Jain Temple Fragments



Jain temple fragment depicting musician

"*Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Jain temple architecture is the stone carving. Wherever one looks, be it pillars, ceilings, walls and floors, Jain temples go to extremes when it comes to adornment*"

The Jain religion was established in India during the 9th to 6th centuries BCE, but unlike Buddhism and Hinduism, did not spread to other countries. Jains believe that an immortal and indestructible Jiva or soul resides within every living entity. Consequently, non-violence, non-materialism and meditation are at the heart of their spiritual practice.



Jain temple fragment depicting dancer

As one would expect from an ancient religion, Jain mythology and cosmology are highly developed and well documented by scholars and artisans of the tradition. Compared to the number of Hindu temples in India, Jain ones are few and spaced out. An important aspect to be noted is that while Hindus and Buddhists built temples, Jains built temple-cities on hills. To put it in their own words, they "ornamented these holy hills with a crown of eternal Arhat chaityas (tabernacles of saints) shining with the splendor of jewels." The Jains used to tear down their older, decaying temples and build new ones at the same sites. Jain temples are the richest temples in the world, surpassing even Mughal buildings in terms of grandeur and material wealth. For example, the Taj Mahal was built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Jain temple architecture is the stone carving. Wherever one looks, be it pillars, ceilings, walls and floors, Jain temples go to extremes when it comes to adornment. Temple sculpture depicts Jain mythology, saints, gods and goddesses, monks, devotees, and traditional religious motifs. They all find their way into a spectacular rendezvous of marble and rock. Each nook and corner of Jain temples are so diligently carved that it’s a wonder that the edifice was created out of plain stone. Carving is perhaps not the right word for Jain temples – chiseling would be more appropriate. Simply put, there is not an inch where one can place his hand and not encounter a spectacular frieze.

These particular stone figures depict temple musicians. They would have decorated the outside frieze of the temple, and been repainted year after year as the elements and weather continually wore away the layers of paint. They are beautiful examples of Jain craftsmanship, and are each approximately 200 years old. They were salvaged from a temple destroyed during the great Gujarat earthquake in 2001.