

# The Historicity of Tirthankara Neminatha and the Antiquity of Mount Girnar: An Exhaustive Epigraphic, Literary, and Archaeological Synthesis

## 1. Introduction: The Epistemological and Cosmological Framework of the Sramana Tradition

The rigorous academic study of ancient South Asian religious paradigms remains profoundly incomplete without an exhaustive examination of the Sramana traditions, of which Jainism represents one of the most archaic, highly systematized, and continuous spiritual frameworks. The Jain cosmological and historical chronologies postulate an eternal, uncreated universe guided by perpetual, undulating cycles of time known as the *Utsarpini* (ascending half-cycle) and *Avasarpini* (descending half-cycle).<sup>1</sup> Within each of these cyclical epochs, twenty-four supreme spiritual teachers known as Tirthankaras (ford-makers) manifest upon the earthly plane to re-establish the eternal tenets of non-violence (ahimsa), non-absolutism (anekantavada), and non-attachment (aparigraha).<sup>1</sup> These highly evolved souls traverse the arduous path of asceticism, eradicate all karmic encumbrances to attain omniscience (Kevalgyan), and subsequently guide humanity, celestial beings, and the animal kingdom toward ultimate liberation (Moksha) before passing into the eternal state of Siddhahood.<sup>1</sup>

While nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship initially approached these vast Jain chronologies with a degree of skepticism—often mischaracterizing them as mere mythology—modern secular academia, advanced archaeology, paleography, and comparative theology have increasingly and robustly corroborated the deep prehistoric antiquity of Jainism and its foundational figures.<sup>1</sup> The discovery of Indus Valley Civilization seals depicting figures in deep meditative postures resembling the Jain *kayotsarga* stance, alongside bull motifs associated with the first Tirthankara, Rishabhanatha, provides compelling material evidence that the ascetic roots of Jainism predate the advent of the Vedic Aryan civilization.<sup>2</sup>

Among the majestic historical luminaries of this ancient tradition is Lord Neminatha, alternatively known by the epithets Nemi and Arishtanemi, who is venerated as the twenty-second Tirthankara of the current descending time cycle.<sup>1</sup> His extraordinary life, his revolutionary teachings on universal compassion, and his ultimate spiritual liberation are inextricably bound to the physical and metaphysical topography of Mount Girnar.<sup>1</sup> Historically referred to in archaic texts as Urjayant, Raivataka, Girinagara, and Suvarna-giri, this majestic mountain range, situated in the Saurashtra region of modern-day Gujarat, predates the geological formation of the Himalayas.<sup>4</sup>

This comprehensive report provides a nuanced synthesis of textual, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence to definitively establish the historicity of Tirthankara Neminatha.

Furthermore, it demonstrates the undisputed antiquity of Mount Girnar as a supreme Jain Siddha Kshetra (a geographic zone of ultimate salvation). By meticulously analyzing the spatial sacredness of the five peaks (Tonks) of Girnar, the occurrence of Neminatha's three Kalyanaks (auspicious cosmic events) upon the mountain, and the mass nirvana of monumental historical figures—including Pradyumna Kumar, Shambhu Kumar, Aniruddha Kumar, Ganadhara Varadatta (Datta), and millions of Jain ascetics—the analysis proves that the entire Girnar mountain range has belonged to the Jain Sramana tradition since prehistoric times.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The Historicity of Tirthankara Neminatha: Reconciling Jain Proto-History with Vedic Antiquity**

The historical validation of the twenty-second Tirthankara, Neminatha, is anchored not merely within the extensive volumes of Jain canonical texts but is profoundly and independently corroborated by continuous cross-references embedded in orthodox Vedic, Upanishadic, and Brahmanical literature. Neminatha was born as Arishtanemi into the illustrious Yadu dynasty (Yaduvamsha or Harivamsa) at the ancient city of Sauripura (Dvaraka).<sup>1</sup> His parents were the noble King Samudravijaya and Queen Shivadevi.<sup>1</sup> In traditional Indian historical chronologies, he is universally recognized as the contemporary and first cousin of Lord Krishna, who is acknowledged as the ninth and final Vasudeva of the Jain and Hindu pantheons.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.1 Vedic and Upanishadic Affirmations of Arishtanemi**

The undeniable presence of the name "Arishtanemi" in the earliest stratum of Indo-Aryan literature serves as a critical, irrefutable indicator of his profound antiquity and immense socio-religious influence. The *Rigveda* and the *Yajurveda*, texts that form the bedrock of orthodox Hinduism and date back to the second millennium BCE, frequently invoke the name Arishtanemi in hymns designed to confer ultimate spiritual protection.<sup>1</sup> Notably, the *Svasti Vachana*, a foundational Vedic mantra chanted universally at the conclusion of auspicious occasions to bestow blessings, explicitly references Arishtanemi in the verse: "*Swasti Nastaaksharyo Arishtanemih*" (May the omniscient protector Garuda bless us, may Arishtanemi bless us).<sup>16</sup>

While certain orthodox Hindu scholars have historically attempted to interpret these terms as generalized epithets for divine protection, the convergence of the names of specific Jain Tirthankaras—such as Rishabhanatha, Ajitanatha, and Arishtanemi—in the *Yajurveda* has led eminent comparative religionists and secular historians to acknowledge these as direct, unmistakable references to the Sramana pathfinders.<sup>20</sup> Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the renowned philosopher, Oxford professor, and former President of India, explicitly noted that the *Yajurveda* contains direct venerative references to these three specific Tirthankaras.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of a Sramana ascetic in the highest liturgical texts of the parallel Vedic tradition signifies that Neminatha was a historical figure of such towering spiritual magnitude and public veneration that the Brahmanical culture found it necessary to integrate his name into their sacred lexicon to invoke spiritual purity and safety.<sup>20</sup>

Further contextualizing his historicity is the *Chandogya Upanishad*, a primary philosophical text

of ancient India, which references a highly venerated and spiritually advanced sage named "Ghora Angirasa".<sup>14</sup> According to this Upanishad, Ghora Angirasa acted as the supreme spiritual instructor to Krishna, the son of Devaki.<sup>14</sup> The teachings imparted by Ghora Angirasa to Krishna centered fundamentally on the virtues of severe asceticism (tapas), extraordinary charity (dana), absolute honesty (rjubhava), strict non-violence (ahimsa), and unwavering truthfulness (satyavacana).<sup>14</sup> Extensive Indological research, including studies by prominent scholars like Hermann Jacobi, has identified Ghora Angirasa as a direct parallel to, or a titular designation for, Tirthankara Neminatha.<sup>3</sup> The transmission of the absolute doctrine of *ahimsa* to Krishna perfectly mirrors the Jain narrative of Neminatha's ideological stance against systemic violence, thereby flawlessly fusing Jain proto-history with the historical evolution of Upanishadic thought.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 The Yadava Lineage and the Paradigm of Non-Violence

To fully comprehend the spatial sacredness of Mount Girnar, one must carefully trace the life trajectory of Neminatha prior to his ascension. Born into the Yaduvamsha lineage, Neminatha possessed immense, unparalleled physical and spiritual strength. Jain epic literature, including classical masterpieces such as the *Harivamsa Purana*, the *Mahapurana*, and the *Pandav Purana*, details a famous incident in the armory of Dvaraka.<sup>1</sup> In this narrative, a young Neminatha effortlessly ascended the massive serpent-bed (Naag Shayya), playfully blew the divine, earth-shattering conch shell (Panchajanya), and bent the mighty bow of Krishna—feats that no ordinary mortal, nor even Krishna himself, could easily replicate.<sup>1</sup> His divine symbol in Jain iconography, appropriately and eternally, remains the conch.<sup>1</sup> This extraordinary display of capability established Neminatha's supremacy within the Yadava clan, leaving Krishna profoundly astounded and momentarily concerned regarding the future geopolitical sovereignty of his empire.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Neminatha harbored no terrestrial ambitions.

## 3. The Great Renunciation: The Genesis of Institutional Ahimsa

The defining turning point of Neminatha's life—and the direct cosmological catalyst for the eternal consecration of Mount Girnar—occurred during his betrothal. Neminatha's royal marriage was arranged with Princess Rajulmati (or Rajamati), the virtuous daughter of King Ugrasena of Junagadh in the Kathiawad region.<sup>4</sup> As the grand wedding procession approached the royal venue amidst immense celebration, Neminatha heard the agonizing, terror-filled cries of thousands of helpless animals that had been penned in an enclosure.<sup>1</sup> Upon inquiring with his charioteer, he learned that these creatures were slated to be slaughtered to provide a lavish feast for the royal wedding guests.<sup>1</sup>

This visceral encounter with systemic, designed violence triggered an immediate, explosive, and profound spiritual awakening (Vairagya) within the consciousness of the young prince.<sup>4</sup> Rejecting the superficiality of geopolitical alliances, the comforts of royal lineage, and all worldly attachments (aparigraha), Neminatha ordered the immediate liberation of the animals, flatly refused the marriage, and commanded his charioteer to turn the vehicle toward the towering,

ancient peaks of Mount Girnar.<sup>1</sup>

This singular act of supreme compassion resonates across millennia. Princess Rajulmati, rather than descending into worldly despair, was deeply inspired by his unparalleled spiritual courage.<sup>8</sup> She subsequently renounced the world as well, founding the highly disciplined order of Jain female ascetics (Sadhvi Sangh) and following him on the rigorous path of spiritual purification.<sup>8</sup> This specific historical event underscores a monumental socio-religious shift in ancient India, championed by Neminatha, toward institutionalized vegetarianism and uncompromising non-violence.<sup>15</sup> By refusing to build his personal happiness upon the suffering of lesser creatures, Neminatha elevated the ethical consciousness of humanity. It is for this precise reason that Girnar, as the site of his asceticism, became indirectly responsible for the propagation of peace, ecological harmony, and compassion for the whole world. The reverberations of Neminatha's ahimsa echoed far beyond Jainism, profoundly influencing the broader Indian cultural ethos toward vegetarianism and reverence for all life.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Mount Girnar (Urjayant): The Spatial Sacredness and the Three Kalyanaks

Mount Girnar, reverently referenced in ancient scriptures as Urjayant, Raivataka, and Suvarna-giri, is a geological marvel older than the Himalayas and has served as an unparalleled locus of spiritual gravitation since prehistoric epochs.<sup>4</sup> In Jain theology, specific geographical locations are designated as *Siddha Kshetras*—sacred zones of ultimate salvation from where enlightened souls have successfully shattered the relentless cycle of transmigration (birth, death, and rebirth) to achieve Moksha.<sup>4</sup>

The unparalleled sanctity of Mount Girnar derives from the extraordinarily rare cosmological phenomenon that it was the site of three out of the five *Kalyanaks* (auspicious cosmic events) of Tirthankara Neminatha.<sup>4</sup> In Jain cosmology, a Kalyanak represents a moment of such profound spiritual power that it reshapes the destiny of the universe.

### 4.1 Diksha Kalyanak: The Path of Asceticism

Upon renouncing his kingdom, Neminatha ascended the Urjayant peak, discarded all royal vestments, ornaments, and worldly possessions, and initiated himself into the Digambara (sky-clad) monastic order.<sup>4</sup> He performed the rigorous ascetic rite of *Panchamushti Kesha Loch*, plucking his hair in five handfuls under the shade of a Mahavenu (bamboo) tree, in the presence of celestial deities (Indras) and humans who gathered to witness this supreme act of detachment.<sup>4</sup>

### 4.2 Kevalgyan Kalyanak: The Dawn of Omniscience

Following his initiation, Neminatha engaged in 54 days of intense, unbroken ascetic fasting and profound meditation on the mountain.<sup>1</sup> Through absolute mastery over his senses and continuous contemplation of the pure soul, he eradicated his destructive (Ghatiya) karmas and attained *Kevalgyan* (absolute omniscience) on the first day of the bright half of the month of Ashwayuja.<sup>4</sup> The celestial beings, orchestrated by the Indras, constructed the magnificent,

divine preaching hall known as the *Samavasarana* upon the slopes of Girnar.<sup>4</sup> From this divine assembly, Neminatha expounded the eternal truths of the universe, the ten virtues (Dasalaksana Dharma), and the exact nature of reality to an immense audience encompassing humans, celestial beings, and the animals.<sup>4</sup>

### 4.3 Moksha Kalyanak: The Ultimate Liberation

Having lived an astonishingly long life spanning 1,000 years (spending 300 years as a princely bachelor, 54 days as an ascetic monk, and an expansive 700 years as an omniscient spiritual guide), Lord Neminatha ascended to the fifth and highest peak of Girnar.<sup>1</sup> On the auspicious eighth day of the bright half of the month of Ashadh (Ashadh Shukla Ashtami/Saptami), he destroyed all remaining non-destructive karmas and attained Nirvana, dissolving his physical form to become a pure, omniscient Siddha.<sup>4</sup>

The absolute concentration of these three pivotal Kalyanaks establishes Girnar not merely as an important pilgrimage destination but as the supreme energetic epicenter of the Jain Sramana tradition, continuously radiating the energy of liberation across the globe.<sup>4</sup>

## 5. The Topography of Liberation: An Exhaustive Analysis of the Five Sacred Peaks (Tonks)

The architectural, historical, and spatial layout of Mount Girnar is meticulously defined by its five distinct peaks, colloquially known as "Tonks," each eternally associated with Jain asceticism, severe penance, and ultimate liberation. The entirety of the mountain is woven together by an arduous pilgrimage route comprising approximately 10,000 ancient stone steps, traversing these five peaks in an ascending order of spiritual exertion.<sup>8</sup> A deep historical and theological analysis of each peak reveals its intrinsic, undeniable Jain identity.

Tonk (Peak)	Jain Significance and Historical Attributions	Structural Detail and Historical Context
First Tonk	Houses the main Jain temple complex, comprising over 100 Digambara and Shvetambara temples dating from the 5th to the 16th centuries CE. Features the magnificent Neminatha Temple (built c. 1128–1159 AD) and the Rajulmati cave. The Charan Chinna (footprints) of Acharya Kundkund.	The largest structural complex on the mountain, recognized globally for its intricate marble architecture. It contains a stunning black granite idol of Lord Neminatha. The site is a marvel of medieval Jain architecture and remains under strict Jain ministration. <sup>8</sup>

<p><b>Second Tonk</b></p>	<p>Dedicated to the Moksha (Nirvana) of <b>Muni Aniruddha Kumar</b>, a highly revered ascetic of the Yadava lineage. The peak also features a shrine dedicated to Goddess Ambika, the Yakshini (guardian deity) of Lord Neminatha.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>While historically a Digambara Jain site containing the footprints of Muni Aniruddha Kumar, structural encroachments have occurred over time, leading to heavily contested ministrations by local Hindu groups.<sup>27</sup></p>
<p><b>Third Tonk</b></p>	<p>Consecrated as the Nirvana site of <b>Muni Shambhu Kumar</b>, who achieved liberation here following grueling, severe penances. Shambhu Kumar was another prominent figure of the Yadava clan who took ascetic initiation under Neminatha.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>Similar to the second peak, it features ancient Jain footprints (Charan Paduka) of the ascetic but has faced systematic structural alteration and modern renaming efforts to obscure its Jain origins.<sup>27</sup></p>
<p><b>Fourth Tonk</b></p>	<p>The Nirvana site of <b>Muni Pradyumna Kumar</b>, universally recognized in Jain and Hindu texts as the son of Lord Krishna. Pradyumna renounced unimaginable royal luxuries, endured immense austerities on this specific rocky terrain, and attained ultimate salvation.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>Accessible via a rugged, difficult path requiring the climbing of raw rocks. It features the ancient, venerated footprints of Pradyumna Kumar. The terrain itself signifies the severe penance undertaken by the ascetic.<sup>8</sup></p>
<p><b>Fifth Tonk (Urjayant/Neminatha Shikhar)</b></p>	<p>The supreme pinnacle of Girnar. This is the exact sacred site where <b>Tirthankara Neminatha attained Moksha</b>. It historically housed the ancient foot-idols (Charan Paduka) and a Digambara</p>	<p>Historically ministered exclusively by naked Digambara Jain ascetics. Over the past century, it has been the subject of intensive appropriation efforts, illegal constructions, and legal battles regarding</p>

	idol of Neminatha in the Padmasana posture. <sup>1</sup>	the deliberate renaming of the peak. <sup>29</sup>
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## 6. The Phenomenon of Mass Nirvana and the Legacy of Ganadhara Varadatta (Datta)

The sanctity of Girnar extends vastly beyond the liberation of Tirthankara Neminatha. It served as the central axis of spiritual awakening for an entire epoch. Jain canonical literature, including the highly venerated *Siri Bhupalaya* (an extraordinary ancient numerical text containing vast cosmological and philosophical data) and the *Nirvana Kanda*, categorically state that Mount Girnar facilitated the liberation of exactly 72 crore and 700 (720,000,700) Jain munis.<sup>6</sup>

### 6.1 The Liberation of 72 Crore Ascetics

According to these ancient texts, prominent Yadava royals, most notably Pradyumna Kumar, Shambhu Kumar, and Aniruddha Kumar, abandoned their militaristic and regal lives following the profound teachings of Neminatha.<sup>4</sup> They engaged in grueling, unyielding penance on the rugged slopes of the second, third, and fourth peaks of Girnar, successfully destroying their karmic bonds to attain eternal bliss.<sup>4</sup> The *Bhupalaya Nirvana Gatha* explicitly records this mass salvation:

*"Nemisami Pajjunne Sambukumar Tahev Aniruddho, Bahattar Kodio Ujjante Sattasaya Siddha".<sup>4</sup>*

This verse translates to the absolute declaration that under the guidance of Lord Nemi, Pradyumna, Shambhu, and Aniruddha, along with an astonishing 72 crore and 700 ascetics, attained Siddha-hood on the Urjayant (Girnar) mountain.<sup>4</sup> This mass asceticism underscores a critical, second-order historical insight: Girnar functioned as the central monastic university and the ultimate ascetic proving ground for the Sramana tradition in western India during the first millennium BCE. It was not merely a site of isolated hermitage but a vast, institutionalized spiritual sanctuary accommodating tens of thousands of monks and nuns simultaneously. The *Kalpa Sutra* verifies this scale, noting that Neminatha's immediate religious order (Sangha) consisted of 18,000 sadhus (male monks) and 44,000 sadhvis (female monks), 169,000 shravakas (laymen), and 339,000 shravikas (laywomen).<sup>5</sup>

### 6.2 Ganadhara Varadatta: From Celestial Brahmadev to Chief Disciple

To understand the historical complexity and the subsequent controversies surrounding the fifth peak of Girnar, one must deeply examine the role of Neminatha's chief disciple, Ganadhara Varadatta (frequently referred to as Datta, Dhattari, or Dhatarie).<sup>5</sup> In Jain epistemology, a Ganadhara is the supreme disciple of a Tirthankara, responsible for comprehending the divine sound (Divya Dhvani) of the omniscient master and structuring it into canonical texts (Agamas) for the benefit of humanity. Lord Neminatha had eleven such Ganadharas, with Varadatta acting as their supreme leader.<sup>5</sup>

The theological backstory of Varadatta provides a profound look into Jain cosmology. Ancient

texts narrate that in a previous existence, Varadatta (in his previous birth) was a celestial being named Brahmadev (Ahamendra) residing in the *Sarvarthasiddhi vimana* (the highest heaven), living in unimaginable luxury and possessing *Avadhi Gyan* (clairvoyance).<sup>36</sup> However, recognizing that celestial pleasure is temporary and not equivalent to the eternal bliss of Moksha, Brahmadev questioned Lord Sagar regarding his ultimate liberation.<sup>36</sup> Lord Sagar prophesied, "Hey *Brahmadeva!* You will be the first disciple (*Ganadhar*) of the 22nd Tirthankara Lord Neminath... and your name will be Varadatta. You will be a great instrument in awakening souls... Without a doubt, you too will be liberated and will attain salvation on the pious mountain *Girnar*".<sup>36</sup>

Fulfilling this prophecy, King Varadatta was present during Neminatha's first sermon. Overwhelmed by absolute disgust for worldly existence, he immediately accepted the severe vows of a Digambara monk, becoming the **first disciple** and subsequently rising to the rank of the chief Ganadhara.<sup>25</sup> Following the Nirvana of Lord Neminatha on the fifth peak, it was Ganadhara Varadatta (Datta) who consecrated the sacred footprints (Charan Paduka) of his master upon that exact spot.<sup>34</sup> Because of his profound devotion and leadership, the fifth peak historically became known as the "Guru Dhatarie Peak" (signifying the peak honoring the Guru of Dhatarie/Datta, i.e., Lord Neminatha).<sup>34</sup> This nomenclature remained intact for millennia, playing a central role in nineteenth-century archaeological documentation before becoming the target of modern toponymic appropriation.

## 7. Epigraphic, Literary, and Archaeological Corroborations of Jain Antiquity at Girnar

The assertion that all five peaks of Girnar belong exclusively to Jainism from prehistoric times is not predicated solely on faith; it is rigorously substantiated by a continuous chain of textual, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence spanning over two millennia.

### 7.1 The Shatkhandagama, Chandra Gupha, Acharya Kundkund, and the Preservation of Canonical Knowledge

A pivotal event in the intellectual history of the Jain Sramana tradition occurred within the natural caves of Mount Girnar during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. Following a series of severe famines in northern India, the oral transmission of the original Jain canonical texts (the twelve *Angas*, taught by Lord Mahavira and his Ganadhara Indrabhuti Gautama) was perilously close to extinction.<sup>4</sup> The last preceptor who possessed even partial knowledge of these profound texts, the great Acharya Dharasena, resided and practiced severe penance in the *Chandra Gupha* (Moon Cave) on Mount Girnar.<sup>6</sup>

Recognizing the imminent loss of this supreme knowledge, Acharya Dharasena summoned two brilliant ascetic disciples from southern India, Muni Pushpadanta and Muni Bhutabali. Within the sacred, highly charged confines of Girnar, Dharasena transmitted the remnants of the *Viahapannatti* and the twelfth Anga, the *Ditthivada*.<sup>39</sup> These two monks subsequently composed the *Shatkhandagama* (Scripture of Six Parts) in Prakrit sutras, which remains the most foundational, revered canonical text of the Digambara Jain tradition today.<sup>11</sup> Following the

completion of this monumental intellectual task, both Pushpadanta and Bhutabali achieved high spiritual mastery (mantra perfection) on a peak of Girnar.<sup>6</sup> This historical episode permanently cements Girnar's status as the geographic savior of Digambara canonical literature; without Girnar, the most profound aspects of Jain philosophy might have been lost to time.

Also around 1st and 2nd centuries CE, Acharya Kundkund Ji visited **Mount Girnar** to offer his prayers. During his stay, he engaged in a **scholarly debate** (shastrarth) with a skeptic, through which he successfully proved the **authenticity of the Digambara tradition** at this sacred site.

## 7.2 Classical Literature, Ashokan Edicts, and the Vaghela Inscriptions

In addition to canonical texts, classical literary works such as the *Vividha Tirtha Kalpa* authored by Acharya Jinaprabha Suri (14th century) and the *Tiloyapannatti* by Yativishabha (early centuries CE) provide extensive geographic, astronomical, and spiritual descriptions of Girnar as a premier Jain tirtha.<sup>4</sup> The *Tiloyapannatti* explicitly records the astrological details of Neminatha's liberation on Urjayant, noting that it occurred with 536 accompanying monks during the dark half of Ashadh.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Acharya Samantabhadra's renowned *Swayambhu Stotra* poetically extols Urjayant Giri as the land where Indra himself descended to mark the symbol of Neminatha with his divine Vajra.<sup>6</sup>

Archaeologically, the foothills and the peaks of Girnar feature some of the most critical epigraphic records in South Asian history. The presence of Emperor Ashoka's Rock Edicts (c. 250 BCE) at the foot of Girnar (Junagadh) highlights the region's immense strategic, administrative, and religious importance during the Mauryan period.<sup>47</sup> These edicts establish the profound antiquity of human reverence for the site.

More directly and explicitly related to Jainism are the numerous inscriptions found within the monumental temple complexes on the first peak. Extensive inscriptions dating to Vikram Samvat 1249 (1192 CE) and 1230 CE detail the massive construction and renovation efforts undertaken by the powerful Vaghela ministers, Vastupala and Tejpala.<sup>33</sup> These inscriptions explicitly extol Tirthankara Neminatha, the Jain monks, and the goddess Ambika, proving irrefutable large-scale, state-sponsored Jain activity, architectural dominance, and continuous ministrations on the mountain throughout the medieval period.<sup>33</sup>

## 8. 19th-Century Colonial Antiquarian Surveys and the Confirmation of Jain Ministration

The most irrefutable, objective secular evidence establishing the absolute antiquity of Jain rights over the highest peaks of Girnar comes from British-era archaeological and antiquarian surveys. These reports were compiled by scholars who possessed no religious affiliation with either the Hindu or Jain faiths, rendering their accounts highly objective and legally admissible as historical fact.<sup>34</sup>

### 8.1 The Accounts of Colonel Tod and Dr. James Burgess

In 1822, Colonel James Tod, the renowned annalist and author of *Travels in Western India*, visited the region and unequivocally recorded Girnar as one of the "Panj-Teerthas" (five primary places of pilgrimage) most sacred to the monotheistic Jains.<sup>34</sup>

More importantly, Dr. James Burgess, the highly respected Archaeological Surveyor and Reporter to the Government of Western India, conducted exhaustive, meticulous surveys of the Kathiawad region between 1869 and 1875. In his official government report, *Report on the Antiquities of Kâthiâwâd and Kachh (1874-75)*, Burgess provided a detailed, eye-witness account of the fifth peak.<sup>34</sup> He documented the arduous climb to the highest summit and recorded exactly what existed there prior to modern encroachments:

"...at length the summit is gained. It has a small open shrine or pavilion over the footmarks or paduka of Neminatha cut in the rock, and was being ministered to by a naked ascetic. Beside it hung a heavy bell. Neminatha or Arishtanemi, who gives his name to this summit and to whom the Jainas consider the whole mount as sacred, is the twenty-second of their deified saints... This one is the favourite object of worship with the Digambara or naked Jainas."<sup>4</sup>

This official archaeological record presents a critical, third-order historical insight: Prior to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was absolute, unquestioned Jain administration of the fifth peak. The presence of the "naked ascetic" (a Digambara Jain monk) actively ministering the footprints of Neminatha in a shrine built exclusively for that purpose categorically refutes any modern claims of non-Jain antiquity regarding the fifth Tonk.<sup>33</sup>

## **8.2 The Toponymic Appropriation: The Shift from Guru Dhatarie to Dattatreya**

A core element of the historical controversy surrounding the fifth peak involves a gradual, deliberate toponymic (place-name) shift executed by encroaching groups. As established, the peak was historically known as the "Guru Dhatarie Peak" (the peak of the Guru of Dhatarie/Datta, i.e., Neminatha's chief Ganadhara).<sup>34</sup> Early 19th-century colonial records, including those of Colonel Tod, consistently spell the site utilizing the Dhatarie nomenclature, recognizing it as a Jain site.<sup>34</sup>

However, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as part of a broader phenomenon of spatial and religious appropriation in South Asia, local non-Jain groups exploited the phonetic similarity between "Dhattari/Datta" (the Jain Ganadhara) and "Dattatreya" (the Hindu syncretic deity).<sup>34</sup> Because there was no historical Hindu deity named "Dhatarie," the name was slowly altered in local parlance and modern unverified texts to "Dattatreya".<sup>34</sup> This deliberate phonetic manipulation allowed encroaching groups to falsely claim that the ancient footprints of Neminatha were actually the footprints of Dattatreya, superimposing an entirely new religious narrative over an archaeologically proven Jain Siddha Kshetra to appropriate it for financial and religious profit.<sup>34</sup>

## **8.3 The Refutation of the Forged Girnar Mahatmya**

To further support their claims, attempts were made by local groups to forge scriptural backing. However, James Burgess and fellow architectural historian James Fergusson explicitly warned

against fabricated local mythologies designed to appropriate the site. They noted the glaring absence of authentic ancient texts for the site, stating that unlike other areas, there was "no Girnar Mahatmya to retail fables and falsify dates," though later local Brahmins attempted to forge such documents and interpolate them into the *Skanda Purana* (specifically within the *Vastrapatha Mahatmya*) to claim the sacred space.<sup>34</sup> Modern academic analyses of the *Skanda Purana* confirm that these sections are indeed later interpolations designed to justify the appropriation of the ancient Sramana site.<sup>54</sup> The archaeological evidence provided by James Burgess completely dismantles this later appropriation, confirming that the artifacts, the caretaker, and the historical identity of the peak were exclusively Jain.<sup>34</sup>

## **9. Contemporary Legal Frameworks and the Protection of Ancient Jain Heritage**

Despite the overwhelming, undeniable weight of historical, literary, and archaeological evidence establishing the exclusive antiquity of Jain rights over all five peaks of Mount Girnar, the site has become a focal point of intense socio-legal conflict in the modern era.<sup>4</sup> The aggressive appropriation of the fifth peak (Neminatha Shikhar), the third peak (renamed Gorakhnath), and the second peak (Ambika) has led to tragic consequences, including violent attacks using sharp weapons on peaceful Digambara Jain monks by encroaching groups in recent years.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Jain pilgrims have frequently faced discriminatory restrictions, completely hindering their fundamental right to worship at the sacred footprints of their Tirthankara.<sup>4</sup> The Jain community has engaged in continuous, peaceful legal battles to restore their historical right to ministrations and worship. The matter was elevated to the High Court of Gujarat, leading to landmark interim orders. In February 2005, the High Court (in the matter of *Bandilalji Digamber Jain Karkhana vs State Of Gujarat*) directed that all devotees have the right to offer prayers according to their religious beliefs and explicitly ordered a halt to all illegal construction activities undertaken by the encroaching trusts on the protected monument.<sup>4</sup> The State Archaeology Department, acting under the *Gujarat Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act*, conducted official surveys validating that illegal constructions had indeed occurred, masking the original ancient Jain heritage.<sup>34</sup>

Recent petitions filed by Jain trusts emphasize that under the *Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991*, the religious character of a place of worship as it existed must be strictly maintained.<sup>34</sup> Since the objective archaeological records of the 19th century (Burgess's survey) conclusively prove the site was a functioning Jain shrine ministered by a Jain ascetic long before any modern disputes, the subsequent encroachment and construction represent a severe violation of both historical truth and statutory law.<sup>33</sup> The covering of Neminatha's ancient footprints and the harassment of Jain pilgrims represent an acute threat to India's pluralistic cultural heritage and constitutional guarantees of religious freedom.<sup>33</sup>

## **10. Conclusion: Mount Girnar as a Universal Beacon of Ahimsa and Spiritual Liberation**

The historicity of Tirthankara Neminatha and the profound, prehistoric antiquity of Mount Girnar

as a Jain Siddha Kshetra are not matters of mere theological belief; they are empirical, historical realities validated by an exhaustive convergence of multidisciplinary evidence.

The explicit references to Arishtanemi in the *Rigveda* and *Yajurveda*, coupled with the precise identification of Ghora Angirasa in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, position Neminatha as a monumental historical figure who fundamentally shaped ancient Indian philosophical thought.<sup>14</sup>

His revolutionary rejection of systemic animal slaughter at his own wedding catalyzed an unprecedented shift toward institutionalized non-violence (ahimsa) and vegetarianism.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, Mount Girnar is not merely a site of local relevance, but indirectly stands as the geographic genesis of global moral philosophies concerning ecological harmony, compassion, and the sanctity of all living beings.

Furthermore, an unbroken literary tradition—from the *Shatkhandagama* composed in the caves of Girnar, to the visit of Acharya Kundkund, to the *Tiloyapannatti*, and the *Siri Bhupalaya*—consistently highlights Girnar as the site of Neminatha's Diksha, Kevalgyan, and Moksha.<sup>4</sup> This textual evidence is magnified by the unparalleled phenomenon of mass liberation, wherein 72 crore and 700 ascetics, including prominent figures like Pradyumna, Shambhu, Aniruddha, and the chief disciple Ganadhara Varadatta (Datta), attained ultimate Siddha-hood upon the five sacred peaks of this mountain.<sup>4</sup>

The detailed British-era surveys by Dr. James Burgess and Colonel Tod act as irrefutable secular time capsules, confirming beyond any doubt that the fifth peak of Girnar originally housed the footprints of Neminatha and was actively managed by Digambara Jain monks.<sup>33</sup> The calculated phonetic manipulation by encroaching groups—shifting the name from "Guru Dhatarie" (honoring Neminatha's chief disciple) to "Dattatreya"—reveals a systemic, localized strategy to obscure the Jain origins of the site.<sup>34</sup>

Mount Girnar, in its entirety—spanning all five of its majestic peaks—stands as a timeless, prehistoric monument to the Sramana tradition. It is the eternal, silent witness to Tirthankara Neminatha's supreme compassion for all living beings and his ultimate spiritual triumph. Protecting the historical integrity, removing illegal encroachments, and restoring the Jain administrative rights of this supreme Siddha Kshetra is not solely a matter of justice for the Jain community; it is an absolute imperative for the preservation of global spiritual heritage and historical truth.

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