Again during the Vijayanagar and later periods they built basadis in the same popular Dravidian style.

Jaina art does not differ from Hindu and Buddhist art in matters of form. The same aesthetic norms, theories of proportion, and formal concepts are basic to the art of all three religions. In general the history of Jaina art can be divided into three phases. (Pal, 1994) ^[1] The Early phase from second century B.C.E to third Century C.E, the second phase stretching roughly from about the fourth until the eighth century and the final phase from around 1000 until 1300 may be regarded as the golden age of Indian temple Architecture.

Jaina Subsidiary Deities

After the Sixth century many other deities began to be represented. The Jinas were now attended by guardian deities. The most important new development was the acceptance of female divinities, both as companions to the Jinas and as independent deities of wellbeing. This was a very important concession to the growing and influential lay community, for which the concept of wellbeing became a basic ingredient of the religious life. (Pal, 1994) ^[1]

While the *Jinas* retain their primacy in Jain devotion, there are many other subservient figures, including guardian spirits, celestial beings, and divinities, known as *Sasanadevata*, or tutelary deities, systematized in several classes such as *Yakshas* and *Yakshis*, *vyantaradevata* (peripatetic gods), *vidyadevi*, etc. The term *Yaksha* was once used synonymously with *deva* or *devata* to mean a god but later acquired the connotation of a demigod.

In Jainism the original meaning appears to have been maintained, for most *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* are regarded as divine beings. They generally serve the Jinas as guardian angels and are frequently present in images. Impressive depictions from Karnataka of Dharanendra and Padmavati, the *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* of Parsvanatha indicate their status in that region. Though in Jaina literature *Yaksha* cult seem very ancient, *Yaksha* images do not appear in art much earlier than fifth century. The earlier scriptures like the *Sthanangasutra*,

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Uttaradhyayan-sutra, *Bhagawati-sutra*, *Tattvartha-sutra*, *Antagadadasao-sutra*, and *Pauma -chariya* have frequent references to *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis*. In the *Pratisthakalpa*, finally the establishment of the character and the function of *Sasanadevatas* is achieved, when it says: *Ya pati sasanam jainam sadyah pratyuhanasinisa.....bhuyat sasanadevata-* (Bhattacharya, 2007) [3]

Many Jains pay their respect to these *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis* for having them provided protection to Tirthankars and to the existence of Jainism. These are the reasons, they are found around the images of Jinas as well as their individual images in many Jain temples. *Yaksha* usually found on the right side of the Jina idol while *Yakshini* on the left side. In Jain temples, they are never situated in superior physical locations in relation to images of the Jinas. These are benevolent *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis*. There are also malevolent *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis* who caused sufferings to Tirthankars and troubles to Jains and existence of Jainism. For example, *Yaksha* Sulpani troubled Lord Mahavir in his mediation and inflicted much suffering and there are similar stories in which malevolent *Yakshas* troubled others as well. The Jains do not pay their respects or worship *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis* for the material gains, favor and freedom from fear, illness and disease. They pay their respect to them for their service to Tirthankars and Jainism.

Iconography

The iconographic details for each of the well-known sasanadevatas numbering twenty-four male forms, attached to the twenty-four Jinas (Tirthankaras) and the twenty-four female forms, considering generally as consorts of one or the other male sasanadevatas, may be stated that many of the *sasanadevatas*, male or female, are known by the name of Brahmanical and Buddhist deities, though most often the details of the iconography differ from these in those faiths. By the time, further, these *sasanadevatas* were iconographically recognized in texts and came to be represented in icons, the bifurcation between the two sects, *Svetambara* and *Digambara* had taken place, with the result that the iconographic details for those that belong to one sect were different from those that were accepted in the other. In fixing the iconography of these *Sasanadevatas*, the *pratistha* texts that had appeared in the meantime were of considerable help to the artists in giving shape to the concepts. These *Pratistha* or *Installation* texts also got divided into *Svetambara* and *Digambara*, affiliating themselves to the one or the other of these texts. While thus the *Digambara* texts include *pratisthasangraha*, *pratisthasarasangraha*, *pratisthasaroddhara*, *Mandira-pratistha-vidhana*, and a few others, the *Svetambaras* depend on the compilations like *pravacanasaroddhara*, *pratisthatilaka*, *Nirvanakalika*, *Acaradinakara*, and others. Both also take into account several *caritra-granthas* and *Pujavidhis*. (Bhattacharya, 2007) [3]

However, both *Digambara* and *Svetambara* texts prescribe the same general features of *sasanadevata*, as to the change in the character of a *Yaksha* when absorbed from the Hindu or Brahmanic fold to the Jaina, a pertinent example is that of *Tumbara*, who in Hindu literature is a divine musician, a *Gandharva*, endowed with a musical instrument, as a *Yaksha* attached to Jina Sumathinatha carries deadly weapons. (Bhattacharya, 2007) [3]

Another interesting point in so far as iconographic details of *Yaksha-yakshinis* are concerned is that in some cases texts in the same sect, e.g., *Digambara*, such as *pratisthasaroddhara*

and *pratisthasarasangraha*, give different number of the hands for the same *Yaksha*, such as, Matanga or Varanandi. The first text gives him four arms carrying a staff, a spear, Swastika and a flag (Ketu), while the second endows him only with two hands. By about the 8th -9th century under the indirect influence of esoterism that was flourishing in Buddhism and elsewhere, Jainism felt inclined in figuring separate entities of *Sasanadevatas*, shaking off their attachment to Jina figures through miniature representations at the sides or on the pedestals found equal favor with the artists throughout, both in the North and in the South.

The gods and Goddesses borrowed from the Brahmana pantheon may be put into three groups. The first group consists of the *Yaksha-Yakshi* pairs made up of minor divinities who are not known to have been related with each other before their adoption in Jainism. The second group comprises the pairs who are related with each other, such as Isvara and Gauri, the *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* of Sreyamsanatha, who are none else but Siva and his sakti. The third group includes *Yaksha-Yakshi* pairs, such as Gomukha and Cakresvari, respectively the *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* of Rsabhanatha who represent two different well known sects. Gomukha and Cakresvari are Siva and Vaishnavi, the two principal deities of Saiva and Vaishnava sects. (Tiwari, 1983) [6] There are legends associating them with their defied teachers. An elaborate description of colour, form, attributes, vehicles, etc. distinguish the *Yakshas* and the *Yakshis*.

The earliest *Yaksha Yakshi* pair carved in Jaina sculpture was Sarvanubhuti and Ambika. Next comes the figure of Dharanendra and Padmavati, the *Yaksha Yakshi* pair of Parsvanath the Jaina pantheon slowly developed around the twenty four Tirthankaras who constitute the principal objects of worship. (Sivaramamurti, 1983) [7]

Yaksha Couple: Dharanendra Padmavati



Karnataka; 12th century Stone; 297/8 in. (76 cm)
Courtesy: Prince of Wales museum of Western India, Bombay

This pair was evidently intended to accompany an image of Parsvanatha, the two images reflect the work of the same sculptor in their modeling, ornamentation, and iconographic features. It is a fine example of the ornate sculptural style that prevailed in the time. The four armed Padmavati is holding a beautifully carved lotus in her lower right hand and a goad in her upper right. In her upper left she holds a noose, while the broken lower left hand, judging by the gesture of her companion, must be in *Varada mudra*. This fits well with the description mentioned in the *Trishashtisalapurushacharita*, the Jain canonical text by Hemachandra. Her high and elegant crown is topped by a single serpent hood. In the larger group she would have occupied a place to the left of the Jina, hence to maintain a visual balance, her left leg is pendant. The details of her sari

and waistband have not been carved, and even her bracelets and other ornaments have remained incomplete. Padmavati may originally have been a snake goddess like the Hindu goddess Manasa. Apart from her serpent attributes, her most distinctive cognizance is a curious creature combining the forms of a serpent and a rooster. (Pal, 1994) [1]

The *Yaksha* Dharanendra has almost identical attributes, even though these do not conform to his iconography. He normally would have been shown holding a serpent, but he does not have a hood of three snakes. The sculptures have several similar features. In both, the details of the noose and the lotus are exceptionally fine, and even the flow of the garland is gracefully maintained. Both aureoles are architecturally, consisting of moulded stambha, or pillars, on either side of the images, over each of which is a *torana*. These are decorated with six floral-scroll roundels, and at each apex is a beautifully carved *Kirtimukha*. (Pal, 1994) [1]

Yakshi



Karnataka (?); 9th century Copper alloy; 9in (22.9cm)

On loan from the royal Ontario museum, Ruben wells Leonard Bequest. This beautifully proportioned figure stands on a lotus base; she holds a lotus rhizome with her right hand and the stem of the lotus bud with her left. These attributes are not sufficient to identify her precisely, but almost certainly she was the attendant *Yakshi* of a Jina. The depiction of the lotus rhizome and the relatively articulate modeling of the back are unusual and noteworthy figures. (Tiwari, 1983) [6]

Jina Parsvanatha



Karnataka; 11th –early 12th centuries Schist; 38 3/16 in. (97cm)
Courtesy: British Museum.

The seated figure of Parsvanatha is represented in deep meditation, undisturbed by the storms which have unleashed against his quietude. He is sheltered by the seven hooded servant king Dharanendra, who is also represented in anthropomorphic form seated adjacent to the Jina with his *Yakshi* Padmavati, on the opposite side. Their respective vehicles, elephant and rooster, are beneath them. Parsvanatha is honored with the triple tiered umbrella rising above his head. At the apex of the stele is a *kirtimukha* mask, a

pervasive motif in the art of Southern India. From the mouth of this monster issues a wondrous flowering wine that binds the composition together. (Pal, 1994) [1]

Conclusion

While the Jinas are the highest venerated members of the Jain pantheon, there are many other deities and subsidiary divinities portrayed in Jain art. These include gods and goddesses, guardian spirits and celestial beings who, it is assumed, came to be worshipped as a result of exchanges of ideas with Hinduism and Buddhism. All India's early religions shared a common ancestry in the nature cults of the ancient Vedic period.

Although many of the secondary members of the Jain pantheon are shared with the Hindus and Buddhists, Jain artistic representations generally emphasise only their benign forms, due to the principle of nonviolence. For Jaina art and iconography tranquility (*santarasa*) is the prevailing sentiment, in keeping with the jaina insistence on nonviolence (*ahimsa*) which can also be seen in the *Yaksha* and *Yakshis*.

The spread of Jainism in South has contributed in great measure great monuments that speak eloquently of the aesthetic taste of the patrons and the architects who constructed the deities in all their glory of divine form. In the realm of art, the *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* have occupied an important status through ages, highly influenced by the Jaina religious conceptions and their images have been found throughout India.

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