

A Comparative Analysis of Symbols and Motifs in Jain and Buddhist Religion

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Introduction

In a literary work, a motif can be seen as an image, sound, action or other figures that have a symbolic significance and contributes toward the development of theme. Motif and theme are linked in a literary work but there is a difference between them. In a literary piece, a motif is a recurrent image, idea or symbol that develops or explains a theme while a theme is a central idea or message.

In India, the aim of art was never to imitate nature or to recreate reality through illusionistic devices; rather, the goal was to produce an idealized form. Sculptors did not model their images on living beings: whether the subject was a god or a mortal, the artist strove to convey a stylized ideal.

Jainism and Buddhism

The view that both these religions arose at about the same time as expressed by Mrs. Stevenson does not hold the field since even dissented from her. He says: "Within the last century a small band of scholars, pre eminent amongst them are the Professor Horvath, Professor Buhler, Professor Jacobi, and Dr. Hornell, have affected a great advance in our knowledge of Jainism. For long it had been thought that Jainism was but a sub-sect of Buddhism, but, largely as a consequence of the researchers of orientalis just mentioned, that opinion has been finally relinquished, and Jainism is now admitted to be one of the most ancient monastic organisations of India. So, far from being merely a modern variation of Buddhism, Jainism is older of the two heresies, and it is most certain that Mahavira, though a contemporary of Buddha, predeceased him by some fifty years".¹

Besides, there are differences between the two religions in their metaphysical and philosophical concepts. The animistic ideas of the Jainas are more ancient. While Buddhism regards all things as transitory. Jainism regards *Jiva* and *Ajiva* as eternal substances. According to Buddhism, there is no continuity of individuality from life to life. The universe is transient and soulless. The soul is not immortal. During transmigration from one life to another, only a new life arises as part of the chain of events.

Shri Jyoti Prasad Jain has mentioned a number of references which show that Jainism is older than Buddhism.² On a careful consideration of the discoveries made by modern research scholars, it can be concluded with reasonable certainty that Jainism is an original religion which goes back to the primitive currents of Pre-Aryan period of currents religious and metaphysical speculation.







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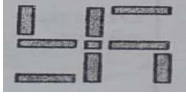












Jain Symbols

Like all religions, the Jain faith has holy symbols that remind believers of certain principles and traditions and help create a sense of identity based on shared beliefs and practices. Some symbols are also considered auspicious, bringing good fortune and warding off bad luck. Many of these are characteristics of wider Indian culture and are therefore also found in other religions that originated in India, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Each of the 24 *Jinas* has a particular emblem, used as a badge of identity along with a colour.³



Digambara footprint icon of Bhattaraka, Bhattarakji Nasiyani, Jaipur, nineteenth century. Photo: John E. Cort (2008).

S NO	Name	Father & Mother	Place of Birth	Emblem	
1	Rishabha/Aadinatha	Nabhi raja – Marudevi	Ayodhya	Bull	
2	Ajitnatha	Jitasatru Vijaya	Ayodhya	Elephant	
3	Sambhava Natha	Jitari Sena	Sravasti	Horse	
4	Abhinandan natha	Samvara Siddhartha	Ayodhya	Monkey	
5	Sumatinatha	Meghaprabha Sumangala (Mangala)	Ayodhya	Curlew-kraunca	
6	Padamaprabhu	Dharana (Sridhara) Susima	Kausambi	Red lotus	

7	Suparshva	Supratistha (Pratistha) Prithivi	Kasi	Swastika	
8	Chandrabha	Mahasena Lakshmana	Chandra puri	Crescent	
9	Pushpdant	Sugriva (Supriya) Rama	Kakandi	Crocodile	
10	Sheetalnatha	Drdha ratha Sunanda (Nanda)	Bhadrika puri (Bhadrilla)	Wishing tree	
11	Sreyansh nath	Visnu Visnudri (Visna)	Simha puri	Rhinocero s	
12	vashupujya	Vasupujya Vijay (Jaya)	Champa puri	Buffalo	
13	Vimalnatha	Krta varman Suramya (Syama)	Kampitya	Boar	
14	Ananatnatha	Simha sena Sarvayasa	Ayodhya	Bear	
15	Dharmanatha	Bhanu suvrata	Ratan puri	Spike	
16	Santinatha	Visvasena Acira	Hastina pura	Deer	
17	Kunthunatha	Surya (Sura) Sridevi	Hastina pura	He goat	
18	Aranatha	Sudarsana – Mitra (Devi)	Hastina pura	Fish	
19	Mallinatha	Kumbha Raksita (Prabha vati)	Mithita puri (Mathura)	Water pot	

20	Minisuvarta	Sumitra Padmavati	Kusagranagara or rajagaha	Tortoise	
21	Naminath	Vijaya Vapra (Vipra)	Mithila puri (Mathura)	Blue lotus	
22	Niminatha	Samudra Vijaya Sivadevi	Sauripura or Dvaraka	Conch	
23	Parsvanatha	Asvasena Vama	kasi	Serpent	
24	Mahavira	Siddhartha Priya Karini (Trisala)	Kundal pura	Lion	

Other traditional Jain sacred symbols include the *svastika* and the *siddhacakra* or *navapada*. Some of these are grouped together as the eight auspicious symbols – *asta-mangala*. More recent symbols of Jainism are the Jain flag and the contemporary Jain emblem.

Not all holy symbols are visual or material. Mantras are holy syllables, words, or phrases that are repeated many times, either aloud or silently. Used to focus concentration on meditation, these religious formulas are considered holy and possessed of great spiritual power. This is why mantras are found so often written, painted, carved, embroidered and so on.

Eight auspicious symbols

The *acma-mangala* or ‘eight auspicious symbols’ is a collection of the most auspicious and most commonly used holy symbols in Jainism. The Digambaras and Úvetâambaras have different lists but share the overall themes. These relate primarily either to royalty and status or to wealth, abundance or fertility.

Some symbols, such as the canopy or fly-whisk, are shorthand for royalty or high status in Indian art in general. These underline that the Jina or other holy figure is a spiritual prince, as worthy of honour as a worldly prince.



Śvetāmbara list	Digambara list
svastika	gilded vase – bhrngara
śrīvatsa	fly-whisk – cāmara
nandyāvarta	banner – dhvaja
powder box or flask – vardhamānaka	fan – vyājana
throne – bhadrāsana	umbrella or canopy – chatra
full water-jug – kalaśa	seat of honour – supratistha
pair of fish – matsyayugma	full water-jug – kalaśa
mirror – darpana	mirror – darpana

Symbols of affluence and fertility, such as the full jug or pitcher, represent the notion of growth and development. These ideas are important in Jainism because Jains must travel their paths of spiritual progress alone, each one responsible only for his or her own soul. By moving through the cycle of rebirth over hundreds and thousands of lifetimes, a soul grows gradually purer, uncluttered by karma, and can eventually attain final emancipation.

Some of the eight auspicious symbols are also the badges of a few of the Jinas. As symbols first found in Indian civilisations going back thousands of years, these ancient icons have been widespread throughout wider Indian culture for a very long time. These symbols are thus significant in their own right and are found throughout Jain art and manuscripts as well as in temples, mendicant lodgings and so on.

The svastika or swastika is a cross with each of its four arms bent at a right angle and turned in a clockwise direction. Derived from a Sanskrit word meaning ‘well-being’ – svasti – the word itself connotes ‘good’ and ‘beneficial’. Considered highly lucky, the svastika sign has two main interpretations in Jainism. In the first, the svastika’s four arms correspond to the four possible states of existence – gati – in the world of rebirth. In the second, the arms represent the fourfold Jain community – caturvidha-sangha. The table provides details of these two readings.

Jain interpretations of Swastika

Four gatis	Fourfold community
Heavenly being	monks
Infernal being	nuns
Animal	laymen
Human being	women

The śrīvatsa is a diamond-shaped mark on the chest of the Jinas. It is often visible on sculptures or pictures of the Jinas.

Siddhacakra or Navapada

The siddhacakra or navapada is the most popular yantra in Jainism. The Sanskrit word siddhacakra means 'circle of perfection' and is the Úvetâmbara term. The sect of the Digambaras calls the same symbol navapada. As its name suggests, the siddhacakra has nine parts and looks like a flower with eight petals. The nine components represent the Five Entities and the Three Jewels of:

(i) Right faith, (ii) Right knowledge, (iii) Right conduct



The last element symbolises a characteristic that is often dubbed the fourth jewel – 'right austerity'. Devout Jains must follow the examples of the Five Holy Entities and strive to practise the last four qualities. Thus all nine elements are vital for attaining liberation.

It is closely associated with the Namaskâra-mantra, which pays homage to the Five Entities. A Prakrit formula, it can be recited at any time.

The siddhacakra is found in many temples and is an important part of many rituals. It plays a central role in rites performed during the festival of Âyambil and the associated fast.

Jain flag



The Jain flag has five horizontal bands of different colours. From top to bottom, the colours are red, yellow, white, green and dark blue, or black.

In the centre, on the white band, is a svastika, with three dots above it and a crescent at the top. The dot above the crescent represents a liberated soul. These are all in orange.

The colours used in the flag are significant. The coloured bands are the emblematic hues of the 24 Jinas and can also represent the Five Holy Entities, who are very honoured in Jainism. The colour orange is associated with one of the Five Holy Entities, namely the âcârya or head monk. Shades of orange and saffron have been linked with religion in India for millennia and orange robes are often worn in religious ceremonies by Hindus and Buddhists as well as Jains.

The origin of the flag is difficult to pin down but it has become fairly widespread since the late 20th century. It is frequently seen flying from the top of temples and is commonly paraded in the

processions that are elements of Jain festivals. It could have an ancestor in the banner – dhavja – which is one of the auspicious dreams and, as such, is holy. The banner and other dreams are listed in the Úvetâmbara scripture called the Kalpa-sûtra, which is generally considered to date back to at least the 5th century CE.

Jain symbol



The Jain symbol is in the shape of the cosmic man. Inside the outline of the cosmic man is a background comprised of the five colours of the Jain flag, though the colours are not always used. Inside the shape are a svastika topped with three dots, a crescent and another dot. Below the svastika is an open hand, on the palm of which is a mantra in a wheel. The mantra is the word ahiCsâ – non-violence.

The open hand reminds believers to always stop and think before acting, specifically to obey the cardinal principle of the Jain faith – ahiCsâ. The wheel represents the cycle of rebirth, through which the soul is fated to pass until it is liberated when it reaches the highest level of spiritual purity. Someone who does harm and does not follow the principles of Jainism remains trapped in the cycle of rebirth. The 24 spokes of the wheel symbolise the teachings of the 24 Jinas, which can help believers make spiritual progress towards enlightenment and then emancipation.

At the bottom is a verse from the Tattvartha-sûtra scripture, which is often translated as ‘Souls give service to one another’.

The 2500th anniversary of the liberation of the last Jina, Mahâvîra, was celebrated in 1975. On this date the worldwide Jain community selected this emblem to represent their faith, since it incorporates several important religious symbols. Since then the symbol has enjoyed widespread currency, used both to represent the Jains to outsiders and within the Jain community. It is used in magazines, websites and community publications as well as during festivals and other community events.

Buddhist Symbols



Many Buddhist symbols need to be considered within the culture of the people who follow it. Therefore, many of the early symbols relate to ancient India and can be found in Hinduism as well, although possibly with a somewhat different meaning.⁴

The historical Buddha lived around the sixth century BCE, but no Buddhist artefacts are known from before the third century BCE. In the scriptures, it is mentioned that the Buddha did occasionally use images like the 'Wheel of Life' to illustrate the teachings. The first archaeological evidence, mainly of ornamental stone carvings, comes from the time of the Emperor Asoka (273 - 232 BCE), who converted to Buddhism and made it a popular religion in India and beyond.

In the second century BCE, people started to excavate Buddhist monasteries in rock, creating a large amount of artwork to withstand the ages. Probably the earliest typical Buddhist monument is the stupa, which was often specially decorated. The first actual Buddha images appeared around the first century BCE, so until then the artwork was largely symbolic in nature.

With the appearance of Buddhist Tantra around the 6th century, a wealth of new artwork and symbolism appeared, as imagination and visualization form a major technique in meditation practices. From this moment on, a pantheon of deities and protectors appeared, together with a vast collection of symbolic items, such as the vajra and bell, mandalas etc. This tradition was mainly preserved in so-called 'Tibetan Buddhism', and partially in the Japanese Shingon tradition.

Symbols for the Buddha

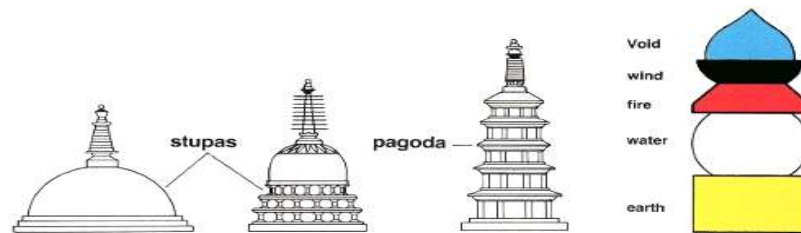


It is said that the Buddha was reluctant to accept images of himself, as he did not like to be venerated as a person. To symbolise the Buddha in the very early art, one used mainly the Eight Spoked Wheel and the Bodhi Tree, but also the Buddha's Footprints, an Empty Throne, a Begging Bowl and a Lion are used to represent him.

The Eight-Spoked Dharma Wheel or 'Dharmachakra' (Sanskrit) symbolises the Buddha's turning the Wheel of Truth or Law (dharma = truth/law, chakra = wheel). The wheel (on the left and right) refers to the story that shortly after the Buddha achieved enlightenment, Brahma came down from heaven and requested the Buddha to teach by offering him a Dharmachakra. The Buddha is known as the Wheel-Turner: He who sets a new cycle of teachings in motion and in consequence changes the course of destiny. The Dharmachakra has eight spokes, symbolising the Eight-fold Noble Path. The 3 swirling segments in centre represent the Buddha, Dharma (the teachings) and Sangha (the spiritual community). The wheel can also be divided into three parts, each representing an aspect of Buddhist practice~ the hub (discipline), the spokes (wisdom), and the rim (concentration). The Bodhi

Tree refers to the tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment. Footprints of the Buddha traditionally symbolize the physical presence of the enlightened one. Begging bowl refers to the story that shortly before the Buddha reached enlightenment, a young woman named Sujata offered him a bowl of milk rice. At that moment, he was practicing austerity by eating extremely little. Finding the middle way between extreme austerity and complete attachment to life is an important principle of Buddhism.

Stupas



The perfect proportions of the Buddha's body correspond to the design of religious monuments. Its architecture developed from the pre-Buddhist Indian grave mound. Under these mounds the saintly ascetic were buried~ their bodies were seated on the ground and covered with earth. These dome-shaped graves, or tumuli, of the saints were regarded as holy places. And were destinations for pilgrimage for the devotional and places of practice for meditators.

The Analogy with the Symbolism of the Stupa

The Seed of Highest Enlightenment, also depicted as a Tongue of Flame (Bindu) to be realized above the double symbol crowning Chorten. The double symbol (Surya Chandra) of Sun and Rising Moon is an emblem of the Twin-unity of the Absolute Truth (of the sphere beyond normal comprehension) and the Relative Truth (of the worldly sphere). The stylized Parasol (Chattra) symbolically giving protection from all evil. The thirteen Steps of Enlightenment, i.e. the first ten Steps of Enlightenment (Dasha-Bhumi) and the three higher levels of supra consciousness (Avenika-smrityupashthana). The dome, corresponding to the primeval mound, as Receptacle of Relics or offerings (Dhatu-Garbha)~ the dome line edifices of Old Indian Stupas were also called egg or water-bubble (Budbuda). The base (Parishada) is square and four stepped, its sides facing the four directions.

The Eight Auspicious Symbols



This set of symbols is very popular in Tibet, but is also known in Sanskrit as ‘Ashtamangala’, ashta means eight and mangala means auspicious.

The Umbrella or parasol (chhatra) embodies notions of wealth or royalty, for one had to be rich enough to possess such an item, and further, to have someone carry it. It points to the “royal ease” and power experienced in the Buddhist life of detachment. It also symbolises the wholesome activities to keep beings from harm (sun) like illness, harmful forces, obstacles and so forth, and the enjoyment of the results under its cool shade.

The Golden Fish (matsya) were originally symbolic of the rivers Ganges and Yamuna, but came to represent good fortune in general, for Hindus, Jain and Buddhists. Within Buddhism it also symbolises that living beings who practice the dharma need have no fear to drown in the ocean of suffering, and can freely migrate (chose their rebirth) like fish in the water.

The Treasure Vase (bumpa) is a sign of the inexhaustible riches available in the Buddhist teachings, but also symbolises long life, wealth, prosperity and all the benefits of this world. (There is even a practice which involves burying or storing treasure vases at certain locations to generate wealth, eg. for monasteries or dharma centers.)

The Lotus (padma) is a very important symbol in India and of Buddhism. In brief, it refers to the complete purification of body, speech and mind, and the blossoming of wholesome deeds in liberation. The lotus refers to many aspects of the path, as it grows from the mud (samsara), up through muddy water it appears clean on the surface (purification), and finally produces a beautiful flower (enlightenment). The white blossom represents purity, the stem stands for the practice of Buddhist teachings which raise the mind above the (mud of) worldly existence, and gives rise to purity of mind. An open blossom signifies full enlightenment~ a closed blossom signifies the potential for enlightenment.

The Conch (shankha), which is also used as a horn, symbolises the deep, far reaching and melodious sound of the teachings, which is suitable for all disciples at it awakens them from the slumber of ignorance to accomplish all beings’ welfare.

The Buddhist Flag



A much more recent symbol is the Buddhist flag. It was in designed in 1880 by Colonel Henry Steele Olcott an American journalist. It was first hoisted in 1885 in Sri Lanka and is a symbol of faith and peace, and is now used throughout the world to represent the Buddhism.

The five colours of the flag represent the colours of the aura that emanated from the body of the Buddha when he attained Enlightenment.

Loving kindness, peace and universal compassion

The Middle Path - avoiding extremes, emptiness

Blessings of practice - achievement, wisdom, virtue, fortune and dignity

Purity of Dharma - it leads to liberation, outside of time or space

The Buddha's Teaching - wisdom

The Swastika

The Swastika is a well-known good luck symbol in India. Unfortunately, it is too well known in the west, as the Nazis chose it as their main symbol. In Sanskrit, swastika means “conducive to well-being”. In the Buddhist tradition, the swastika symbolizes the feet or footprints of the Buddha and is often used to mark the beginning of texts. Modern Tibetan Buddhism uses it as a clothing decoration. With the spread of Buddhism, it has passed into the iconography of China and Japan where it has been used to denote plurality, abundance, prosperity and long life.

Mountains

“There are two key mountains in Buddhist symbolism. The first is Vulture Peak in northern India where the Buddha is said to have delivered a number of sermons. Vulture Peak has particular significance in Mahayana Buddhism as one of its key texts, the Lotus Sutra, is said to have developed out of the Buddha's teachings at Vulture Peak [also the very important Heart Sutra was taught here]. The second belongs to Buddhist cosmology and is known as Mount Meru, the mythological centre of the Buddhist universe and the link between the hells below the earth and the heavens above.”

Vajra



The Vajra is a Buddhist tantric symbol representative of great spiritual power and firmness of spirit. It symbolizes one of the three main branches of Buddhism, Vajrayana. Shaped like a club having ribbed spherical heads, the Vajra is symbolic of the attributes of a diamond (purity and indestructibility) as well as the properties of a thunderbolt (irresistible energy). It also represents endless creativity, skilful activity and potency. In Tibetan Buddhism, the Vajra is also a ritual tool and is known as Dorje. It is used along with a bell by lamas and other practitioners of sadhana.

Conclusion

Regarding the relation between Jainism and Buddhism, the opinion of early scholars was divided. While one group thought that Jainism is older than Buddhism. Yet the other group of orientalist hold that Jainism was an off shoot of Buddhism because outwardly certain points were common to both and their land of origin and early activities was the same. This question whether Jainism was a precursor to Buddhism or not was settled for good in a scholarly manner by the researches of two great German orientalist, namely Jacobi and Buhler. It is now an established fact that Jainism is not a branch of Buddhism, but is an independent religion and that it was flourishing when Lord Gautama Buddha founded his new religion. There are many similarities between Jainism and Buddhism. Both are Indian religions in every sense of the term and both are representatives of *Sramana* culture in India. In spite of various similarities, we do find that there are some basic differences between Jainism and Buddhism. Buddhism belongs to the category of Founded Religion as it was founded by lord Buddha, but this cannot be said about Jainism which is a traditional religion continuously existing in India from remote past. It is true that both Jainism and Buddhism are considered as ascetic religions as they attach prominence to the ascetic way of life and to the practice of penance. But there is a great difference in the extent of practice of penance in both religions.

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