



Research Paper

Sacred Forms in Stone: The Jain Sculptural Heritage of Ayodhya – Iconography, Style, and Cultural Context

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Abstract

Ayodhya is famous in Indian cultural memory as an ancient and sacred city, but its significance in the history of Jain art has been relatively little studied. According to Jain tradition, Ayodhya is the birthplace of five Tirthankaras, hence it has special religious significance in Jainism. From the Gupta period onwards Ayodhya developed as an important center of Jain religious activities, patronage and sculpture. The objective of the presented research is to study the Jain sculpture of Ayodhya. In this, mainly the form of the sculptures, their identity, style and their cultural context will be considered. Tirthankaras, Yakshas and other symbols associated with them will be studied on the basis of sculptures preserved in the State Museum, Jain temples and remains recovered from archaeological sites. In addition, an attempt will also be made to understand the measurements of fingers, body proportions and prescribed forms related to the making of sculptures in the Jain classical tradition.

In this research the stylistic evolution of Jain sculpture of Ayodhya will also be seen. The evolution from the simplicity, balance and grace seen in Gupta period sculptures to the more ornate and elaborate forms seen in Pratihara and late medieval sculptures will be studied. The Jain sculptures of Ayodhya will also be compared with the Jain sculptures of major art centers like Mathura, Deogarh and Khajuraho. Through this comparison an attempt will be made to understand what artistic features were common in different regions and what were the distinctive features of the sculpture of Ayodhya. The research will not be limited only to the external appearance and symbols of the statues but will also keep in mind the social, political and religious circumstances of that time. In particular it will be looked at which people or groups were involved in the creation and preservation of Jain sculptures, how the identity of the Jain community was formed and what were the circumstances of cooperation, co-existence and differences between different religious communities in North India.

By focusing on Jain sculptures and other remains of Ayodhya, this research will attempt to more clearly highlight this neglected area in Indian art history. These stone idols will not be seen merely as objects of worship but will also be seen as important evidence of religious beliefs, social identity and cultural memories of their time. Thus, the study of Jain sculpture of Ayodhya will help in understanding that on the one hand the art here was connected to the broader tradition of Indian Jain¹ art, while on the other hand it also expressed Ayodhya's own local religious and cultural identity.

¹ The Jain idols are males depicted in both sitting and standing postures. The tirthankaras are represented either Padmasana (seated in yoga posture) or standing in the Kayotsarga posture. Parshvanatha statues are usually depicted with a snake crown on head, Bahubali statues are usually depicted covered with creepers. However, there are a few differences in Digambara and Śvetāmbara depiction of idols. Digambara images are naked without any beautification whereas Śvetāmbara ones are clothed and decorated with temporary ornaments. (Wikipedia n.d.)

I. Introduction and historical background of Jainism in Ayodhya



The Jain religious history of Ayodhya holds special importance for understanding the multi-layered development of Indian religious traditions. The Jain tradition views Ayodhya not only as an ancient city but also as a major sacred area associated with the Tirthankara tradition. Jain literature contains names like "Vineeta" and "Ikshvakubhumi" and according to Jain tradition, the first Tirthankara, Rishabhanatha or Adinath, belonging to the Ikshvaku lineage, was born in Ayodhya. Apart from this, Ayodhya is also considered to be the birthplace of the second Tirthankara Ajitnath, fourth Tirthankara Abhinandannath, fifth Tirthankara Sumatinath and fourteenth Tirthankara Anantnath. Thus, as the birthplace of the five Tirthankaras, Ayodhya holds a very special place in Jain religious memory. Although these birthplaces and ancient events cannot be compared with modern historical evidence, Jain Agamic and later pilgrimage traditions clearly demonstrate that the sanctity of Ayodhya has been a long-standing and continuous presence within Jain religious geography. Modern research has also identified Ayodhya as a religious city where Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain traditions co-existed at various periods. Recent studies based on archaeological, literary and art-historical evidence have specifically pointed out that understanding the history of Ayodhya only through a religious tradition limits its true cultural identity. Religious texts as well as archaeological material are important in studying the connection of Jainism with Ayodhya or ancient Saketa. Researchers have viewed early Jain sculptures and remains recovered from the Ayodhya region as physical signs of Jain presence in the region, although the available archaeological material is not yet extensive enough to systematically describe each phase of the Jain community in ancient Ayodhya. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain a distinction between religious tradition and historical evidence while studying the Jain history of Ayodhya. Jain literature associates Ayodhya with the memory of the Tirthankaras and the Ikshvaku dynasty, while historical studies attempt to understand the presence of the Jain community within the evolving urban and religious landscape of Saket-Ayodhya. The development of Jain temples and pilgrimage sites in Ayodhya in later times embodied this religious memory and even today, the presence of Jainism is visible in the sacred landscape of the city. Therefore, the Jain history of Ayodhya is not limited to the religious belief of being the birthplace of the five Tirthankaras, but also encompasses the history of memory, pilgrimage traditions, religious geography and cultural heritage built over time. Studying the Jain tradition of Ayodhya helps us understand that the city has historically been a common center of faith and cultural activities for many religious communities.

Terracotta figure of Jain ascetic:

Sculpture of Jain monk recovered from Ayodhya. This sculpture was recovered from the excavations conducted at Hanumangarhi by Professor BB Lal in 1976, and was made of brown terracotta and dated to the 4th century BC. The sculpture is in extremely damaged form. This is a sculpture of a Digambara Jain, which has a lot of similarity with Indus art and primitivism.

There is no emotion on the sculpture, and it is carved only in bust form with physical musculature. Despite excessive erosion, some features are clearly present which shows that it is the sculpture of a Jain monk. This sculpture may be from the reign of Chandragupta Maurya because Jain sculptures had started being made at that time.

Rishabhanatha - Nirmohi Akhara -



Rishabhanatha - Nirmohi Akhara

At the beginning of the present era, Lord Rishabhdev was born in Ayodhya and transformed the tradition of religion. According to mythological beliefs, the history of Ayodhya is timeless and infinite. Because according to Jain beliefs, Ayodhya is the eternal birthplace of infinite Tirthankaras and will remain the birthplace of infinite Tirthankaras in the future. It is clearly proved that Ayodhya has been the center of Jainism since ancient times, as is evident from the evidence of Jain sculpture found from the Maurya period which I have mentioned in the Maurya sculpture section.

This sculpture depicts the highest preaching of Jainism or the physical form of the first Tirthankara Rishabhdev. His association with Ayodhya makes it a holy city for Jains as is believed for the birth of Ram in Hinduism. He is considered to be the spiritual successor of Lord Samprati, the last Tirthankara of the Kalachakra. According to mythological beliefs, he was born to King Nabhi and Queen Maru Devi of Ayodhya. In this sculpture, Shrivatsa is not marked on his chest. It is possible that this tradition had not yet developed, as the symbol of Shrivatsa appears on Jain sculptures after the Gupta period.

In this sculpture Rishabhdev has been depicted in a meditative sitting posture as opposed to Kayotsarga posture and with Buddhist matted locks as opposed to long locks of hair. Therefore, this sculpture seems to tarnish the classical features of Jain and Buddha sculptures. It clearly shares the stylistic features of the Jain sculpture of Kankali Tila of Mathura. Among the figures carved in the back slab of the entire sculpture, two garland-bearing Gandharvas and two sages engaged in meditation or two chavanr dhaarinee Yakshas have been carved on either side of Rishabhdev. Apart from this, the small figures made near his feet on both sides are probably the sculptures of his Yaksha Gomukh and Yakshi Chakraeshwari whose stylistic features have faded and are difficult to identify.

The Hellenic influence is clearly visible in the hair design of all the figures. The figure has disappeared from the broken umbrella made on top of Adinath's head. The entire sculpture slab continues the stylistic features of the Mathura Buddha sculptures of the then Gupta period, there is sophistication in the delicate modeling of the carving and the plasticity appears soft. Like the Buddha sculptures, the meditative eyes, the smiling face, the body posture is very stable. The structure of some of the figures can still be seen clearly in Shiva broken Aasana.

Sculpture of Dharmanatha (Ratnapuri)–

The 15th Tirthankara of Jainism was born in the Ikshvaku dynasty to King Bhanuraja and Queen Shuvratrani at Ratnapuri. The sculpture is currently installed in the sanctum sanctorum of the newly built Jain temple at Ratnapuri, earlier it was installed in the ancient temple of Jainism here. The sculpture has a rare type of arrangement of steady and well-proportioned body, giving him supernatural, natural and extraordinary power. The Shrivatsa inscribed on the chest depicts the highest knowledge from the heart of the Tirthankara. The entire sculpture slab is carved with figures of Dharmanatha's Ganas, Yakshas, Yakshinis and attendants and rows of elephants and lions carrying the weight of his seat. Despite the abundance of figures in the background, the main



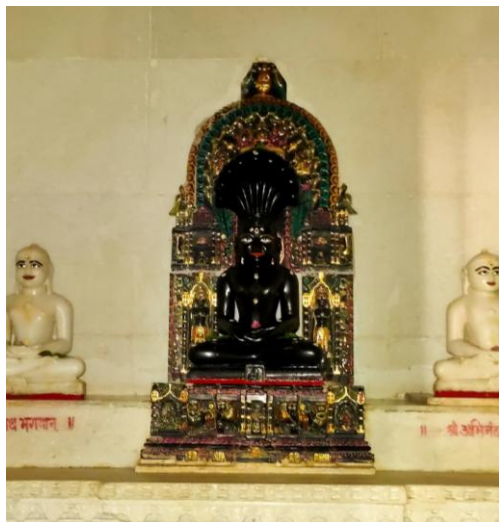
Sculpture of Dharmanatha

sculpture stands out completely, the open captivating 'kanchakshu' of the Lord looks at the entire world.

According to the Shvetambara sect, the open outer eyes allow him to be alive. Though the 'lachans'² on the Jain sculpture were created in the seventh century. This sculpture is an Ashta-Pratiharya or Parikaara sculpture in which Dharmanath was presented to show one of his Parikaar while preaching in Samavsaran and his assistant deities along with Ashtamaha-Pratiharya. In the entire Parikaar, 'Chamardhari' deity, Dundubhi-Gods and Goddesses playing Veena and conch, Demi-Deities holding garlands or riding elephants have been depicted.

Sculpture of Parshvanatha (Ratnapuri) —

This image of Parshvanatha, made in about seventh-eighth century, is of black polished granite stone with a Shesha hood stamped on his head and a raised cobra under his feet. The Shrivatsa on the chest of the Jina is carved in high relief, which is a characteristic of Parshvanatha images. The many-headed 'Shesha' spread like an umbrella on the head covers the head of the Tirthankara. His Yaksha Dharnendra and Yakshi Padmavati are carved beside him. Parshvanatha is carved sitting cross-legged in a meditative pose with open eyes. His entourage is carved with other Ganas, deities, demi-gods, Yakshas and animals besides Ashoka trees. Small brackets hold fly whisk holders, protective Yaksha pairs as a symbol of guardian status. This image must have been made during the period of both royal and merchant patronage.



The carving is soft yet rigid, the body is stable. The fine carving on the entire slab shows compliance with mathematical principles. The sculpture shows similarities with Mathura sculpture of Gupta period, as it shares features with the sculptures found from Kankalitila. Rajasthani and Gujarati sculpture features are also included to some extent. This sculpture, which advocates the post-Gupta style, shows some artificiality due to the amazing fine carving. Two other Jain sculptures next to them, Sambhavnath and Abhinandannath, are made in a meditative pose with folded hands, which seems to be the sculpture of Sambhavnath.

Sculpture of Parshvanatha (Ratnapuri)

Sculpture of Adinath (Ratnapuri) –



² Note - After the Gupta era, after 650 AD, the 'Laanchhans' of 24 Tirthankaras were developed, which gave a new shape and identity to the scu. Tirthankaras were shown with attendants, Yakshas, Yakshinis, Vidyadhars, Trichhatras on their background platforms, which are called Parikaars. The design of their hair is called "Unnat Mastaka Sikha". The influence of Western Chalukya sculpture can be clearly felt on the sculpture.

Sculpture of Adinath (Ratnapuri)

Jina Adinath is depicted as representing divine peace after severe penance on the path to liberation. His open eyes are full of world welfare or compassion. The figure follows the classical tradition, with broad shoulders and slightly expanded chest. The figure is angular and the body represents internal breath, slim waist and well built, the sculptor of Ayodhya has shown skill in showing details of muscles on the stomach.

The head has 'Jataas' like the Mathura Buddhist sculptures of the Gupta period. This sculpture advocates the image of Shvetambara Cult. The back slab of the sculpture has hard angular carvings of their Yakshas, Yakshinis, deities, elephants and lions. The sculptor has shown dramatic in the representational language of sculpture in expressing his message. This codified sculpture shows connection with the 5th century Jain or Buddhist sculptures of Gujarat or Rajasthan. The figure is sitting on a throne of elephants with its fly whisk holders and garland holders in its beautiful and animated posture, 'Laanchhans' bull is carved in relief in the slab of the throne.

Arishtanemi or Neminatha and Ambika –



The figures are in classic meditative pose, with animated effect, dramatic and without proportion. This piece depicts the Yakshini Ambika, the protector goddess of Tirthankara Neminatha, who is also shown meditating under a tree or at the top of a tree with Neminatha also in a meditative pose. Ambika is shown holding a child and a trident in both hands.

The facial expression and posture is very fearful, with two sons Priyankar and Shubhankar. Near Ambika's feet is probably a lion or Neminath's Yaksha Gomadh Yaksha. These figures with very dwarf and dramatic postures seem to be inspired by the local folk traditions of Ayodhya. Ambika's heavy body shape depicts motherhood, fertility. Apart from this, she is depicted as a nurturing and protecting goddess. Made of black blue stone, this sculpture was made around the 12th century during the Gahadavala reign.

Rishabhanatha 12th century–



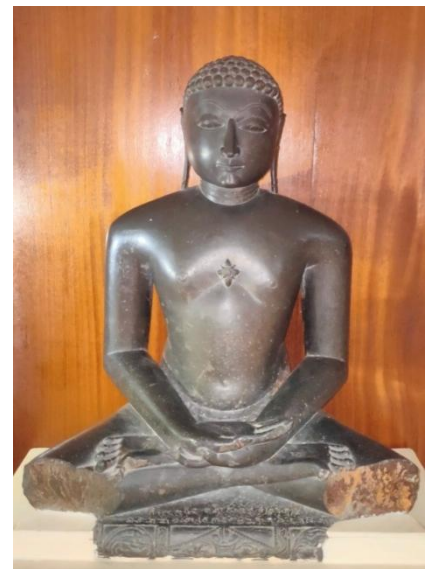
Rishabhanatha 12th century

The present sculpture preserved in the museum of Ayodhya is a representation of Rishabhanatha or Adinatha, the first Tirthankara of Jainism, carved out of light red sandstone. He is known as the founder of the Ikshvaku dynasty. His importance is equally prevalent in both Hindus and Jains, as he is seen as a descendant of Rama. He is identified with his symbols like bull, Nyagrodha tree, Gomukh Yaksha and Chakreshwari Yakshi, but the sculpture is broken near the feet and the symbols made there have disappeared. In the sculpture, Trishabhadeva is shown standing in a meditative posture in lotus position or Kayotsarga mudra, which is his most accepted mudra. His long hair strands fall on his shoulders, which is a distinctive feature of his sculptures. Broad shoulders, Ajanbahu hand posture, face shows a sense of meditative peace and humility. The lips are made with a mysterious smile.

The artificiality and angularity in the carving is clearly seen in the Gahadavala sculptures but the Gurjar Pratihara features are still intact. On both the upper sides of the sculpture are standing figures of Chauri or fly whisk holders and above them two divine garland bearers worshipping them and a divine drummer who was carved on the umbrella is half broken. The sculpture clearly borrows features from the styles of Buddhist sculptures of Mathura or Sarnath of Gupta period. The soft and rounded carving is a clear expression of the original hero figure and successfully reflects the spiritual power on the compound. There is a three-linear umbrella above the head. Yakshas and Yakshinis were associated with one each of the 24 Jinas to satisfy the need and aspirations of worshippers for material possessions. The flowing hair postures share similarities with the sculptures found from Mathura and Chausa and the Jain sculptures found from Kankali district and to some extent also show connection with the sculpture of the Parmaras.

Jain Shvetambara Tirthankara –

The ideological basis of the path followed by 24 liberated souls in Jainism to attain the advanced state. The Pan-Indian ideal of yogic asceticism, who explored many forms of knowledge to acquire spiritual knowledge. This physical image is of a Jain Tirthankara, possibly Mahavira, who is a Shvetambara sect image. Made of black granite, this image was made in the 12th century. Physical features such as a realistic round face, dramatic nose, eyes and lips are created, but still the calm inward looking eyes represent the deep knowledge of the Tirthankara. The anatomy and carving have angularity and stillness, which is characteristic of later Gahadavala sculptures. The gesture of hands joined in a meditative pose symbolizes fearlessness, detachment and spiritual knowledge.



The Tirthankara dressed in a simple loincloth emphasizes the Shvetambara sect's renunciation of materialism. This Ayodhya sculpture invites one to seek timeless wisdom within oneself beyond the cycle of birth and death. The materialized or concrete representation of "the soul does not know birth or death" is portrayed in this Jain sculpture of Ayodhya. A major feature of Hindu sculpture is the complete absence of 'alamakara', but Jains consider this to be contrary to the vow of renunciation. The short curly hair is an anomaly, as he imitates the Buddhist tradition of short curly hair left after cutting off hair with a sword rather than the mandatory Jain practice of plucking out one's hair. The extended ear lobe represents a high person or lineage and shows that all Jinas were of high lineage. There is some inscription in ancient script near the feet and some ornamentation has also been created below.

Parshvanatha Sculpture:

This sculpture of Parshvanatha, depicted in a meditative pose with a sense of victory, is seated on a supported seat, with inscriptions on it along with the marking of his insignia snake. The shiny surface has a roundness yet angularity. The pose is very dramatic or animated and the shape of the feet is disproportionate to the head. This image, representing the Svetambara sect, is depicted with open eyes, a blank face and a Shrivatsa raised in the middle of the chest.



Parshvanatha Sculpture

They are surrounded by Chandraprabhu on one side and Rishabhdeva on the other, who are comparatively smaller. The sculptures share similar stylistic features. The facial features are asymmetrical and angular. All the Jinas are depicted with broad chests, narrow bellies and bare figure. Near the feet of Chandraprabhu are reliefs of his symbol, the moon, and near the feet of Rishabhdeva are reliefs of a bull.

Mahavira in black Granites and Two other Jinas:



This black granite sculpture represents the early phase of the late medieval period. This image is probably of Mahavir Swami, who is carved in shiny black granite. There are chains of round hair on the head. He is made in a meditative posture on a throne of rectangular plaque, on which an inscription is engraved in ancient script. The facial expressions show extreme stiffness or artificiality and the body appears disproportionate.

Adinatha, Bharata and Bahubali:



Adinatha, Bharata and Bahubali

This image depicts Adinatha with his two sons Bharata Chakravarti and Bahubali. The sculptures are shown standing in Kayotsarga mudra. The carving is very delicate. There is less artificiality as compared to other sculptures. All three are in Dhyana mudra and the images also have realism. The sculptures share the same features of calm and hair texture like the Buddha sculptures. Strong heavy body structure, broad chest, round belly, no ornaments and delicate fingers and toes. In the image of Bahubali, more emphasis has been given to the motionless stance. Apart from entangling creepers in his feet, the sculptor has also carved creepers of leaves on his thighs and arms. Adinatha is depicted with his bull and all the Tirthankaras have a Srivatsa in the middle of their chests. A special kind of peace and satisfaction is visible in the faces, their arms are hanging down. Overall, these sculptures share the stylistic features of the period immediately after the 12th century.

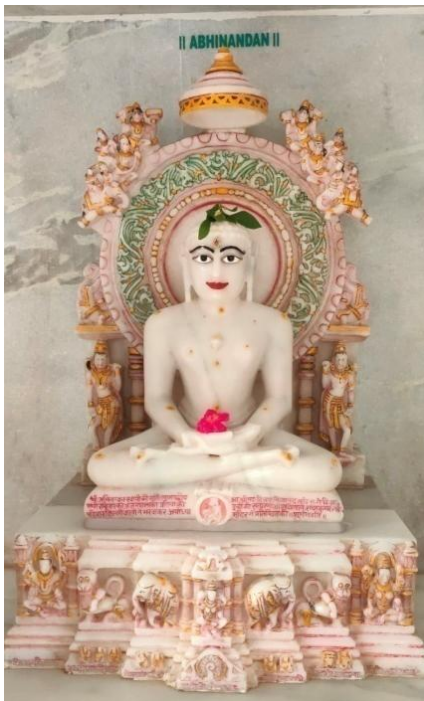
These Jain sculptures are installed in the Jain temple of Ayodhya, which are mostly made of white marble and have the stylistic features of Rajasthani Jain sculptures. Among them, the sculptures of Bhagwan Sumatinath, Abhinandannath and Rishabhanatha are more.



Sumatinath is seated on a high throne with open eyes in a meditative posture, in which his Yaksha Tumburu (Purushadutta) Mahakal Yakshi and his symbol heron (crane) are carved in between. Apart from this, the lower slab of the throne has figures of elephants and lions and writings engraved in Devanagari script. Behind, near the decorated round halo, deities wearing garlands and riding elephants are carved.

The figures appear rigid and stable. On both sides of them, fly whisk holders are shown standing in animated postures. Like other Jain sculptures, round carvings are made, yet the body appears stiff. Broad chest, delicate fingers, thin stomach and waist have been made. From the aesthetic point of view, there is some degree of plasticity or softness, but the back slab has an abundance of cumbersome ornamentation.

Abhinandan Nath:



Abhinandan Nath



Sumatinath

A Jain temple in Ayodhya is a late 17th century structure adorned with high relief ornaments, unique in its complexity and advocates the Shvetambara cult.

Abhinandan Nath was also born in Ayodhya in the Ikshvaku clan. His throne depicts the monkey Yakshaswara and the Nayaka Yaksha Vajrasrinkala and Kalika Yakshi. The sculptures show signs of realism or artificiality and signs of decline. Apart from this, the sculptures of other Jain Tirthankaras have also been carved with their symbols, which include modernity and realism, or there is a lot of ornamentation and also looks artificial, yet the

figures are beautiful. Other Jain sculptures are made in Samavasaran form or Sarvatobhadra avatar, in which the Tirthankaras are shown preaching in all four directions. All share similar stylistic features, which can be distinguished only according to their symbols.



Parsvanatha Samvasaaran Pratima

Jain sculpture of Ayodhya after the twelfth century: stylistic change, external influence and modern development.

The sculpture of the last phase of Ayodhya (late medieval period) comes after the sculpture of the 12th century, after which signs of decline in the sculptures are visible. More realism started being included in the sculptures, and Jain sculptures were given more decorative features than Hindu sculptures. The complexity of carving in Hindu sculptures started to diminish, and the effect of roundness in the carving started disappearing; angularity started appearing in the structure. Due to the inclusion of features of external influences, there was a difference in the creation of sculptures, and local sculptors started abandoning the interests of ancient traditions in making sculptures. The dedicated expressions that were present on the sculptures, which were characteristic of sculptures, now started disappearing. Dramaticism clearly started being included in the sculptures of Ayodhya after the 12th century. Physical disproportion, lack of expression, and haste started appearing, apart from this, the dominance of architectural elements started appearing. After this came the Mughal period, from where the history of sculpture of Ayodhya started ending, the influence of Mughal, Iranian, and local folk life started appearing on the sculptures that were made. During the period of the British and local kings, architecture and sculpture started appearing in a combined form on which the characteristics of Banaras sculpture or Bengal architecture are visible. Now the sculptures were given clothes and ornaments according to the society of Ayodhya at that time. The combination of British influence is the characteristic of the sculpture of the last phase of Ayodhya.

Most of the Jain sculptures in Ayodhya's Jain temples date from the 12th century to the modern period. Of these, the early 13th century sculptures have notable stylistic features and also borrow some similarities with their predecessors.

II. Conclusion

From the study of this research it became clear that the Jain sculpture of Ayodhya is an important, but relatively less discussed heritage of Indian Jain art. The study of available sculptures, archaeological remains, images preserved in temples and museums shows that the Jain religious and artistic tradition in Ayodhya continued to develop in different historical periods. In the Jain tradition, the religious prestige of Ayodhya as the birthplace of the five Tirthankaras gave the city special significance. Study of the sculptures reveals the use of prescribed forms, body proportions and symbols of the Jain classical tradition in the creation of sculptures of Tirthankaras, Yaksha-Yakshis and other subsidiary deities. Also, due to local artists and regional artistic conditions, some special forms also developed in these sculptures. The sculptures of the Gupta period show spontaneity, calmness, balanced proportions and simplicity of the body, while the sculptures of the Pratihara and post-medieval periods clearly show an increase in ornamentation, ornaments and decorative elements. Comparison with major Jain art centers such as Mathura, Deogarh and Khajuraho shows that Jain sculpture of Ayodhya, on the one hand, was linked to the broader Indian Jain artistic tradition, while on the other hand it also retained its local characteristics. Research also shows that these sculptures cannot be seen merely as idols of religious worship, but also express the social, religious and cultural conditions of their times. Religious communities, donors and local patronage may have played an important role in their construction and preservation. The presence of Jain sculpture in a multi-religious city like Ayodhya also indicates that different

religious traditions developed within the same cultural region with their own pilgrimage sites, art and religious identity. Therefore, the study of Jain sculptures of Ayodhya is not limited to the study of local art tradition in Indian art history, but is an important means of understanding the relationship between Jainism, sculpture, religious memory and cultural identity in North India. Ultimately this research concludes that the Jain sculpture of Ayodhya deserves a more serious place in the broader history of Indian Jain art, as the sculptures preserved and recovered here provide important evidence for understanding the Jain religious heritage of this ancient city and its multilayered cultural history.

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