

VISUAL AND CONCEPTUAL LINKS BETWEEN JAINA COSMOLOGICAL, MYTHOLOGICAL AND RITUAL INSTRUMENTS*

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Introduction

Jainism has developed a distinct iconography and produced a wealth of additional religious symbols, images and ritual instruments not employed or venerated by the followers of other religious groups in the subcontinent. Jaina temples throughout India display cosmological representations, which are seen as maps and guides to enlightenment and are derived from a highly-developed Jaina cosmographical system.¹ Other topics have been supplied by Jaina mythology, which provides vivid descriptions of legendary constructs, some of which have been translated into physical form in Jaina art and architecture. Based on a discrete form of temple ritual and the veneration of statues, specific ritual devices too have been created over time to suit and aid the complex Jaina religious ceremonial. This paper will analyse three distinct Jaina religious items: the *meru*, the *samavasaraṇa* and the *siṃhāsana*. The *meru* is a cosmological element, the *samavasaraṇa* largely a mythological construction, and the *siṃhāsana* a ritual instrument. In their specific shapes, all three items are unique to Jainism.² The three

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¹ For a detailed analysis of artistic and architectural representations of Jaina cosmology, see Hegewald (2000: 3-42; 2009: 50-61).

² Sacred mountains play an important role in Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies and religious thought too. The standardised schematised form of the *meru* in Jaina art and architecture, however, is unique to Jainism. There might be a remote stylistic connection between the *samavasaraṇa* and the *stūpa*, however, the *samavasaraṇa* ultimately replaced the *stūpa* in a Jaina context (Shah 1987: 15). Jaina *stūpas* differed from Buddhist *stūpas* by not enshrining relics and the evolved *samavasaraṇas* discussed in this paper are visually distinct structures, not found outside a Jaina context.

elements form a group by being visually clearly related. All three are pyramidal in shape and consist of three major superimposed tapering tiers. The link between them, however, is not simply visual or structural. This paper will argue that in a ritual context, the three items are clearly related conceptually, and to a certain extent they are even interchangeable.

Structural Similarities

The Cosmological Item

Jaina cosmological writings provide minute descriptions of cosmic oceans and island rings. These describe what is believed to be the physical nature of the Jaina universe, although their main aim is to provide believers with a guide to salvation. Only by understanding the shape and geography of this religious and moral cosmos will Jainas be able to break out of the tangible world and reach a higher form of bodiless existence. Focal to most descriptions of the cosmos and the individual world continents are the presence of sacred mountains. Sometimes these are individual peaks but frequently they are described as entire mountain ranges. The central world mountain, Mount Meru or Sumeru, which is located in the middle of the innermost island continent, Jambū Dvīpa, is the tallest and most revered of them all. After their birth, all infant Jinās are taken to the summit of Mount Meru where they receive their birth ablutions from the god Indra. Mount Meru, as the Jaina mountain *par excellence*, has gained such universal significance that it has developed into a symbol, which is representative of all sacred Jaina mountains. Taken one step further, it has developed into a more general image of a pure sacred place. In this standardised and symbolic form, the complex geography of Mount Meru, described in much detail in Jaina cosmological treatises, has been simplified and schematised to provide an easily recognisable and reproducible image. When introduced in this abstract and more generalised form of “the sacred mountain,” Mount Meru is usually referred to simply as *meru*. Representations of the *meru* show the mountain as consisting of three truncated cones, each one smaller than the one below, placed one on top of the other. At the apex of this cosmic structure is a square pavilion and a tree, sheltering a Jina icon seated on a throne (Plate 1). The upper element of the construction, the *cūlikā*, is sometimes raised on an additional projection or terrace, which in some cases can lead the arrangement to appear four-tiered.³

³ For more detailed textual descriptions of the *meru*, see Caillat and Kumar (1981: 30, 130, 156, 160). The same monograph contains reproductions of stylised *meru* paintings (ibid., pp. 131, 141, 161 and others).

Painted depictions of *meru* have been preserved in illuminated Jaina manuscripts and on larger sheets of paper and cloth. It is also common for such cosmic paintings to adorn the walls of Jaina temples throughout India.⁴



Plate 1 Wall painting showing the *meru* in the cosmological hall of the Śvetāmbara Jaina temple complex in the fort of Mandu in Madhya Pradesh.

In addition to miniature and mural paintings of the subject, we have three-dimensional images of the *meru*. Such sculptures can either be relatively small, about one metre high and made of bronze, or they can be larger configurations, usually fashioned in white

⁴ A roughly eighteenth-century wall painting of a *meru* can be seen in the Śrī Āgravāla Digambara Jaina Temple in New Delhi, whereas the Śvetāmbara temple compound in the fort at Mandu (Māndū), Madhya Pradesh, has modern cosmological wall paintings depicting, amongst others, various aspects of the *meru*. See plate 1 for a photographic reproduction of a detail of the Mandu paintings.

marble. Small metal representations of the *meru* are commonly kept in side chapels, antechambers and the *maṇḍapas* of more extensive temple structures. The larger stone models are usually housed in the principal shrine room and are venerated as the main object of worship in a Jaina temple. A beautiful small bronze sculpture of a *meru* topped by a Jina statue kept under a protective glass dome is venerated in the south-eastern image chamber on the first floor of the Mahāvīra Digambara Jaina Temple at Seoni (Sivanī) in Madhya Pradesh. Larger stone *merus*, housed in the core *garbha-gr̥has* of Jaina temples, are particularly common in the north of India and exhibit a large range of variations. Most examples are made of white marble and have three octagonal terraces, frequently delineated by low *jālī* screen-like balustrades of the same material. Most of these *merus* support the *mūl-nāyaka*, the main ritual icon of the temple. While in most paintings and small bronze representations the *meru* itself is the central object of veneration, in the larger stone arrangements the pyramidal *meru* bases are usually somewhat subordinated and are reduced to the function of providing an elaborate pedestal displaying the principal statue. The presence and importance of the *meru* form in such sculptural constellations, however, is clearly acknowledged in the name given to such formations. They are usually referred to as “the *meru* of ...” followed by the name of the Jina seated at its apex. A typical example of this kind is the *meru* of Ṛṣabhdeva in the Digambara Jaina Baddhī Mandir at Nāmdev Cauk in Sanganer (Sāṅgāner, Saṅgrāmapura), Rajasthan. The black image of the Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhdeva, seated at the apex of the structure, is supported on a beautifully carved lotus pedestal. The three octagonal layers of the *meru* of Vāsupūjyasvāmī in the Śrī Vāsupūjyasvāmī Bhagvan Temple at the foot of the sacred Mount Cūlagiri at Khaniya (Khāniyā), outside Jaipur in Rajasthan, is elaborately decorated with trees and other floral and vegetal designs (Plate 2). Because the platform supporting the figural representation is relatively high, it appears almost like a fourth terrace. All of the four layers have been surrounded with low filigree-like stone balustrades. The tapering tiers of the *meru* almost always have edges, but they need not always all be octagonal. The top two terraces of the *meru* of Ajitanātha in the Pārśvanātha Temple in Allahabad (Allahabād), Uttar Pradesh, are octagonal even though the bottom tier is square. In this case, the Jina seated above is raised on an elaborate throne, which has been furnished with a backrest. Two unusual *meru* constellations are the stepped *meru* of Ādinātha in the Śrī Digambara Baṛā Jaina Mandir in Old Delhi (Purānā Dillī), which is made of black and not white marble and bears golden decorations, and the smaller three-tiered *meru* of Pārśvanātha in the Digambara Baṛā Jaina Mandir at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, which is elaborately painted and crowned

by a *śikhara* roof. The superstructures of most *meru* pavilions are topped by bent *baṅgla* roof shapes or rounded domes, which are more typical of later temple forms in South Asia, which have been influenced by Islamic design elements (Hegewald forthcoming).



Plate 2 The *meru* of Vāsūpūjyasvāmī in the Śrī Vāsūpūjyasvāmī Bhagavān Temple in Khaniya near Jaipur in Rajasthan

In the following section, it will be shown that representations of the *meru* and the *samavasaraṇa* are visually closely related and in many cases almost indistinguishable. From the available material, however, it seems that it is more common for *meru* sculptures to be octagonal and in some cases to have a square base, and for three-dimensional *samavasaraṇas* to be round. The fact that this means of differentiation though does not work in every instance, is attested to by the large circular *meru*, called the Meru Mandir, located immediately to the north of the Digambara Jaina Temple at Ahar (Ahār) in Madhya Pradesh. A further means of differentiation is that most *merus* are

topped by a single main figural statue, contrasting with a usually fourfold image supported at the tip of *samavasaraṇas*. The mythological background to this feature will be explained in the following paragraph on *samavasaraṇas*.

The Mythological Dimension

The Jaina community has not just developed a complex system of cosmic geography but also a distinct and highly-evolved mythology. At the centres of Jaina myths and legends stand the life stories of the twenty-four Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras. The biographies of the Jinās are closely related and follow a standardised scheme, with those describing the life and deeds of Ādinātha and Mahāvīra being the most elaborate. All Jinās are said to be born into a *kṣatriya* family, they are awakened by the gods to their destiny as spiritual teachers, renounce the world to become wandering ascetics and after strenuous austerities they reach enlightenment.⁵ Having attained omniscience (*kevalajñāna*), the Jinās deliver their first sermon. For this purpose, the gods create an amphitheatre-like open-air structure. This is referred to as a *samavasaraṇa*, or more colloquially as a *samosaraṇ*, which literally means ‘assemblage.’

As pointed out earlier, *meru* and *samavasaraṇa* are visually closely-related. In this context it is noteworthy that in many religio-philosophical texts on architecture, such as the *Vāstuvīdyā* of Viśvakarmā, *merus* and *samavasaraṇas* are treated in conjunction and are discussed in the same passages.⁶ Detailed descriptions of the mythical assembly halls of the Tīrthaṅkaras are provided in the Jaina *Purāṇas* of both major sects. These describe the *samavasaraṇa* as a complex amphitheatre-like pyramidal structure, consisting of three terraces or fortifications to accommodate the audience of gods, humans and animals attending the first formalised teaching of a Jina. *Samavasaraṇas* can either be round or square in plan, although they seem more commonly to have a circular ground plan.⁷ The pyramidal preaching hall is topped by a square platform, referred to as *pīṭha*, *gandha-kuṭī* or *devachchhaṇḍa*, on which the enlightened Jina takes his seat. The

⁵ Dundas (1992: 18f.) described and analysed patterns in the life stories of the Tīrthaṅkaras at great length.

⁶ For textual references and further details, see the discussions by Somapura and Dhaky (1975: 16). In this respect it is also worth noting that a temple on Mount Sonāgiri is both referred to as a *meru* and as a *samavasaraṇa*.

⁷ Verses five and six of the *Samavasaraṇa-stavana*, for example, give the dimensions of the various constituent elements of round and square *samavasaraṇas* (Bhandarkar 1911: 128-129) but, according to Shah (1955: 93), square *samavasaraṇas* are a later conception.

gods then create three more identical images of the Tīrthaṅkara, seated on similar stools, to address the listeners in the remaining three directions. This aspect of the story provides the rationale for having a quadruple depiction at the summit. The fourfold icon is protected by a pavilion (*śrī-maṇḍapa*) (Plate 3) or sheltered under a tree growing atop the three-tiered structure. In many instances both elements, shrine and tree, are present. The sheltering tree is either referred to as a *caitya-vṛkṣa* or more specifically as an *aśoka* tree. Because of the close connection between the Jina's attainment of omniscience and the structure of the *samavasaraṇa*, which provides the venue for his first sermon, models of the mythical preaching auditorium are considered symbolic representations of the Tīrthaṅkara's *kevalajñāna*.



Plate 3 Large-scale representation of a *samavasaraṇa* at Pavapuri in Bihar, marking what is believed to be the actual spot of Mahāvīra's first sermon

In Jaina caves and temple architecture, there are many carved relief panels depicting stylised versions of the multi-tiered preaching hall of the Tīrthaṅkaras. It is interesting that although depictions of the standardised three-tiered *samavasaraṇa* do not appear on the surviving first to second century CE *āyāgapaṭas* (tables of homage), from Mathura (Mathurā) in Uttar Pradesh (Shah 1955: 86) there are what seem to be early rock-cut representations of it in the Jaina caves at Udayagiri in Orissa. These too date from about the first century CE. Much clearer examples, however, may be seen in medieval Jaina temples in Rajasthan. See, for instance, the ceiling panels in the porch of the Mahāvīra Temple at Kumbharia (Kumbhāriā, ancient Ārāṣaṇa), and those of shrines number fifteen and nineteen in the temple of Ādinātha, better known as the Vimala-Vasahī, at Mount Abu (Ābū Parvata, Delvārā). Both temples date from the early to mid-eleventh century. From this period we also have painted versions, such as the roughly eleventh-century murals decorating the ceilings at Tirumalai in Tamil Nadu, and those in the open *maṇḍapa* of the Vardhamāna Temple at Kanchipuram (Kāñcī), Tamil Nadu, dating from about the twelfth century CE (Shah 1955: 94).⁸

From the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, painted versions of the *samavasaraṇa* do not remain confined to architecture and we also have painted examples on cloth and paper. In addition to stone reliefs and paintings, there are free-standing *samavasaraṇa* sculptures, which can be made of metal or stone.⁹ The metal versions are usually relatively small but can be very elaborate. A beautiful sculptural *samavasaraṇa*, where a lot of emphasis has been placed on the three tiers of the arrangement, is housed in the side chapel in the north-east of the Śrī Digamabara Jaina Bīṣpañthī Baṛī Koṭhī Mahāvīra Temple in the village of Sonagiri (Sonāgiri) in Madhya Pradesh.¹⁰ Sculpted *samavasaraṇas* made of stone are often very closely related to the three-dimensional

⁸ In later medieval as well as in contemporary temple building and decoration, paintings of this genre are more likely to be positioned on the vertical walls of temples. This may be seen in the Nasiyan Temple at Ajmer (Ajmīr), Rajasthan, and on the outer walls of the Baḍaga Basadi temple complex at Mudabidri (Mūḍabidrī) in Karnataka. In these temples, *samavasaraṇa* imagery is used to advertise a clear and distinct Jaina identity on the outside of the temple structures.

⁹ This is another area where there is a close connection between models of *merus* and of *samavasaraṇas*. Sculptural representations of both are either cast in metal or carved in white marble. There are some exceptions, where different materials or types of stone have been used in connection with both types of structures.

¹⁰ Shah mentions a similar *samavasaraṇa* bronze from Surat (Sūrat) in Gujarat, dated to about 1065 CE. This has been illustrated in his study (Shah 1955: figure 76).

stone *merus* discussed above. *Samavasaraṇas* modelled in stone usually have a moulded base below, supporting three circular tiers, which are surmounted by a square pavilion accommodating a quadruple image of a Jina. While most *merus* have angular terraces, it is more common for *samavasaraṇa* models to consist of circular rings. This difference seems not to be derived from textual prescriptions. Most *merus* have a single main statue at the summit and it is most common for *samavasaraṇas* to be topped by a four-faced icon of a Tīrthaṅkara. The subsidiary sanctums of large numbers of Jaina temples in north-western India enshrine circular *samavasaraṇa* representations fashioned in white marble. Cell number twenty, in the south-west corner of the Vimala-Vasahī at Mount Abu (CE 1032 and later) houses a striking example. Of a similar date is that in the southernmost chapel on the east side of the Mahāvīra Temple at Kumbharia (CE 1062). A later case of a pyramidal *samavasaraṇa* is located in the north-eastern corner of the Caumukh Tuṅk at Palitana (Pālitānā) in Gujarat, and dates from about the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

Especially in recent centuries, *samavasaraṇa* pyramids are also venerated inside the central shrines of temples. In these instances, the images at the summit of the structures are very small, contrasting with the large mythical preaching auditoriums, which have been portrayed in great detail and present the key element of the arrangements. Consequently, it appears that in these later cases the architectural structures and not the figural statues present the primary focus of worship. This expresses a general tendency in Jaina art to display an ever increasing interest and focus on mythological and cosmological themes, which are unique to Jainism and provide clear points of differentiation from other religious groups in the subcontinent (Hegewald 2000). A large modern *samavasaraṇa* is housed in the image chamber on the first floor of the Pārśvanātha Basadi at Narasimharajapura (Narasimharājapura) in Karnataka. A further noteworthy position in which *samavasaraṇa* sculptures made of stone can be placed is typical of Jaina temples in north-western India. Especially in Rajasthan, where Jaina temples have pronounced walls and are raised on high terraces, *samavasaraṇas*, which are about one and a half metres high, are frequently positioned in a small *maṇḍapa* (*nāla-maṇḍapa*) positioned over the steps of the entrance to the temple. The pyramidal representations face the main icon in the central sanctum. Theoretical texts on architecture, such as the *Vāstuśāstra* and the *Vāstuvīdyā* of Viśvakarmā, prescribe this layout and imply that these *samavasaraṇas* act as equivalents and Jaina replacements for *vāhana* sculptures, such as *nandi* or *garuḍa*, found in a Hindu temple context.¹¹

¹¹ In the volume edited by Shah and Dhaky (1975), various authors discuss this issue. Especially useful is

All *samavasaraṇas* discussed so far are housed inside temple buildings and represent sculptural approaches to the subject. In addition, *samavasaraṇas* were created on a much larger scale, expressing the translation of this theme into monumental architecture. All architectural examples date from later periods, such as the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries, and express an unbroken continuity of this mythological theme in Jaina art and architecture. There are architectural *samavasaraṇas* from all regions of the subcontinent. It is fascinating to observe that in more monumental cases, the pavilion at the summit of the structure is frequently enclosed and remains locked on ordinary days, obscuring the multiple images inside. In these cases, it appears to be more the celebration of *kevalajñāna*, the attainment of enlightenment in general, which ultimately is the aim of every Jaina, rather than the illustration of the historical first sermon of a specific Tīrthaṅkara, which is symbolised. Whilst the *samavasaraṇa* in the south-west of the large temple complex at Pāpora (Pāporā), Madhya Pradesh, is specifically associated with Pārśvanātha's first preaching, the group of three *samavasaraṇas* in the north-east of the temple area, although they too must be topped by specific Jina icons, are largely venerated as images of *kevalajñāna* in general. A beautifully shaped *samavasaraṇa*, possibly dating from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, which is dedicated to Candraprabhu, is located in the Digambara temple complex at Ramtek (Rāmṭek) in Maharashtra. The *samavasaraṇa* structures on Mount Sonāgiri in Madhya Pradesh and at Pavapuri (Pāvāpurī; ancient Pāpā) in Bihar (Plate 3) are on an even larger scale. The example at Pavapuri is especially significant, as it is believed to mark the actual spot on which the historical Mahāvīra delivered his first sermon. One of the largest representation so far of its kind has been constructed at Palitana, at the base of Mount Śātruṅjaya. Although smaller *samavasaraṇas* are usually solid, functioning as monumental sculptures and allowing the visitors to climb the structures, the latter example is a 'real' building in the sense that it encloses an internal space.¹² The translation of this mythical monumental symbol into a religious edifice, which devotees can enter, seems to be a feature particularly of very recent structures in this style. Similar monumental *samavasaraṇa* edifices were under construction at the two Rajasthani sites of Shri Himachal Nagar (Śrī

the joint paper by Sompura and Dhaky (1975: 13-20). Note particularly the sections on pages 15 and 16, but also the discussion by Dhaky on pages 329 and 332. The latter also seems to imply that other symbolic representations can replace *vāhana* sculptures.

¹² Visitors can enter the structure. Inside the large *samavasaraṇa* at Palitana, an exhibition of Jaina cosmological and mythical themes is permanently on display.

Himācal Sūrya Nagar) in 1998 and at Bamanvad (Bāmaṇvādī) in 2003. Such monumental *samavasaraṇas* are large-scale architectural structures, which represent a symbolic commemorative temple type, which in this specific shape has not been associated with other religious groups in the wider geographical area of Asia or outside the region.

The Ritual Instrument

In addition to their evolved cosmologies and distinct mythological stories, focussing around the Tīrthaṅkaras, the Jainas have also developed a distinct form of temple ritual. This is based on their discrete approach to sacred images and the presence of multiple religious sculptures, which are frequently housed in a multitude of shrine rooms located on various floor levels.¹³ Considerations of purity are of crucial importance with relation to sacred Jaina icons and especially with regard to the *mūl-nāyaka*. The central statue of a temple is usually a large fixed stone sculpture (*pratiṣṭhit*). In certain temples, lay worshippers and especially women are barred from touching this main religious icon, preventing them from performing rituals such as the bathing, anointing and decorating of the sculpture. This is one reason why most temples have one or several small metal images, referred to as *vidhi-nāyakas*. There are less concerns with regards to purity concerning these portable ritual figures. The *vidhi-nāyakas* are relatively light and easily movable and are therefore used during the performance of ceremonies.¹⁴ The larger stationary sculptures housed in the central *garbha-gṛha* of a temple will also be washed and anointed on a regular basis, but the daily ritual morning bath as well as more complex observances are more commonly performed on the small portable ritual images (Plate 4) (Jain & Fischer 1978 I: 13). Jainas generally believe that the rituals conducted on the metal statues equally apply themselves to the main icon, the *mūl-nāyaka*, housed in the principal shrine. On these occasions the movable metal image is placed at the summit of a metal structure, called a *śimhāsana* stand, and acts as a substitute for the *mūl-nāyaka*. The *śimhāsana* ritual stand constitutes the third element in our group of closely related three-tiered Jaina religious items.

¹³ For a discussion of the effects, which this distinct approach to image veneration has had on Jaina temple architecture, see either the comprehensive monograph by Hegewald (2009) or one of the concise analyses of the topic (Hegewald 2001).

¹⁴ In many Jaina temples, the portable metal images are also kept in the main shrine room but are taken to the *śimhāsana* stand in order to perform rituals.



Plate 4 Morning rituals being performed on an octagonal *simhāsana* stand in the Pārśvanātha Temple at Sholapur in Maharashtra

Simhāsana literally means ‘lion seat’ or ‘lion throne’ and is used to describe any pedestal or platform adorned with lions at its extremities, carrying an image of a Tīrthaṅkara or other divine being.¹⁵ In its general sense, the term is used to refer to the

¹⁵ Consequently, the *simhāsana* is also a constituent element of the *samavasaraṇa*. According to textual descriptions, there are four lion thrones at the summit of the *samavasaraṇa* structure, on which the four Jinas are seated (Coomaraswamy 1994: 23; von Glasenapp 1999: 279). Whilst the *vidhi-nāyaka* is placed on a large three-tiered pedestal called a *simhāsana*, most *mūl-nāyakas* are seated on lion thrones in the more general sense (Srinivasan 1975: 168). These pedestals with lions at the extremities form a part of stone and metal sculptures. This applies to small ritual statues as well, which usually have an inherent pedestal adorned with lions. For a discussion of simple lion pedestals as constituent elements of Jain sculptural arrangements, see, for instance, the publication by Shah (1987: 10). Consequently, the placing of the icon and its inherent pedestal on a larger throne sculpture, the *simhāsana*, constitutes a certain repetition. At the end of this paper, however, it will become clear that during rituals the *simhāsana* stand ceases primarily to represent the lion throne of the Jina and becomes equated with the *meru* and the *samavasaraṇa*.

seat located on the summit of the ritual stands as well. However, it is more commonly applied to the entire three-tiered structure. The foremost purpose of the *simhāsana* is to carry and display a sculptural representation of a Jina for the execution of religious rituals. Such three-tiered ritual podiums are found in most Jaina temples throughout India and are used on a daily basis. Most *simhāsanas* are located in the main *maṇḍapa* at the front of the *garbha-grha* housing the focal image of a Jaina temple, but they can also be positioned at the front of side cells. Larger temples may have more than one *simhāsana* stand.¹⁶ The pyramidal ritual podiums are either made entirely out of metal or they consist of a wooden frame covered with sheets of silver. A few are made of bronze or are gold-plated. The tapering structures are composed of three either square or circular pedestals, although there are some with octagonal tiers as well (Plate 4). The levels are positioned one over the other culminating in a throne platform or seat. As was the case with the previous two three-tiered items, there frequently is a small pavilion sheltering the icon, which can have a dome or a *śikhara* roof form at its apex.

It is obvious from the description that the *simhāsana* ritual stands are structurally closely related to the other three-tiered structures, the *meru* and the *samavasaraṇa*, discussed above. Especially noteworthy is that conceptually, they seem to form a link between the other two items. This has predominantly to do with the kind of rituals conducted on the tapering stools of the *simhāsanas* and with the events portrayed and represented in these particular ceremonies. The following discussion will explain the more abstract links and intangible dimensions further connecting the three.

The Conceptual Link

Sacred Jaina statues have to be formally installed and consecrated through the performance of a series of complex rituals in order to function ritually and to be potent religious objects. In a Jaina context, these installation and consecration rituals are commonly referred to as the *pañca-kalyāṇaka-pratiṣṭhā-mahotsava* or as the *Jina-bimba-pratiṣṭhā* (Babb 1998: 66; Jain 1983: 114; Fischer & Jain 1974/5: 35). The rituals aim at re-enacting the five central events in the life of a Tīrthaṅkara. At the end of the sequence the Jina has figuratively ‘relived’ the five auspicious occasions of: conception, birth,

¹⁶ This is particularly common of larger complexes or temples in popular pilgrimage centres, which attract large numbers of worshippers simultaneously. Two *simhāsana* stands, for example, are in use in different sections of the Ajitnātha Temple at Sirohi (Sirohī) in Rajasthan.

renunciation, omniscience, and release. In this fully-enlightened and liberated state, he is enshrined in the temple. The consecration rites are usually conducted on a small replacement image made of metal (Fischer & Jain 1974/5: 35). The two aspects of the rituals re-enacting the five core events, the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā* or *pañc-kalyāṇ pūjā*, which are particularly important with regard to our analysis and interpretation of three-tiered structures in Jaina art and architecture, are the birth (*janam kalyāṇaka*) and the enlightenment (*nīrvāṇa kalyāṇaka*) of the Tīrthaṅkara.

The climax of the birth celebrations (*janmotsava*) is represented by the re-enactment of the first bath (*janamābhiṣeka*), which every Jina receives from the god Indra on a terrace at the peak of Mount Meru immediately following his birth.¹⁷ The ritual bathing of the image is referred to as *snātra* or *snāpana pūjā* (Babb 1998: 69; Jaini 1990: 200) and in a temple context, either one or several devotees, take on the role of Indra and pour various kinds of liquids (*abhiṣeka*) over the portable metal icon placed on the *simhāsana*.¹⁸ During the ritual, the *simhāsana* stand, which is visually closely related to representations of the *meru* discussed earlier, becomes immediately associated with and symbolic of Mount Meru (Jaini 1990: 197, 200). This bathing ceremony, however, is not only performed as an element of the lengthy and costly celebrations of the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā*. It should be performed every morning for every Jina representation housed in a Jaina shrine. Therefore, it is part of the *pūjā* of eight substances (*aṣṭa-prakārī pūjā*), but is also a preliminary to any major ritual or veneration in general (Babb 1998: 69). When the bathing ceremony is not performed in the context of the sequence of the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā*, it is more often referred to as *jal pūjā* (water worship) or *abhiṣeka* (Babb 1998: 85). Anybody conducting a lustration ceremony is meant to imagine himself or herself as Indra, and any bathing ritual is symbolically regarded as representative of the birth of the Tīrthaṅkara. Consequently, the *simhāsana* stand acts as a *meru* during its employment in bathing rituals.

For the duration of other sacred temple rites, the *simhāsana* also doubles as the *samavasaraṇa*.¹⁹ Any temple housing an icon is figuratively equated with the

¹⁷ Babb (1998: 72-84) describes the ritual sequence of Jaina bathing ceremonies in much detail.

¹⁸ The liquids passing over the surface of the sacred image are consecrated in the process and are carefully collected in a special container. Worshippers conducting or observing the ritual will usually dab some of the sacred water onto their eyes and foreheads. The remaining liquid is kept over the day and offered to those, who have not taken part in the ceremony.

¹⁹ For further information on the symbolic connection between the *simhāsana* and either Mount Meru or the *samavasaraṇa*, see Jain and Fischer (1978 I: 12, 13), Jaini (1990: 201), Jain (1977: 38), and Williams

samavasaraṇa. The placing of the ritual statue at the apex of the *simhāsana* stand, however, is interpreted more specifically as an image of the Jina's attainment of omniscience and represents the final stage in his worldly life. Consequently, this segment of the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā* is also performed on the ritual stand, which visually is closely related to the mythical preaching auditorium of the Jina. During this final stage of the *pūjā*, it is symbolically equated with the *samavasaraṇa*. Fascinating in this connection is that a further common term to describe this ritual implement is 'samavasaraṇa' or more colloquially 'samosaraṇ' (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 21, 25).

Conclusion

Although the concept of the *meru* can be found in other South Asian religions, and Hindu as well as Buddhist sculptures are raised above the ground on low thrones or pedestals, called *simhāsanas*, distinctive and uniquely Jaina shapes are connected with these terms in a Jaina religious context. It is striking that the shape chosen for these two concepts as well as for that of the *samavasaraṇa*, are structurally closely related and at times difficult to tell apart. Standardised representations of the *meru*, the *samavasaraṇa* and the *simhāsana* show these items in the shape of a tapering pyramidal tower consisting of three main superimposed terraces with either one or multiple Jaina images at the apex. The recurrence of this visual shape in connection with essential Jaina cosmological concepts, mythological constructions and ritual instruments, expresses the religious significance dedicated by the Jainas to this simple threefold shape.

In fact there are other religious Jaina items, which use the same structural form. There are *chatrīs* or *carāṇs*, small pavilions housing the sacred foot imprints (*pādukās*) of Jinās and other deceased Jaina saints, which follow a very similar or even the same three-tiered layout, but display *pādukās* instead of a figural image at the apex.²⁰ There are also individual examples where other cosmological items, such as Nandīśvara Dvīpa, have been represented by this simple three-tiered shape.²¹

(1991: 216, 221). Particularly good with respect to the double symbolism encountered in this case are Babb (1998: 71) and Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994: 21).

²⁰ A good example, which clearly shows the visual and structural connection to other three-tiered structures, is the large *carāṇ* adjacent to a *samavasaraṇa* in the temple city at Nenagiri (Naināgiri, Reśandīgiri) in Madhya Pradesh.

²¹ There is a striking example of a Nandīśvara Dvīpa representation in the topmost shrine of the triple-storeyed Jaina temple on Muktāgiri in Maharashtra. This sculptural representation does not follow any

Significant with respect to the three items forming the focus of this paper, however, is that they are not simply linked by a common design programme, but that the *meru*, the *samavasaraṇa* and the *siṃhāsana* are conceptually linked as well. During ritual performances, the *siṃhāsana* ritual stand can take on both the significance of the *meru* as well as that of the *samavasaraṇa* and creates a more subtle but not less powerful intrinsic connection between the two.²²

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standardised form of depiction usually employed by Śvetāmbara or Digambara Jains, but consists of three octagonal tiers closely related to *samavasaraṇa* and *meru* images.

²² A longer discussion of this topic, with a larger number of examples and photographic reproductions, has been published in the felicitation volume for Enamul Haque (Hegewald 2007). In addition, see the chapters on Jaina religion, which deals with its distinct cosmology and mythology, and the chapter on objects of Jaina veneration in Hegewald (2009: 50-61, 63-125).

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