



## ANCIENT ASIA

Vol. 15, 2024, pp. 135-150  
© ARF India

URL: <https://ancient-asia-journal.com>  
<https://doi.org/10.47509/AA.2024.v15i.08>

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License

# A Unique Partially Rock-cut and Partially Structural Jain cave temple: Cave no. 10 at Muktagiri

## Oshin Bamb

Research Fellow, Bhagwan Shitalnath Chair for Jain Archaeology, Department of AIHC and Archaeology, Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute (Deemed to be University), Pune. E-mail: [oshinbamb@gmail.com](mailto:oshinbamb@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Jainism in Vidarbha, especially of the medieval period, has been through a lot of continuity and transformations, in terms of rituals, sacred space, monastic order, and even architecture. The rise of pilgrimage centers, which the people of Vidarbha can fulfill their religious needs from, is yet another important feature. The landscape of the region was well explored and utilized to best suit the requirements for claiming the sacred nature for such tīrthas. Muktagiri, an important tīrthakṣetra, mentioned in the lines of Nirvānakāṇḍa, grew on to become a very famous pilgrimage center not just for Vidarbha, but for Jains coming from all parts of the country. The landscape and scenic beauty were very well used to make the best place for religious and spiritual endeavors. This article describes the unique partially rock-cut and partially structural cave temple no. 10 at Muktagiri, which is supposed to be the starting point of architectural activity at this place. Such early experiments at the site were still well-thought-out and planned before execution, and this has been further substantiated by the description of this cave temple in this article by the present author.

**Keywords:** Jainism, Cave-temple, partially rock-cut, Muktagiri, pilgrimage, landscape

Published : 30 June 2024

### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Oshin Bamb (2024). A Unique Partially Rock-cut and Partially Structural Jain cave temple: Cave no. 10 at Muktagiri. *Ancient Asia*, 15: 1, pp. 135-150. <https://doi.org/10.47509/AA.2023.v15i01.08>

## Introduction

Muktagiri (Mendhagiri), a famous Jain pilgrimage center, dedicated to the Digambar (sky-clad) sect of Jainism, is located in the Bhainsdehi Tehsil of Betul District in the present state of Madhya Pradesh. Although today it forms a part of Madhya Pradesh state, it was once an integral part of the Vidarbha

region in ancient times, up to a time when Central Provinces and Berar were merged with the state of Maharashtra on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1960. Muktagiri is located 7 km north of Kharpi in Amaravati District and is at a distance of a mere 3.5 km from the present-day Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh border. The picturesque location of this group of hill temples at Muktagiri, amid a dense forest covering the Satpuda mountain ranges, inlaid by the flow of various pristine waterfalls, streams, and rivulets, was chosen by the Jain followers for the creation of *Bāvan Jinālaya* i.e., a group of 52 Jain temples (figure 1). A variety of flora and fauna adorn the natural landscape of this place, which became more famous for its sacred and cultural importance amongst the followers of Jainism, especially in the medieval period.

Though the temple-building activity here dates to the medieval and late medieval periods, the site is termed as a place of importance since a much earlier time. The 16<sup>th</sup> stanza of the *Nirvāṇakāṇḍa*, a Prākṛit work written by Ācārya Kundakunda (dated to the early centuries of the common era, there are debates amongst scholars regarding his fixed date), mentions Mendhagiri in the following words:

“*Accalapuravanayare īsāṇabhāye meṇḍhagirīsihare, āhuyakoḍiyo ṇivvaṇagayā ṇamo tesim.*” It literally translates as-



Figure 1: Muktagiri general view

*To the north-east is Achalpur, where lies the mountain Mendhāgiri. We/I bow to the three and a half koṭī Mūnis who attained liberation from here.*

Thus, this place had received importance as the place where numerous monks attained salvation or *mokṣa*. It became renowned as a *Siddha Kṣetra* or *Nirvāṇa Bhūmī* (because many revered monks attained *mokṣa* from here), and also as an *Atiśay Kṣetra* (because many mystic and miraculous incidences are reported to have happened and are still happening as per the people’s beliefs).

## Previous Research and Historiography

As such no systematic and exclusive study has been undertaken with regards to this site. However, few scholars have noted the presence of this site in a larger frame of their comprehensive works. James Fergusson (1876) has briefly described the geographical setting in which this sacred landscape of Muktagiri was created. R. V. Russell (1907) in the Central Provinces District Gazetteers of Betul District has mentioned this site as a medieval pilgrimage center of the Jain faith. It also gives a basic introduction to the architecture of the temples existing here. Hiralal (1932) in his Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar has very briefly given a rough time frame for the inscriptions present at Muktagiri. Balbhadra Jain (1978) while locating the multiple Digambara Jain pilgrimage centers throughout India in various comprehensive volumes, has also described the religious and sectarian importance of this site and has also mentioned important stories and narratives that were woven to substantiate the sacred and serene nature of this site. Viraj Shah (2008) has worked extensively on the Jain Rock-Cut Caves of Western India, to understand the development of cave architecture concerning Jainism. As she has dealt with a different region than the one in which Muktagiri is located, she has not described this site but her research models so implemented during her study prove useful while dealing with sites such as Muktagiri. Pranoti Meghal (2018) has made an attempt to understand the development of Jain architecture in Maharashtra and within that has mentioned Muktagiri along with several other Jain sites as examples of the evolving architectural style being put to use by the Jains. Manisha Patil (2003) in her unpublished thesis on Illustrated Manuscripts and Paintings from Digambar Jain Bhandaras of Vidarbha has described how the mobility of Bhaṭṭāarakas had importance concerning the consecration and installation of images and temples at the site of Muktagiri. These researches have briefly noted the presence of this site but its importance and development as an individual centre has not been focused upon. This paper has attempted to understand the landscape and its role behind the making of Muktagiri as a sacred pilgrimage site for the Jains.

## Reasons Behind its Various Names

It is believed that the *samavaśaraṇa* or the gathering of the realm of *dharma* of the tenth *Tīrthānkara Bhagwāna Śīṭalanātha* had reached till this place. At that time, a downpour of pearls or *moti* started happening. Thus, the name Muktagiri came into vogue. A saying famous in the region related to this goes like- *Muktāgiri par Muktā Barse, Śīṭalanāth kā ḍerā*. Another story as per the tradition goes like this- Thousand years ago, a ram (*meṇḍhā*) fell near the waterfall where a Jain monk was practicing meditation near cave no. 10. The monk whispered the holy *Ṇamokār Mantra* in his ears and after his death, the ram attained *devagati*. From that day onwards, this place was named as Meṇḍhagiri (Russell 1907: 41-42, 248-249), the name which also appears in the *Nirvāṇakāṇḍa*, as mentioned above.

## A General History and Description

The tradition gives the farthest antiquity of 2500 years to Cave no. 10 at Muktagiri. It claims that the images inside this cave were installed by Magadhan King Bimbisāra. This of course seems to be a mere legend, but is a common way of the Jain followers to ascribe great antiquity and dating to images and temples, when these things are not known from elsewhere. Most of the temples at Muktagiri have a large amount of influence from Indo-Islamic architecture and do not follow any prescribed classical temple architectural model. The most important of these temples is the Temple no. 26, where the image of *Mūlanāyaka Pārśvanātha*, the 23<sup>rd</sup> *tīrthānkara* is enshrined (figure 2). The central image of Pārśvanātha, approximately 4 feet high, carved in black basalt, has seven snake hoods, which is an important identity marker. It is seated in *padmāsana* and has a *parikara* with *aṣṭapratihārya* such as

*cavar, chatra, puspavṛuṣṭi, bhāmaṇḍala, divya dhvani, simhāsana, devadundubhī, Aśoka vṛkṣa.* At both corners of the pedestal of the image, respective *yakṣa* and *yakṣiṇi* are present, whose iconographic features have got destroyed and their bodies lie half buried due to renovation. The central image has *srīvatsa* on chest, elongated ears, half meditating eyes, *uṣṇiṣa*, etc. which are the iconographic characteristics of a great person or *mahāpuruṣiṃya lakṣaṇas*. The small *rathikas* of this image have depiction of two seated *Jinas* on both sides. Tradition says that this image was enshrined by King Śrīpāla of Achalpur when he came across this image near a lake. The finding and retrieval of Jain images buried underground when they appear in dreams and their installation by the person who saw that dream (who is usually himself either a *Kṣatriya* or a rich merchant or closely associated with them) is also a common phenomenon observed at many Jain sites.



Figure 2: The image of Mūlanāyaka Pārśvanātha, the 23<sup>rd</sup> tirthankara

At the central portion of back wall of this image, we have a *caubīsī* or depiction of 24 *Jinas*. Lay-people playing musical instruments like flute and trumpet and carrying flags can be seen depicted on the wall, as if they are on a pilgrimage to some *tīrtha kṣetra* or in a religious procession; this typical scene seems to be influenced by many medieval Hindu temples of Maharashtra. A set of 12 *Jinas* can also be seen on the other two portions of this back wall. The temple stands on four pillars and topped by a pyramidal *śikhara* with four small minaret-like structures at four corners. It is believed by the followers of Jainism that the area between cave no. 10 and Temple no. 26 receives rains of sandalwood and saffron (*kesar candan ki varṣā*) on *tithīs* like *Aṣṭami*, *Caturdaśī* and *Porṇimā*. This phenomenon

of miracle of the rain of such kind is common at any sacred Jain site or association with any monk of higher mystic capabilities.

The other temples are also built of masonry stone, with images (small and large) of *Jinas* installed in them. The inscriptions at some images mention Mūlasaṅgha Balātkāra Gaṇa, one of the important monastic orders within Digambar sect. The use of Indo-Islamic arches, very narrow and low heighted doors, minaret-like structures, etc. show the influence of medieval period Indo-Islamic architecture along with contemporary temple architecture prevalent in the region of Maharashtra. Apart from Cave no. 10, which we are going to discuss in details, Cave nos. 48 and 49 are partially rock-cut and partially structural and the latter is carved above the former. A narrow tunnel like maze leads to the enshrined images of Śāntinātha and Kunthunātha in Cave-temple no. 48, outside which we can see the *kṣetrapāla*. The cave-temple above this, i.e., Cave-temple no. 49 houses a *caubīsī* panel of a relatively recent date. But these two lack any iconographic or architectural specifications, have undergone renovation and are thus not being discussed in depth here.

The pilgrimage site of Muktagiri is distributed over a hill of Satpuda mountains. It is surrounded by a wide variety of deciduous flora and wild fauna. Apart from the large 50 feet waterfall near Cave-temple no. 10, there are many smaller waterfalls present here. Mountains as these have always been preferred by the *tīrthaṅkaras*, Jain monks and nuns and even the laity for their respective reasons of which Sammed Śikhar, Pālitānā, Girṇār, Gopācal, Mt. Abu are just few examples. This landscape adorned with natural beauty may have attracted the attention of Jains in the medieval period, who chose this place to be developed into a pilgrimage centre. The natural conditions were conducive for this particular choice. Importantly, this was the region of transition, which connected the Central India to the Deccan plateau. Trade routes may have passed from nearby areas like Achalpur, Burhanpur and a good population of mercantile Jain community may have settled in adjoining regions. This may have led to the pouring of donations which helped to support the monastic community at this place and aided the structural building activities too. Donating for the monks and for building temples is considered one of the most important ways to earn punya and lessen the *karma bandha* or shackles of *karma*. Thus, the place which was mentioned in *Nirvāṇakāṇḍa* as a place of liberation of monks was further developed into a place of pilgrimage for the Jains. These conditions of its earlier sacredness, availability of raw material in the form of stones, natural landscape, settlement of Jain mercantile community in nearby areas, development of trade may have all contributed into giving this place its present scope. Many Jain pilgrimage centres and Jain temples started to grow in the region of Vidarbha, not just in urban areas but also at important places with economic and political importance, smaller towns, villages, etc. during the medieval period (Patil 2003: 70-71). The seat of *Bhaṭṭāraka* at Karanja (Lad), which was quite active during this period, may have commanded great authority and facilitated the construction of these many temples and consecration of images as attested from the pedestal inscriptions of images enshrined in various Digambar Jain temples spread over the region of Vidarbha. Thus, we have the *Bhaṭṭārakas* visiting and consecrating images here at many instances. *Bhaṭṭāraka* Dharmabhuṣaṇa of the Balātkāra Gaṇa, who established the seat of this order at Karanja in *Samvat* 1575 (c.1518 CE), did so while he was on the pilgrimage to Muktagiri (Patil 2003: 70-71). *Bhaṭṭāraka* Gyānasāgara (around 16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> century CE), *Brahmacāri* Dhavji, disciple of *Bhaṭṭāraka* Surendrakirti of *Kāṣṭha Saṅgha* (17<sup>th</sup> century CE), Kavi Raghav have mentioned Muktagiri in their writings. The nearby Kharpi has a samadhi of *Bhaṭṭāraka* Padmanandi who had come for the pilgrimage to Muktagiri around 1819 CE, which tells us of the connection of this site with *Bhaṭṭāraka* seats till very recent times (Jain 1978: 319-330).

Now, we turn our attention to discuss the cave-temple no. 10 in details.

### Description of Cave-temple no. 10

At the right side of the beautiful grand waterfall, which flows for at least 6-8 months of the year, the solid rock of the hill was cut to form a cavity. This cavity was then inlaid with masonry stone blocks at the façade and the inside walls and pillars (figure 3). These blocks of various shapes were made to form a door, flanked by two windows at the front portion. At the inside, the masonry blocks were arranged to form a sacred space fronted by four pillars which are connected by arches (figure 4). These arches on the doors and windows are a common feature in all temples of Muktagiri. Like the other Jain caves at Māngī-Tuṅgī, Pāṭan, Gajapantha, Dhārāsiva and others, no decorative figures were carved and the whole focus was given to carving the images of *Jina* inside the cave. This made the Jain caves look simple yet serene and peaceful.



Figure 3: Masonry stone blocks at the façade



Figure 4: Inner view of the Cave-temple no. 10

The Cave-temple no. 10, facing east, has a squarish plan with its sides measuring 5.5 meters each (figure 5). The height of the cave-temple is 2.6 meters. There are four squarish masonry pillars at the centre, with each side measuring 0.35 meter each. This divides the space into nine quadrants. The dome supported by these pillars has a diameter of 1.6 meters. The façade, built with masonry stone blocks, topped by a medieval period arch, has a depiction of two lions above the door (figure 6). A seated *Jina* image with *chakra* is shown at the top of this pair of lions. There are four other *Jina* images at the façade. Two seated *Jina* images flank both sides of the door. Two smaller niches with medieval arch have floral motifs. On the left portion of the door, there is a pair of elephants anointing the seated *Jina* with holy water. On the top side of this, is another seated *Jina* and a floral motif. Left to these depictions, is a broken wall, which also has a seated *Jina* in a small niche and a floral motif. At the very top of this (now hardly visible due to a newly constructed tunnel, made for protection from falling boulders and landslides) is yet another seated *Jina* image with a floral motif below its foot. A similar kind of pattern of arrangement of images and motifs can be seen at the right side of the door, i.e., towards the waterfall. The only exception at the right side is that, the broken wall has an empty niche instead of a *Jina* image and floral motif. The door frame has a chequered pattern band going all around it.

The inner side of the cave has numerous *Jina* images. The left side wall is divided into three compartments by pilasters. These are also topped by medieval-period arches. The first niche has a

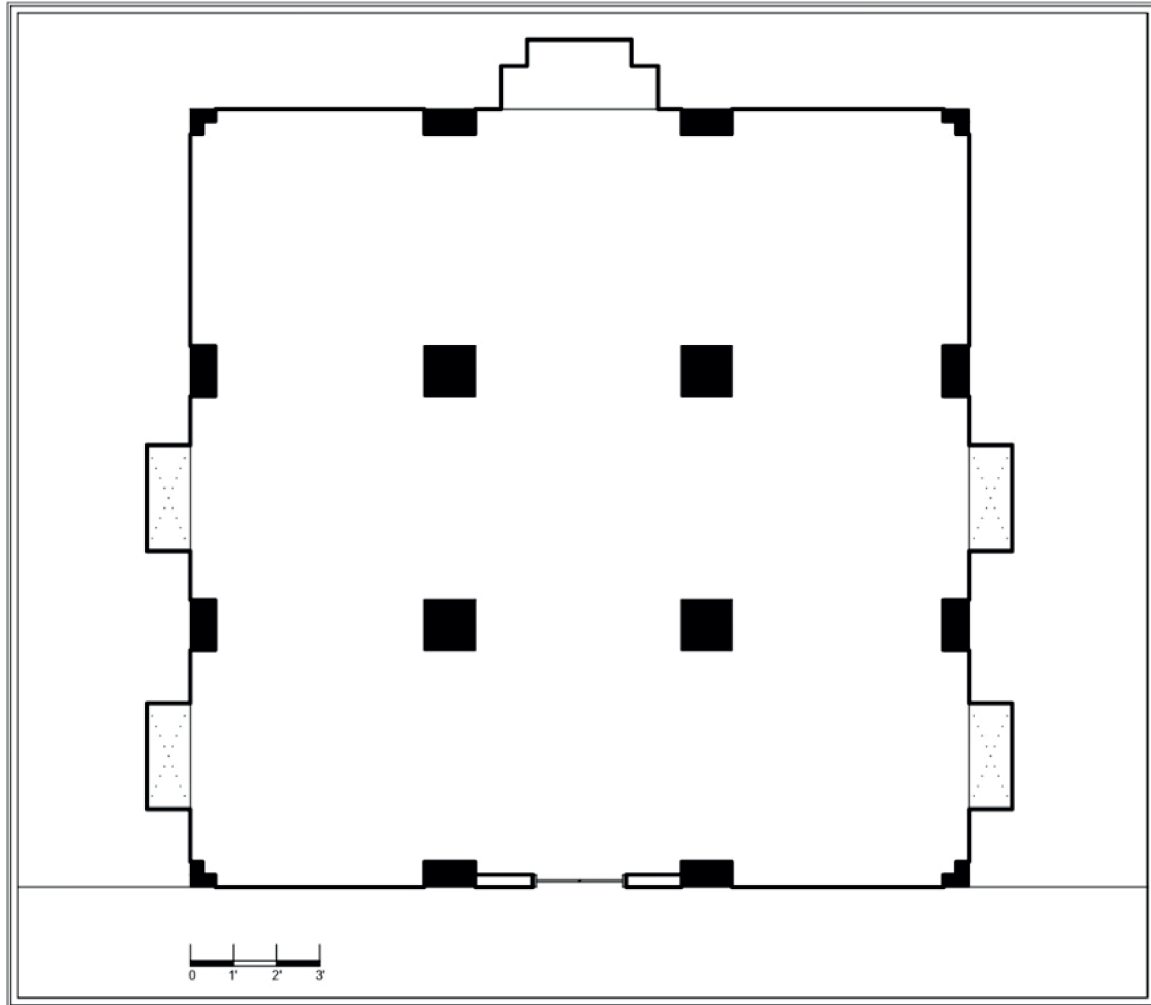


Figure 5: Ground plan of the Cave-temple no. 10

(Image courtesy: Purva Sanjay Parab)

fragment of stone which depicts a small sized seated *Jina* image and a floral motif (figure 7). The *Jina* images at this cave are devoid of any *lāñchana* or emblem through which specific identification could be done. The ears of all the *Jina* images are disproportionate. A *śrīvatsa* at the chest of the *Jinas* has been shown. At the ceiling, in front of this niche, a decorative floral motif has been carved. Over the pilaster is another seated *Jina* image. The niche next to this, in the central compartment of the left wall, has a larger sized beautiful *Jina* image seated in *padmāsana* (figure 8). The *chatra* can be seen over his head and a *śrīvatsa* can be noted on the chest. This image seems to be made with comparatively better proportions and was definitely meant for worship, rather than being a mere decorative element. A garland of flowers can be seen below his throne. The *uṣṇiṣa* on the head of this image can also be noted. The nose is pointed, eyebrows are like bows. The ears are shown elongated enough that they are touching the shoulders. The face seems to have a delightful and calm appearance, going very well with the philosophic connotations of Jainism. At the top, left and right of this above-mentioned *Jina* image are small sized seated *Jina* images. The ceiling of this quadrant also has a floral motif. The pilaster to the left of this compartment also has a small sized seated *Jina* image. At the third compartment, we have a set of fourteen small sized seated *Jina* images arranged in rows of five, five and four (figure 9). The ceiling at the front of this quadrant has a depiction of floral motif.



Figure 6: Details of the door



Figure 7: Small-sized seated *Jina* image in the first niche of the left wall)





Figure 8: Large-sized beautiful *Jina* image seated in the second niche of the left wall



Figure 9: Set of fourteen small-sized seated *Jina* images on the left wall

The back wall of the cave also has three compartments made by pilasters. The first one, in continuation of the earlier set of fourteen *Jina* images, also has a set of fourteen *Jina* images arranged in similar fashion. The ceiling at front of this quadrant, like the other quadrants, has a floral motif. The pilaster to the left of this quadrant has a small sized seated *Jina* image. The central compartment at the back wall has a big niche. This niche enshrines the image of *Pañcaparmeṣṭhī*, thus giving the cave its present name. The image is shown seated in *padmāsana* over a high pedestal (figure 10). It is unparalleled in proportion and beauty to all the *Jina* images present in this cave. The pedestal is shown decorated with floral designs. The *prabhāmaṇḍala* is shown having lotus petals. Two seated *Jina* and two *Jina* in *kāyotsarga/khaḍgāsana* are shown in the same image panel. A three-tiered *chatra* can be seen over the central image. The polish on this image made from black basalt, is worth noting. This niche is decorated with a band of geometrical patten. Both sides of this niche are flanked by *Jina* images in *kāyotsarga* posture. The top of this niche has a depiction of two elephants anointing a seated *Jina* image with holy waters. This depiction is not repeated anywhere inside the cave, thus establishing more importance for this central image. There are two very small niches at both sides of the niche of central *Jina* image, which were used for keeping lamps. The inside top portion of the central niche having the main image, has a beautiful floral decoration. The ceiling of this quadrant too, has a beautiful protruding floral motif. The pilaster to the left of this central compartment also has a seated *Jina* image, which is now much eroded.



Figure 10: The image in central niche at the back wall



Figure 11: Set of fourteen small sized seated *Jina* images on the back and right walls

Like the first compartment of back wall and the third compartment of the left wall, here too, the last compartment of back wall and the adjoining compartment of right wall have a set of fourteen small sized seated *Jina* images (figure 11). The pilaster to its left also has a seated *Jina* image like all other pilasters. A large amount of calcification layers can be seen on this image due to seepage of water, as the cave is adjacent to such a huge waterfall. The central compartment of the right wall, has a large sized beautiful *Jina* image, engaged in meditation (figure 12). Its features are similar to the image in the niche of central compartment of the left wall. But, the interesting part of this image is that, the only inscription present in this cave, is at the pedestal of this image. The left and right portions of the inscription have been completely eroded and only few letters of the central part are visible, but it does not make much sense without the other two portions. At the top, left and right of this niche are smaller niches having small sized seated *Jina* images. The pilaster to its left has a seated small sized *Jina* image. The last compartment of this wall has no image inside it. Instead, there is a pair of *carana* (footprints) of either a *tīrthankara* or a monk of higher spiritual order (figure 13). Probably, they are in memory of a monk, who may have meditated in this cave and attained liberation. This tradition of making *carana* of such revered monks has continued till present times.

In total, if we count the number of small *Jina* images carved on the walls (seated and standing), except the ones installed in the niches for worship, we get a total of 72 *Jina* images, which makes it a triple *caubīsī*; which means, at the *darśana* of this one cave, a devotee will pay reverence to the 24 *tīrthankaras* of three different time cycles, including the present one. Thus, we can infer from this that the iconographic scheme of this cave is not haphazard but is carefully planned and executed in the given medium of stone.



Figure 12: Image of a *Jina* with an inscription in the niche of the right wall



Figure 13: *Carana* at the niche of right wall



**Figure 14: Floral motif at the central dome**



**Figure 15: *Caupar* at the floor**

The central dome of this cave, formed by the four squarish pillars and interconnected by arches, has a star-like appearance if seen from below. There is a decorative protruding floral design at the centre of this dome, to which a bell has now been tied (figure 14). The dome has four concentric bands. The second is decorated with floral designs, while the third has geometric designs. The four corners made by these pillars have a beautiful decoration of protruding flowers. The influence of Indo-Islamic arches, floral and geometric motifs can very well be seen in this dome. At the floor of this dome, a *caupar* has been carved, probably at a later date (figure 15). Jains have a rich tradition of *Jñāna Caupar*, a game dedicated to understanding the liberation of soul through breaking of karmic bonds. Whether this specific *caupar* at Cave no. 10 was used for the exact same purpose is not sure, but at least this helps us understand the multiple functions which this cave-temple may have provided in varied periods of time. The four pillars have a small niche each, meant for keeping lamps. A band of floral design runs at the lower portion of all the walls. The echoing effect due to the nature of rock and squarish plan of the cave-temple, the sacred chants and the lights from the lamps would have made a perfect divine experience for the pilgrims visiting here.

### Discussion

The temples and images of Muktagiri lack the rich aesthetic appearance of the early medieval and medieval Jain temples of classical *Maru-Gurjara* architectural style (Fergusson 1876: 255-258). The small sized seated *Jina* images appear to be crude and not much finished. They do not have much details carved on them. In terms of *tāla-māna* proportions, they barely seem to fit in any textual prescription. Many of the essential characteristics of Jain images like *chatra* and *siṃhāsana* or *padmāsana* are missing. They were decorative in nature and were not under worship or have any ritualistic importance. However, the images occupying central niches, which are large sized and are meant for worship have much better aesthetic appeal. They are elaborate with depictions of *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas*. Their proportions are balanced. Nowhere can any *lāñchana* of the *tīrthankara* be seen in the images of this cave-temple. The reason behind this cannot be that they belong to early period, but the fact that the sculptor has not followed any prescribed rules of image making justifies the absence of such signs and symbols. None of the elements of classical temple plan are present in the temples of Muktagiri. In fact, there is no separate *garbhagrha* in any of the temples here, niches have been used to install images. A liberal use of medieval period domes, arches, floral motifs tell us of the amalgamation of Islamic architecture, which is visible not just on the Jain temples of Muktagiri but in all parts of this region during the medieval period.

The other Jain pilgrimage centers of the medieval period in the western and southern parts of India are much embellished and decorated, contrary to what we notice at Muktagiri. Amongst the Digambara Jains, sites having a similar landscape and importance comparable to that of Muktagiri in the contemporary medieval setting are few. When compared with sites such as Shravan Belagola in the south, located at a certain elevation on a hill, Muktagiri appears to be plain and simple in terms of artistic expression. More attention has been given at Muktagiri to make the devotees focus on the qualities of penance and austerities of the *Jina* rather than diverting their attention towards elaborate artistic features and designs, which we usually come across at the sites of the contemporary period. This specifically goes well with the landscape and geography of Muktagiri, where its natural environment has been utilized to the best to establish and provide a sacred place of pilgrimage to the laity hailing from Vidarbha and Central Provinces. Even at Karanja, where the Bhaṭṭāarakas had their seats during the medieval period, the temples are larger, elaborate, and more vivid in terms of religious objects of worship, use of decorative wooden pillars, and composition. The patrons and artists at Muktagiri seem

to have relied more upon the natural landscape to elevate the aesthetic as well as spiritual experience of the devotee rather than the usual art and architectural idioms so used at other contemporary Jain sites.

Though the traditions may ascribe a much early date to this place of pilgrimage, it can be said that the partially rock-cut, partially structural type was first experimented here at Cave no. 10, followed by Cave nos. 48 and 49. These could be the earliest architectural activities at this site, probably dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE. With the use of stone masonry blocks, the excavated cavity was given the shape and structure of a place of worship. The journey of how a mass of hill was transformed into a sacred space, and finally getting the status of a sacred architecture in people's memories, so much that devotees start weaving stories of glory and miracles around it, is a wonderful journey of the site. Similar such architectural experiments of partially rock-cut and partially structural type from earlier date are known from Udayagiri and Maladevi in Madhya Pradesh, though there is a lot of time gap between these two, which discredits any direct comparison amongst the same. Keeping aside a direct comparison, it can be said that this particular style of architecture has continued since early medieval up to medieval period and this seems to have been perfectly utilized at places blessed with enormous natural beauty and scenic landscape. Many more temples and images came up at this site in the later period, as late as 20<sup>th</sup> century CE. These simple looking temples stand testimony to the penance, meditation and rigorous *tapa* of numerous Jain monks and nuns. This is also the place where various rituals and ceremonies were performed and are still being performed by the laity. This group of 52 living shrines, preserves an illustrious saga of history, divinity, spirituality and religious practices. It served as a pilgrimage site to people during the Islamic and other rules, when instead of long tedious unsafe pilgrimage journeys, the laity was in search of a nearby site, equaling in sacredness of other holy mountains mentioned in Jain texts. It not only played the role of a pilgrimage site, but also a place where laity would have interacted with the monks or pontifical heads, say *Bhaṭṭāarakas*, since all the rituals were guided by these people. The whole mountain was finally bought by Natthusa Pasusa Kalamkar of Achalpur with the help of Raisaheb Motisangai Rukhabsangai and Gendalal Hiralal Badjatya from the ownership of Khaparde in order to put a ban on animal hunting and violence in this area and to secure it for further exclusive ownership of the Jains in 1928 CE. In this way, the development of the site first as a *nirvāṇa bhūmī* and then as a place of pilgrimage in medieval period onwards can be seen over the time.

### Summary

The pilgrimage site of Muktagiri, went on to broaden its horizons, from being accommodated in a couplet of *Nirvāṇakāṇḍa* up to having its own broader important place in the Jain pilgrimage circuits of India in a period of time. It provided a sacred space of considerable importance to the people living in adjoining areas, helped them stay connected with the faith they were following and continue their material and spiritual growth at the same time. Despite not following the established classical architectural tradition, getting capital for which would not have been as great an issue, the local rock was used to create this simple cave-temple and the other structural temples. These may not have the artistic appeal or grandeur but when experienced in the presence of the scenic beauty here, it may have given an extra-ordinary and divine experience to the visitors. This experience has remained intact since many centuries and the site continues to fetch important monks and laity from all over the country. It is thus a living shrine, with a sacred landscape and identity of its own.

### Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the authorities of Shri Digambar Jain Siddhakshetra Muktagiri for their cooperation and permission for photography. This article is a part of the fieldwork undertaken for the Bhagwan Shitalnath Chair for Jain Archaeology, Department of AIHC and Archaeology, Deccan College PGRI, Pune. The author expresses heartfelt gratitude

towards them. Thanks are due to Dr. Shrikant Ganvir for his constant guidance, Prasannakumar Bamb for his moral support, Anchit Jain, Sorab Jain, Pratik Jain, and Rohit Chakote for their useful insights and Purva Sanjay Parab for the ground plan of this cave-temple.

## References

- Fergusson, J. 1876. *A History of Architecture in all countries: History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, vol. 3. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street.
- Hiralal. 1932. *Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar*. 2nd ed. Nagpur: Government Printing.
- Jain, B. 1978. *Bharat Ke Digambar Jain Tirth: Rajasthan-Gujarat-Maharashtra* (in Hindi), vol. 4. Mumbai: Bharatvarshiya Digambar Jain Tirthakshetra Committee.
- Meghal, Pranoti. 2018. "Development of Jain Architecture from Caves to Temple Architecture in Maharashtra." *International Journal of Engineering Research* 7(2): 188-194.
- Patil, M. 2003. *Illustrated Manuscripts and Paintings from Digambar Jain Bhandaras of Vidarbha*. Unpublished thesis (PhD), Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad University, Baroda.
- Russell, R. V. 1907. *Central Provinces District Gazetteers: Betul District*. Allahabad: Pioneer Press.
- Shah, Viraj. 2008. *Jaina Rock-Cut Caves in Western India (With Special Reference to Maharashtra)*, vol. 1. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.