

The Significance of Manastambha in Jain Temples: A Study of Karauli, Rajasthan

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Abstract

The term "Manastambha" carries the profound connotation of being a "Column of Honor" or a "Pillar of Pride" stemming from its Sanskrit roots where "Mana" signifies eminence or pride and "Stambha" denotes pillar. This architectural feature typically takes the form of a robust, free-standing pillar crowned with a depiction of a Jina, commonly situated in the vicinity of Jain temples or grand statues. The structural integrity of Manastambha is ensured by anchoring them firmly to the ground through a specially crafted masonry platform, which serves as a stable foundation. In a customary design, the pedestal is meticulously sculpted into three distinct tiers or steps, each representing a significant aspect of the path to spiritual liberation in Jainism. Symbolically, the three steps embody the core principles of the faith: right understanding and faith, signified by the step named Samyak Darshan, right knowledge represented by Samyak Gyan, and the importance of right conduct encapsulated in Samyak Chaitra. Whether fashioned in a square or octagonal shape, the Manastambha is a timeless emblem of Jain philosophy, embodying the journey towards enlightenment through its architectural symbolism and spiritual significance.

Keywords: Manastambha, Jain Architecture, Samyak, Jain Cosmology, Pillar

Introduction

The Manastambh, a significant pillar in Jainism, holds a unique and revered position as a solemn tribute to Tirthankara Bhagwan. Imbued with mystical powers and encircled by an atmosphere of deep reverence, this votive pillar stands tall, symbolizing unwavering devotion and spiritual reverence (Kishore, K., 2015). Rising magnificently, often towering twelve times the height of the primary deity in the temple, it embodies a profound symbol of faith and spiritual commitment. Recognized as a revered Jina or celestial being, it is typically supported by a monolithic shaft and sheltered within a beautifully adorned pavilion adorned with intricate carvings. Enriched with symbols like the 16 dreams, Om, Swastik, and Pratiharya, these pillars are adorned with fine details that showcase the richness of Jain devotion and artisanship. The presence of four Tirthankara idols facing each cardinal direction in North India further enhances the grandeur and sacredness of these architectural jewels. (Krishnamurthy, S. and Tiwary, K, S., 2016). Jain temples, revered as sacred sanctuaries and miniature reflections of Lord Tirthankara's divine Samavasarana, prominently feature the Manastambha at their entrances. This symbolic structure underscores the core values of equality and humility that one must embody upon stepping into a sacred space where worldly distinctions fade away. The divine aura that permeates these pillars, revered by celestial beings, symbolizes the construction of these magnificent structures that serve as pillars of spiritual triumph and enlightenment for the Tirthankaras, known as Manastambha. (Jaina Architecture In India | by Takeo Kamiya |, (no date))

In various regions across India, including the southern provinces, the Manastambha might display Yakshas and protective deities atop them, symbolizing guardianship and divine protection. Noteworthy examples of these awe-inspiring pillars can be found in Jain temples worldwide, from the majestic Kirti Stambha in Chittorgarh to the intricately carved monolithic pillars in Karkalla. Serving as poignant reminders of the spiritual sojourn and the pursuit of inner peace and tranquillity, these structures echo the deep-rooted values and traditions of the Jain community that have withstood the test of time. (Jainism Facts | Britannica, 2023).

The profound history and enduring traditions of the Jain community, stretching back millennia, embody the timeless legacy of their beliefs and principles. Rooted in the teachings of the 24 Tirthankaras, the foundational tenets of forgiveness, nonviolence, and detachment from worldly attachments stand as pillars of Jain philosophy. This ancient faith, entwined with Indian culture and civilization, reverberates through the mythologies, histories, and architectural wonders of Jain temples, melding influences from Hinduism and Buddhism in a harmonious blend.

Jain architecture, a harmonious fusion of Buddhist and Hindu elements, mirrors its practitioner's intricate artistry and spiritual hunger. (The Dilwara Temples At Mt. Abu | Jaina Architecture, chapter 1). From the early rock-cut temples inspired by Buddhist designs to later constructions atop hills symbolizing the mountains of immortality, Jain temples stand as testaments to faith and artistic brilliance. These architectural marvels not only testify to the artistic ingenuity but also offer a window into the spiritual core that defines Jainism and its enduring presence in the fabric of Indian culture.

Objective

The study will explore the Jain religion, its ethics, core values, history, and culture. It will analyze key Indian religions, their unique architectural styles, and the temples built by the Jain community in Uttar Pradesh. Factors influencing Jain architecture will be explored, including climate, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and sects within Jainism. The study will also examine how Jain architectural concepts have transcended their origins, influencing regional styles and structures. The cross-cultural impact of Jain architectural principles will be studied to understand their unique contributions and adaptations in different regional contexts. This comprehensive research will provide a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between Jain architecture and its broader societal, cultural, and religious contexts.

Literature Review

The literature extensively reviewed in this particular context delves deeply into the research problem of understanding Jainism and Jain architecture in a comprehensive and enlightening manner. By carefully examining various facets, the literature seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of Jain iconography that goes beyond mere surface-level analysis, shedding light on the intricate beliefs and practices that influence the portrayal of Jain idols in art and architecture. (Hegewald, B, A, J., 2002).

Additionally, the literature takes a holistic approach, tracing the fascinating evolution of Jain architecture from its early cave structures to the magnificent temples that stand today as awe-inspiring tributes to Jain craftsmanship and devotion. Through a critical analysis of the architectural styles and developments during the Buddhist and Hindu periods in India, the literature offers a broader historical and cultural context that enriches the appreciation of Jain architecture.

This thorough exploration and scrutiny of the literature not only deepen our comprehension of Jainism as a religious and philosophical tradition but also illuminate the architectural expressions that embody and

convey Jain beliefs. These insights into Jain philosophy and the architectural manifestations of the faith represent valuable resources that significantly enhance scholarly understanding of Jainism's distinct cultural, religious, and historical importance. Furthermore, they provide a unique glimpse into the rich architectural legacy of Jainism, enabling researchers, scholars, and enthusiasts to recognize and admire the skill and artistry inherent in the construction of Jain temples and structures.

Hence, the literature review stands as a pivotal tool in unraveling the mysteries of Jainism and the intricate nuances of Jain architecture. By advancing knowledge and scholarship in this field, the reviewed literature contributes substantially to the progression and broadening of our understanding within these domains. It presents a wealth of information that not only benefits academics and researchers but also fosters a broader public interest and admiration for Jainism and its architectural legacy, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation among a wider audience for the profound richness of Jain cultural and architectural traditions.

Research Methodology

The Jain Manastambha, a significant religious structure in India, is being studied using a descriptive methodology to understand its historical significance, architectural elements, symbolic representations, and religious customs. Data collection methods include observations, interviews, and scrutinizing literature and relics. Fieldwork is conducted across India to document architectural details, inscriptions, and sculptures. Visual means like photographs and sketches are used to capture intricate details. The accumulated data is analyzed to discern patterns, similarities, and differences among different Jain Manastambha, revealing profound meanings and cultural and religious significance. The study also explores the historical context surrounding the construction of these monuments, including historical records, manuscripts, and texts related to Jainism. This holistic approach enriches our understanding of the Jain Manastambha and promotes the preservation and propagation of our cultural heritage.

The Significance of Manastambha in Jain Cosmology

The Manastambha is a significant symbol in Jain cosmology, representing spiritual power and strength. Standing twelve times taller than the revered Tirthankara, it stands as a visual representation of Jain principles, offering devotees a physical representation of their beliefs and guiding them on their spiritual path. This towering structure serves as a focal point for prayer, meditation, and contemplation, creating a sacred space for individuals to connect with their inner selves and the divine.

Its intricate carvings and detailed inscriptions carry profound meanings, inviting believers to delve deeper into the rich tapestry of Jain spirituality and philosophy. With each visit, devotees are encouraged to reflect on their journey of self-discovery and enlightenment, drawing inspiration from the enduring wisdom encapsulated within this symbolic monument.

The Manastambha architectural intricacies are astounding, with meticulous craftsmanship evident in every detail. The towering structure, elevated 16 bows above the ground, epitomizes spiritual significance and divine connection. The intricate design of the lower part, adorned with Dhanush Pramana diamonds and a thunderbolt door, exudes a sense of grandeur and reverence. The circular crystal base and Vaidurya gem upper base further elevate the majestic presence of the Manastambha, symbolizing devotion and divine protection.

The picturesque surroundings of the Manastambha, adorned with beautiful cities and step-wells, create a serene atmosphere for worship and reverence. The names of the stepwells in each direction evoke a sense

of divine presence and cosmic harmony, inviting devotees and celestial beings into a realm of tranquillity and spiritual fulfillment. As one beholds the radiant glow of the Manastambha, spanning 20 yojanas, a sense of awe and reverence envelops the observer, transcending worldly concerns and elevating the spirit.

The Tranquil Beauty of Shri Mahavirji Atishay Kshetra, Karauli



Pic: 1 Karauli, Google Map

The region of Karauli, which lies near the Aravalli range, has low to moderate temperatures throughout the year, making it a comfortable spot to visit. The temple has seen an increase in visitors and followers from all over the world as a result of this benefit. Awe-inspiring sights that perfectly capture architectural beauty and grandeur welcome guests as they approach the enchanted grounds of the regal Shri Mahavirji temple. It is a captivating sight for everyone who sees the carefully crafted and ornately decorated rectangular building. The roof exhibits a very remarkable level of perfection due to its painstaking construction. The temple is a monument to skilled craftsmanship, supported by several arches that are individually adorned with incredibly complex carvings that portray motifs like lotus blossoms and vines. The temple's impressive entryway greets guests with a grandeur that defies time, beckoning everyone to experience the hallowed atmosphere that permeates this hallowed sanctuary. As we approach the temple through a 52-foot-tall pillar, the Manastambha, or column of pride, is adorned with carvings depicting four Tirthankaras facing in all directions. The façade and interior of the temple are wonderfully engraved, with fourteen legendary sights and sceneries etched onto the walls. The temple is lavishly graced with a sense of extravagance thanks to the golden murals. A feeling of awe descends upon crossing the finely wrought threshold, engulfing the visitor in the rich history and spiritual essence that characterize this architectural wonder from a bygone period. A quiet tribute to the artists whose deft hands brought this masterpiece to life, the elaborate decorations that cover the walls and arches whisper tales of love and expertise. Every area of the temple exhibits painstaking attention to detail, from the ornate carvings on the pillars to the complex designs on the ceilings. Visitors are encouraged to explore the shrine's holiness further by the carefully woven tapestry of artistic and spiritual elements that each aspect creates. The temple's peaks' heavenly forms soar into the skies, representing the deep spirituality that permeates every inch of this consecrated area and leaves an enduring impression on everyone who visits these hallowed grounds.

Capturing the fundamental principles of enlightenment, understanding, and spiritual awakening, the temple's architectural beauty is a deep monument to the ageless wisdom and teachings of Jain philosophy. The meticulous positioning of every peak and spire represents the path to inner serenity and self-actualization, beckoning guests to go out on a spiritual adventure led by the towering figure of the venerated Tirthankaras. A feeling of wonder and reverence permeates the heart as one looks at the elaborate designs and carvings that cover the temple walls, strengthening the bond with the holy and timeless truths that resound inside.

The temple's inverted bowl-shaped pavilion, adorned with magnificent images and dazzling golden hues, is a stunning sight that pays homage to the spiritual legacy and luminaries of Jain tradition. Visitors are led on a journey of reflection and devotion as they move up the painstakingly constructed steps and through the exquisitely designed corridors, which culminate in a profound sensation of connection to the divine energies that pervade the shrine. Worshippers can completely immerse themselves in the spiritual atmosphere of the temple thanks to the careful planning and construction of the sanctuary, which creates a harmonic environment that makes the circumambulation procedure smooth and respectful.

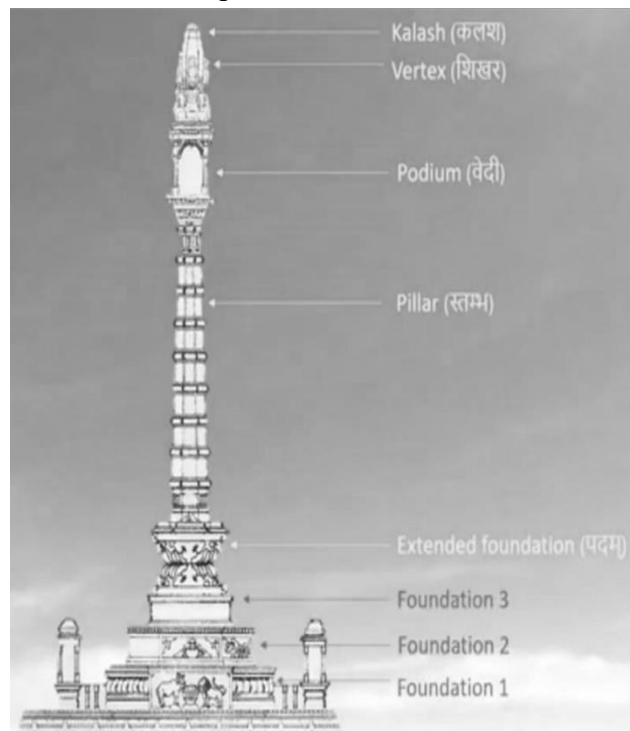
Each intricately carved detail pays attention to the spiritual teachings of Jainism, and the exquisite decorations that cover the temple walls convey stories of dedication and adoration. The impressive snake finial that adorns the sanctum sanctorum represents the blessings of Ashta Mangal and the Tirthankara Parshvanath, bringing calm and tranquillity to everyone seeking refuge within the temple's walls. With its majestic Yakshi Padmavati statue and respected Tirthankar Parshvanath, the vast Mahamandap is a place of contemplation and spiritual grace. In this haven, followers can escape the madness of the outside world and commune with the holy essence that resides within. Visitors are welcomed by a special changing area that leads to the enormous circular dome-shaped Chhatra Mandap, an area radiating peace and reverence, while they explore the internal architecture of the temple. Encircled by the peaceful atmosphere that permeates the temple grounds, this place offers periods of reflection and contemplation for those seeking inner peace and spiritual enlightenment. With its red sandstone pillars and priceless diamonds, the bottom level is a haven for spiritual reflection and devotion that provides a window into the innermost secrets of the soul.

With its marble chhatris and majestic front, the temple's exterior magnificence is a monument to the rich cultural legacy and devotion to God that define this holy place. A visual feast for the eyes and a heart-filling sensation of holiness is created by the rich architectural elements, which include the arching dome, Rajputana-style windows, and other elaborate embellishments. Visitors are reminded of the timeless lessons of renunciation and humility, which are represented in the teachings of the spiritual master Mahavir Swami, as they walk through the majestic entrance gate and see the moving sculpture that graces the façade of the temple.

The continuing building projects to enlarge the altar space of the temple are expected to improve the sanctity and spiritual atmosphere of the shrine, providing devotees and guests with an elevated sense of peace and reverence. Encouraging everyone to share in the holy energies that flow through this sacred area, the towering statue of Tirthankara Mahavir in the Kayotsarga stance, flanked by the twenty-four Tirthankaras, adds to the visual magnificence and spiritual vibrancy that permeate the temple grounds. The temple is always changing, becoming a more serene haven and a lighthouse for anybody seeking spiritual enlightenment inside its confines with each renovation and extension.

Details of Manastambha In North India

During our exploration of the Karauli campus, we were fascinated to discover three distinct variations of Manastambha structures. Each type exhibited its unique design elements and historical significance, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the region. These impressive structures stood tall and majestic, serving as a testament to the craftsmanship and architectural marvels of the past. Our findings deepened our appreciation for the intricate details and symbolism embedded in these Manastambha structures, shedding light on the spiritual and cultural practices prevalent in the area. As we studied each type closely, we were able to discern subtle differences in their construction and ornamentation, hinting at the diverse influences that shaped their evolution over time. Overall, our encounter with these Manastambha structures was a truly enriching experience, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the vibrant history and artistry that defines the architectural landscape of Karauli.



Pic: 2 Manastambha detail

An ideal Manastambha is divided into 8 parts,

1. Starting from the bottom:
2. Platform 1(Samyak Darshan)
3. Platform 2(Samyak Gyan)
4. Platform 3(Samyak Charitra)
5. Padam(base in the form of a lotus)
6. Pillar(Stambha)
7. Podium (Vedi)
8. Vertex(Shikhar)
9. Kalash

The Manastambha is a complex structure with eight parts, each representing a significant spiritual and philosophical aspect. The journey begins with Platform 1 (Samyak Darshan), where the seeker cultivates the right vision. Platform 2 (Samyak Gyan) guides the path, while Platform 3 (Samyak Charitra)

encourages righteous conduct and ethics as the foundation for spiritual growth. The structure mirrors the spiritual journey, highlighting the importance of each part in achieving spiritual growth.

The Padam serves as the sturdy base of this majestic structure, resembling the elegance and purity of a lotus, symbolic of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. Rising above the Padam stands the Pillar (Stambha), a representation of strength and stability in the face of life's challenges, urging the devotees to stand firm in their beliefs and values. Ascending to the Podium (Vedi), the seeker is encouraged to elevate their spiritual practices and offerings as a mark of dedication and devotion.

Reaching towards the Vertex (Shikhar), the pinnacle of the Manastambha, symbolizes the culmination of spiritual evolution, where the seeker aims to attain the highest state of consciousness and realization. Finally, the Kalash crowns this divine structure, signifying completeness and divine presence, encapsulating the spiritual journey within its sacred form.

Thus, the Manastambha stands as a testament to the aspirant's dedication and journey towards self-realization and spiritual enlightenment, guiding them through the various stages of growth and realization in the profound world of spirituality and higher consciousness.

Different Styles of Manastambha In Karauli

1. Chandanpur Mahavirji Temple

This flawless manastambh, constructed in white marble in 693 Samvat, stands as a timeless symbol of reverence and architectural magnificence, holding a significant place among India's oldest manastambh. As we trace its design from the base, we encounter a meticulously crafted structure featuring three distinct platforms, each symbolizing a profound aspect of spiritual enlightenment.

The first platform (*Pic 3*) measuring 16 feet square base and rising 3 feet high, embodies the essence of Samyak Darshan, adorned with intricate depictions of elephants, Kuber trees, and Dwarpal figures, creating a visual tapestry that captivates the beholder with its attention to detail and artistic finesse.

Moving to the second platform, which mirrors the essence of Samyak Gyan, we find a 14'6" square base rising 3 feet into the air, enveloped in exquisite decorative jalis. Embracing spiritual teachings, the platform bears inscriptions of Barahabhavana and DasLakshranDharam on all four sides, weaving a narrative of wisdom and enlightenment.

Transitioning to the third platform, a representation of Samyak Charitra, we encounter a 12-foot square base structure standing 2 feet tall, narrating tales of Bhagwan Mahaveer that inspire awe and reverence. The subsequent addition of a magnificent Padam (lotus) and a towering cylindrical pillar, standing at 30 feet, further enhances the monument's grandeur and spiritual significance.

Atop this remarkable structure, a meticulously crafted glass-covered podium holds the idol of Tirthankar Mahaveer, gazing benevolently in all directions, embodying the essence of eternal presence and divine grace. Crowned with an ornate shikar and a golden Kalash, the monument's majestic height of approximately 52 feet symbolizes a timeless beacon of spirituality and architectural brilliance, inviting awe and reverence from all who lay eyes upon its intricate beauty.

2. Shri Shantinath Jinalaya

This extraordinary manastambh stands out distinctively among all others. It is distinguished by its unique presence within the octagonal boundaries created by intricate red sandstone jalis. At the base of this remarkable structure, three distinct platforms escalate upwards, culminating in a grand podium at the very top. The initial platform (*Pic 4*), resembling Samyak Darshan, spans 20 feet in a square base with a subtle

2-foot elevation, exuding an aura of reverence. A staircase leads to the second platform, portraying the essence of Samyak Gyan. This secondary platform, measuring 18 feet square, is adorned with exquisite depictions of elephants, majestic Kuber trees, and fascinating tales of Bhagwan Mahaveer.

Moving up to the third platform, symbolizing Samyak Charitra, it is a 16-foot square base structure standing 2 feet tall, alive with vibrant illustrations narrating the stories of Bhagwan Mahaveer, evoking a profound sense of spirituality and ancient wisdom. Transitioning to the elevated sections of this awe-inspiring manastambh, a square podium adorned with images of Tirthankar Shantinath on all four sides captures attention, followed by the intricately crafted lotus motif and an elegant cylindrical pillar reaching a grand height of 8 feet. Ascending further, a second podium crowned with a chhatri, encompassing the idol of the revered Tirthankar Adinath poised to bless all directions, adds a touch of divinity to this grand structure.

The pinnacle of this magnificent edifice showcases an ornate shikar embellished with a golden Kalash, proudly standing atop this remarkable manastambh, commanding a height of approximately 46 feet. This profound structure not only defies time but also serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of spiritual enlightenment and the artistic marvels of ancient craftsmanship.

3. Krishnabai Chatyalaya

The historically significant Manastambha, dating back to 2481 Samvat, stands tall with its intricate details and symbolic representations. Its architecture is a sight to behold, starting with the three distinct platforms that symbolize the virtues of Samyak Darshan, Samyak Gyan, and Samyak Charitra. The first platform (*Pic 5*) measuring 14 feet square base, exudes a sense of stability and strength. As we move upward, the second platform, slightly smaller at 12'6" square base, signifies progression and enlightenment on the spiritual path. The final platform, standing at an 11-foot square base, represents the culmination of spiritual growth and wisdom. Rising elegantly above these platforms is the majestic octagonal pillar, towering at 41 feet in height, symbolizing the enduring nature of faith and belief.



Pic 3: Chandanpur Mahaveerji



Pic 4: Shantinath Manastambha



Pic 5: Krishnabai Chatayala

The absence of a Padam in this structure adds to its uniqueness and peculiarity, inviting contemplation and reflection from all who visit. At the pinnacle of this grand monument, the serene presence of the Tirthankara Mahaveer idol, enclosed within a square shape and adorned with glass, radiates a sense of peaceful divinity in all directions. This exquisite portrayal of reverence and devotion encapsulates the essence of Jain philosophy and tradition, offering a tranquil sanctuary for spiritual seekers and admirers of art alike. Every aspect of this Manastambha reveals a rich tapestry of cultural heritage and spiritual significance, beckoning visitors to immerse themselves in its profound beauty and timeless wisdom.

Inferences

The multi-faceted research endeavor being undertaken aims to delve extensively into the intricate cultural, historical, and religious dimensions of Jain Manastambha in Karauli, Rajasthan. Through this in-depth exploration, a thorough comprehension of its intrinsic significance within the spheres of conservation endeavors, architectural traditions, and the intricate tapestry of Jain art and symbolism is sought to be achieved. It is imperative to emphasize the adaptability of this research to suit specific interests, available resources, and the desired scope, thereby ensuring its resonance with the unique needs and requirements of the specific context it seeks to address. Furthermore, a meticulous assessment of the existing literature within this specialized domain is indispensable to ensure that the research question is aligned proficiently with the current state of knowledge.

The potential implications wrought forth by the findings of this comprehensive study hold promise in various domains. Foremost, the elucidation of the significance and preservation methodologies of Jain Manastambha can significantly advance the cause of heritage preservation, offering insights into the preservation practices of yore and paving the way for the formulation of contemporary best practices to safeguard these invaluable cultural relics. Moreover, the research findings can lay a robust foundation for the initiation of cultural tourism endeavors, presenting a detailed insight into the architectural ingenuity and artistic symbolism encapsulated within Jain Manastambha. Armed with this wealth of knowledge, local communities and organizations can efficaciously promote these historical treasures as premier tourist attractions, thereby catalyzing economic prosperity within the region.

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