



Original research

Spiritual Cosmogony: Intersecting the Assamese *Anādi Pātan* Illuminations with *Lokapuruṣa* in the Jain Tradition

Rajan Kumar Vaidhya

Associate Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Assam University, Silchar 788011, Assam, India.

Abstract

The study aims to examine whether the pre-modern visual culture of Assam conceptually aligns with pan-Indic cosmological perceptions with its expressive visual grammar, and to sense that Vedic sources were the fountainhead of spiritual cosmogony. '*Anādi Pātan*' manuscript exemplifies an imaginative approach to visually narrate the conceptions of cosmogony, Mount *Meru*, *Jambudvīpa*, and the infernal and heavenly destinies of human deeds, depicting indigenous pictorial imagery. It can be contextualised with the Jain cosmography of '*Trailokyadīpikā*', excerpted in '*Lokapuruṣa*' of western India, which presents an iconographical and geometric visual diagram, underscoring the contemplative, austere, and moral etiquette for Karmic adjudication with shared cosmological and didactic vitality. The former is adapted from the Bhāgavata and Vāmana Purāṇa in the vernacular and signifies relative terminological archetypes, while the latter does not. So, does it further reflect common epistemic and visual paradigms of Jain dogmas, or grow independently within the Neo-Vaishnava faith? Through ethnographic assessment of analogous themes and visual analysis by Panofsky's iconology, this study explores one of the first comparative accounts of '*Anādi Pātan*' and '*Lokapuruṣa*' paintings within the broader landscape of the Indian knowledge system of art and aesthetics. Juxtaposition shows that illustrations from both visual traditions reflect individual features rooted in literary intangibility; despite cosmic phenomenology, they commonly serve as indigenous visual imagery, conventional anthropoidal viewpoints, and pedagogy of spiritual engagement.

Keywords: *Anādi Pātan*, cosmological interpretations, *Lokapuruṣa*, Sattriya painting, *Trailokya Dipika*.

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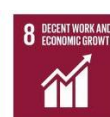
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1. Introduction

Cosmogony in India's visual traditions has diversified into various branches, including mathematically rigorous Jain diagrams, tantric yantras, temple architecture, and illuminated manuscripts (Khanna, 1979). Within this diverse spectrum, the 'Anādi Pātan' manuscript from Assam emerges as an intermittent and aboriginal example of semi-abstract metaphysical perception, rendered into symbolic visual forms. Authored by saint Śrīmaṇṭa Sankaradeva, the progenitor of neo-Vaishnavism, and illustrated by anonymous artists within the *Satras*, the neo-Vaishnavite institutions of Assam during the 16th -18th centuries (Kalita & Choudhury, 2001). 'Anādi Pātan' articulates the theology of creation from a *Vaishnavite* cosmological perspective, introduced by Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva in the pre-modern era, rooted in devotion (bhakti), scriptural clarity, and community engagement, through folk theatre (Bhaona), congregational prayer (Kirtan), and Manuscript paintings (Neog, 1965). Numerous *Satras* (monasteries) emerged as centres of cultural, spiritual gatherings and educational practices in the vicinity, producing numerous exemplary manuscripts such as *Anādi Pātan*, *Bhakti Ratnavali*, *Kirtanhghosa*, and *Gita Govinda*, among others. Those were rigorously copied and illustrated by inmate monks, skilled in native styles. Indigenous techniques were inherited and passed down through gurus and cohorts, ushering in the tradition (Hazarika, 2016).

Anādi Pātan was compiled as a cosmological treatise and a referential medium, combining visual narration with spiritual interpretation. Pictorial representations and painting tradition emphasise abstract allegorical scenes with spiritual dynamism, folk communication, and cosmological interpretations derived from textual descriptions and cosmological themes of the *Bhagawata Purana*. Initial transcription of 'Anādi Pātan' with visual narrations was executed in the Kuji Satra of Morigaon, Assam, during the late 17th to early 18th centuries, succeeding with crucial copies that are preserved in the State Museum of Assam, Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti in Guwahati, and local Satra collections (Goswami, 1930). Those Amateurly-illustrated folios reflect a distinct visual language in contrast to other regional Indian manuscript traditions. Characterised by bold lines, puppet-like figures, and minimal or abstract detailing, creating an independent tradition of manuscript illustrations (Kalita & Choudhury, 2001). Those were practised and utilised as visual aids in the Satra tradition to engage monks and lay followers in understanding metaphysical and cosmological phenomena through visual contemplation of Vaishnava ideology (Neog, 1981).

1.1 Jain and Brahmanical contexts

Jain cosmology is revered for its precise iconographic diagrams, geometry and measurement based on the Jain scriptural traditions, especially those accumulated precisely in '*Samgrahani Sutra*' (1136 A.D.), in 319 verses, scribed in '*Prakrit*' on ethical conduct and cosmology, attributed to the 11th-century scholar Sricandra Sastri, a disciple of the revered Scholar Acharya Maladhari Hemachandra (Ghosh, S. 2021). According to Robert J. Bonta, this version, popularly known as '*Samgrahaniratna*' (Jewel of the compilation) in Sanskrit, is titled '*Trailokyadīpikā*', illumination of the tripartite world (2013, pp. 47-50). This elaborately highlights the cosmography through '*Lokapurūṣa*' (world Man), which narrates and visualises the structure of the universe with specific measurements, labelling different realms, regions, and sub-realms (Gupta, 1992). *The Lokapurūṣa cartography anthropomorphises the cosmos, placing the hell realms in the lower torso, the present realm at the centre, and the heavens in the upper section*. These schematic forms are didactic and meditative, often used as visual aids for complex metaphysical systems (Cort, 2010). Besides, in Vedic tantric traditions, cosmology is often symbolised through *Yantras*-homocentric geometric diagrams, presumably enfolding cosmic energy (Zimmer, 1946). Circles, triangles, and lotus formations signify notions of cyclic viewpoints, divine centres (*Bindu*), and spiritual accord (Khanna, 1979).

These diagrams are endorsed as cosmological miniatures and are continually used in rituals, meditation, and temple architecture. Basically, the geometry of Yantra and Mandala reduces the cosmic formation to squares, triangles, and circles as the fundamental structures through which all cardinal aspects of life, origin, elements, nature, and time are represented. Circle, encode the manifested form of the *Bindu* (dot), signifying time as sempiternal, cyclic and emanative (Vatsyayan, 1997). The triangle represents *Prakriti* (nature): with the peak downward, it signifies the female principle; and the peak upward, the male principle, as the primordial insertion of space. A triangle is the archetype of sacred enclosure, as space cannot be confined by fewer than three lines (Bhattacharya, 2005, p. 346; Bienemann, 2003). It is considered the origin of manifested nature, known as *Prakriti*. The most balanced pattern of creation, as extracted, is fundamental in this form of origin (Khanna, 1979). According to Mookerjee & Khanna (1977),

The tripartite structure of the triangle is construed over multiple levels. Some of these conceptions are: (1) Creation, Perpetuation, and annihilation, symbolised as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. (2) The three tendencies of human nature: the neutral, the positive and the negative, indicated by the terms *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. (3) The three Vedas: *Rig*, *Sam* and *Yajur*. (4) Past, Present, and Future. (5) The three seasons: Spring, Winter and Summer. (p. 54).

Whereas the square symbolises the physical reality of *Prakriti* and *Puruṣa* in conjugal union, the Tantric practise aims to excel in consciousness.

2. Methodology

Anādi Pātan is a crucial and revered text of Sattriya visual culture, a unique manuscript in classical Indian painting that explores the theme of cosmology through a fluid, organic, and semi-abstract visual language, convincing one to compare it with the cosmorama of *Lokapurūṣa*. The study employs an interdisciplinary framework of textual, art-historical, and qualitative approaches to artefact analysis. Specifically, to investigate the visual and conceptual convergence and divergence, systematic analysis that extends Panofsky's iconological study, with Puranic and Tantric explorations in the background, adopts the three-level framework below.

Level 1.	Pre- iconographical	Analysis of the basic elements of art, i.e., line, form, colour, and materiality, to understand the fundamentals of illumination in Sattriya and Jain imagery.
Level 2.	Iconographical	Comparative Interpretation of visuals of both cases in relation to their textual narratives and cosmological and spiritual rhetorics.
Level 3.	Iconological	Assessment of relevant epistemic and canonical sources, in relation to their didactic, socio-religious, and phenomenological cores, with reference to the Vedic Indian knowledge system.

3. Cosmic illumination of Anādi Pātan

An exceptional work of imagery and cosmological explanation of the Vaishnavite tradition, composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva at Patbausi Satra, rooted in the X canto of the Sanskrit Bhagwat Purana. Many transcriptions of the text have been procured and preserved in various locations, such as a significant manuscript transcribed on *Tula Pat*, a cotton-based folio

measuring 42 cm x 27cm and dating from the mid-18th century, recovered from the Kuji Satra in the Morigaon district of Assam (Kalita, 1996). Around 25 folios of the manuscript comprise 49 paintings and are now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The text's theme is cosmogony, which depicts the destruction and recreation of the universe by *Isvara Puruṣa*, *Param Puruṣa*, or *Brahma Puruṣa* as mentioned in Bhagawata X. It explicitly defines the components of mind, 14 types of *Bhuvan* (earth), 24 significant *tattvas* (knowledge), seven paths (final destination of soul), *sapta-dvipas* (seven distinct islands), seven heavens, including four *Vedas*, *Shastras*, *Puranas*, *Varnas* (classes), ten *Dikpalas* (guards of the directions), twelve *Rashi-chakras* (zodiac cycles) and 84 hells (*naraka*) (Sarma, 2012). The narration refers to the Bhagavata Purana and includes elements from the Vamana Purana that emphasise astronomy (Choudhury & Nandagopal, 1998).

The initial part of the manuscript mythologises the Earth, carried by eight divine elephants, Anantnaga, a giant serpent, and a tortoise. The subsequent section elucidates the *Maha-pralaya* (inordinate deluge), or a devastating flood, followed by recreation, which *Brahma Puruṣa* carries out with confirmation and favour of *Prakriti* (see Figure 1). The use of visual imagery in this transcription is noteworthy across Assam's painting genres (*Satria* style) and throughout India's vast manuscript painting tradition. Some other replicas of the text were obtained from various locations; i.e., a copy from 'Samaguri Satra' of Majuli, measuring 46 cm x 11 cm, scribed on Sanchi pat by Hiloidari Bora, with the artist's name Jadava Dwija. It spanned 33 folios in total, and the artistic execution is more restrained than in the other transcripts. Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti also preserves another significant copy dated to 1782 A.D., sourced from Darrang, Assam (Goswami, 1930). It is also inscribed on the Sanchi pat, spans 21 folios, contains 39 paintings, and measures 46 cm x 15.7 cm. Apparently, the stylisation of artworks seems a bit conventional and folk, yet it is comparatively better than the previous copies; a remarkable manuscript, representing the Darrang style of the Assam School of painting.



Figure 1: *Anādi Pātan*, cosmorama of the divine Puruṣa, giant serpent, divine turtle, *Diggaṃjas* (veterans) and cosmogenic attributes. Folio of the *Anādi Pātan* Manuscript depicting the different realms of the cosmogony. (Source: Initially compiled by the author, Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, December 2014)

The subject emphasises the concept of creation as described in the *Bhagavata Purana*, III Canto, and the *Vamana Purana*, executed on 30 folios of Sanchi pat measuring 13 x 3 ½ inches. The entire script comprises 296 Assamese couplets that explore Vedic cosmogony, describing the

seven categories of Heaven and Hells. Both sides of the folio are inscribed in eight horizontal text lines, describing the justification of deeds, which determines the different levels of heaven or hell to which a person goes after death (Goswami, 2009). It begins with a persistent tale in which Parikshit, a king, poses a question to the veteran Shukhadeva about the evolution of the earth and other phenomena. In response, the sage narrates that the earth rests on eight hills, elevated by eight *diggajas* (great veterans), who are standing distinctly on the eight heads of *Ananta Naga* (the divine serpent), who, in turn, is supported by the giant *Kumra*, a divine tortoise, and the displacements of these *diggajas* cause earthquakes (see Figure 1).

It further narrates the devastation of the universe by Lord Rudra, followed by an episode of overall destruction and a *Maha-Pralaya* (inordinate deluge). Then, the recreation occurs through the will of '*Isvara-puruṣa*', cosmic veteran (male), and through this formation, '*Mahamaya*', prodigious impression (female), emerges, who gives birth to '*Mahattva*' (magnitude) (Sarmah, 1999). *Mahattva* gives rise to three *Gunas*, or attributes, known as *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*, which lead to evolution (Sarma, 2012). The text also highlights other details, such as astronomical and zodiacal diagrams; planetary calculations and assumptions about natural phenomena; the seven major islands and oceans; and *Jambudvīpa* or *Bharatvarsa*. It also narrates the formation of the *Siddhas*, *Narada*, *Prajapatyas*, the distinct *Adityas*, the *Danavas*, and the animal world; humankind and its classes; the compilation of the four main Vedas, fourteen Sastras, and eighteen Puranas (Kalita, 1996; see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Illumination of *Anādi Pātan*, the sustainer lord Vishnu, with other subordinate deities. Folio of the *Anādi Pātan* Manuscript depicting cardinal deities of neo-Vaishnavite interpretations. (Image Source: initially compiled by the authors, Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, December 2014)

3.1 *Anādi Pātan* - Manuscripts minutiae (level-1)

Five significant transcriptions of *Anādi Pātan* across Assam, rich in cosmological illustrations that are analysed here in relation to Jain and Puranic-Indic concepts, such as Mount Meru, *Jambudvīpa*, hells (Naraka), and heavenly realms, are listed below.

I. '*AnādiPātan*' Manuscript No. 54, preserved in Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati, late 18th century, on *Sanchi-pat* (bark of the *Aquilaria* tree), Mahi- indigenous Ink, natural mineral pigments, style: Vaishnavite, *Sattriya* Assamese miniature tradition.

- Mount Meru is centrally depicted as a cosmic mountain surrounded by seven concentric oceans and continents. Four major rivers (Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, and Sindhu) emerge from Mount Meru in four directions.

- Bright primary colours (red, yellow, blue, green) and black outlines emphasise divine hierarchies and the cosmic axis. Heavenly realms (*Swarga*) are shown above Meru, while *Patala* or *Naraka* is illustrated below.
- The paintings visually map Indic cosmogony, highlighting how Vaishnavism incorporates universal geography into spiritual practice. A considerable intangible relevance of Jain cosmological mapping is evident, especially in the concentric diagrammatic format.

II. ‘Anādi Pātan’ – Preserved in Assam State Museum, Guwahati, dated to the early 19th century on *Tula Pat*, Handmade Cotton paper, natural pigments.

- Exemplifies *Bhuloka*, *Naraka*, and *Swarga* realms with horizontal layering (tripartite division). *Dasavatara* (Ten Avatars of Vishnu) are shown guarding cosmic regions.
- Use of gold and silver leaf in the depiction of *Devaloka* and human souls is shown ascending or descending in accordance with karma.
- Emphasises the moral geography of the cosmos: virtue leads upward; sin leads downward. Visualises karma theory alongside spatial cosmology, blending Puranic eschatology with Neo-Vaishnava devotion.

III. ‘Anādi Patan’ Manuscript - Barpeta Satra Library Collection, Date: Late 18th to early 19th century, Material: *Sanchi pat*, Bark manuscript scribed with indigenous ink & natural pigments.

- Presents a sequence of coloured images delineating the text, in a scene of ‘*Yamaloka*’, the court of the deity of death, with his attendant ‘Chitrakupta’. *Yama* is painted as fearsome, as per the vernacular adaptation of the bhakti-yoga.
- Acts of ruthless punishment are shown dramatically to disseminate the devotion and fear of punishment to imbibe the moral upliftment in human life.

IV. A copy from the Collection of Auniati Satra, Majuli, belongs to the early 19th century, scribed on palm-leaf, illustrated by natural colours, inorganic pigments and indigenous *mahi* (ink).

- Represents geometric patterns, the formation of the *Brahmanda*, the universe from the fundamental elements of Earth, Fire, Water, Air, and Space.
- Planetary systems have been depicted in anthropomorphic forms, the nine planets of Navagraha, interpreted with corresponding deities into a celestial diagram. Mantras in vernacular script describe scenes.
- Highlights the local interpretation of cosmology, astrology, and the effects of celestial and planetary effects on human life. Seems to be adapted from Vedic and Puranic lore practised in the Satras of Majuli.

V. A copy of the *Bishnupriya* Manuscript, procured from Sualkuchi, Sattra of Assam, dated to the 19th century. It is Scribed on Tula-pat, a cotton-based folio illustrated in indigenous style with vibrant water-based mineral colours.

- showcase Lord Vishnu as the authority of the universe, resting inclined on the giant divine serpent ‘*Sheshanaga*’ on the wave bed of the mythical ocean of ‘*kshirasagara*’.
- Interpretation of the seven heavens and hells has been depicted through fourteen celestial spaces, respectively, *sata-loka* and *patal-loka*, all governed and nurtured by Vishnu.
- Illustrations are stylised and imbued with traditional imagery, conveying the extraction of the script. Paintings are colourful; however, they lack proportion, perspective and natural draughtsmanship. Celestial objects are represented symbolically and whimsically.

Table 1. Summary

Manuscript	Location	Theme and Visual Features	Core Themes
M.S No.54, Sankaradeva Kalakshetra	Guwahati	Mount Meru, concentric oceans, directional rivers	Indic-Jain cosmology, Vaishnava synthesis
Assam State Museum	Guwahati	Swarga-Naraka layers, Dasavatara, karma flow	Moral geography, bhakti-karma interplay
Barpeta Satra	Barpeta	Yamaloka, punishments, soul judgment	Didactic visuals of the afterlife
Majuli Satra	Majuli	Brahmanda, Navagraha, mandala	Planetary and elemental cosmology
Vishnupriya Imagery	Sualkuchi	Fourteen Lokas, Vishnu on Sheshanaga	Devotional cosmology, cosmic Vishnu

3.2. Visual Characteristics of Anādi Pātan paintings (level-2)

Paintings seem close to the *Satria* visual imagery, which is characterised by a ubiquitous red background, while the details reveal a significant divergence. Human and divine characters are in profile; artists are overcome by linearity, which is not very visible, and angularity is not very prominent. The pointed coronet is a standard headgear, and vegetation is depicted sparingly. Natural phenomena, trees and mountains, and the visualisation of Ananta Naga, an infinite Snake or divine Cobra (metaphorically, the coil of time), are mainly composed at eye level (see Figure 3). In some folios, figures are arranged on distinct horizontal planes, with cusped, canopy-shaped red fortresses that depict anthropomorphic characters representing the locations of planets across different cosmographic planes (see Figure 2). Sparse architecture is evident, reflecting bamboo, wood, and local structures in a traditional style that shapes the outlines. Palette embraces yellow, blue, green, white, and pinkish brown, despite the obvious Red. Borders are adorned with fascinating lines, floral, and geometric motifs.

Anādi Patan illuminations are significant for imaginative visualisation and epistemic acquaintance of Vedic mythology, rather than as fine examples of miniature art. These are unusual, non-figurative, and somewhat abstract; they focus on conveying the script and theme, with articulated subjects and minimalist style. The subject matter creatively combines conventional and interpretive abstract styles. Distinct zodiac signs are depicted interestingly, and each has been personified with a separate *lagna* or time. Lagna is characterised by four arms, a dark male figure, encircled by twelve other sections, and a symbol of that zodiac, represented in anthropomorphic or syncretic form on each section (Dasgupta, 1972). Pictorial depiction is decorative and conventional, appears more symbolic than realistic, similar to the stylisation of Mount Meru. Illustrations of heaven and hell across different levels are equally stylised, and it seems they are not intended to create a sense of recognisable nature or realism. Whereas, in the depiction of *Ananta Sagara* or the Primaeval Oceans, continuing the Satriya-style of box and basket pattern, identical to that in *Gita-Govinda*, in white-on-blue depth (Vatsyayan & Neog, 1986). Human faces are frequently depicted in profile, reflecting the influence of the *Satria* School. When a figure is portrayed in a frontal view, it is drawn approximately, and limbs appear to be sprouting superficially, like fixtures, from distinct parts of the torso.



Figure 3: Illumination of *Anādi Pātan*, cosmorama of the Ananta Naga, and *Brahmanda* (cosmic oval). Manuscript portraying cosmic egg and Ananta Naga of Sattriya style (Image Source: initially compiled by the authors, Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, December 2014)

Three-dimensionality and modelling have not been explored, except for a few efforts to add volume and roundness to the neck. Mythological figures, devils, and deities are composed distantly from their existing counterparts; artists highlighted them as impractical, unrealistic, and otherworldly. The palette is based more or less on the primary colours of red, blue and yellow. Remarkably, the delicate (celestial bodies, deities, veterans) and gross (devils, mythical, animal) characters are all imagined in human forms, perhaps to make them accessible even to the ordinary person, thereby illuminating the intricacies and assumptions of the cosmos. Visual representation of the cosmology serves as an imaginative medium for expressing abstract ideas corresponding to the scriptures, so artists here avoid the complexities of form and prioritise a straightforward approach to communicating profound viewpoints through relevant symbolic human forms. They are primarily articulated by frequent curves that shape their pictorial form. Though the curves are neither sophisticated nor flexible and dynamic, the bending figures appear like dummies. Character and gestures feel attractive and animated, with a protruding tongue, a wide-open mouth, and fish-shaped eyes. A conventionalised basket pattern is used to delineate rivers and oceans, akin to other Satria manuscripts from Assam (Kalita, 2009).

4. Jain cosmology

Initial ideas of the Jain cosmos were conceived in the 1st-century C.E. Śvetāmbara canons, in which the universe was presumed to be a tripartite structure comprising three basic segments: roots, stem, and canopy of a cosmic *Jambu* tree (Krüger, 2018, p. 21). The crown segment of the tree represents heaven, the stem is the linking axis mundi, and the roots symbolise the earthly and infernal worlds. Over time, the tree has been transformed into Mount Meru, the centre of the universe. According to the canonical Jain text '*Jambudvipaprajnapati*' (description on Rose Apple Island), emphasising the life of the legendary progenitor as Rishabha and his son Bharata, the core island of Madhyaloka, or the known physical world, is situated at the centre, surrounded by concentric oceans, and is perceived as '*Jambudvipa*' (Sastri, 1919). It is marked by the seven parallel territories of vast mountain ranges, among which the southernmost zone is revered as 'Bharatvarsha', the entire land of ancient India. The mountain range in the centre of *Jambudvipa* is known as Mount 'Sumeru' or 'Meru', the centre of the mythical cosmos. This specific cosmic

phenomenology resembles Brahmanical Vedic traditions, reflects syncretism, and influences the initial archetypes of Jain cosmology (Jaini, 1979). The concept of a tripartite cosmos is widely prevalent in the Vedic texts, described as earth, space, and heaven, with earth and heaven further subdivided into three levels (Murthiyedath, 2018). These three levels are classified into seven other realms, being abodes of distinguished deities. This idea of a multifaceted cosmos, with classification into lower (infernal), middle (earth), and higher (heaven), was espoused in Jain cosmology, which featured similar levels of heaven associated with gods, Tirthankaras (Krüger, 2018, p. 22).

In Jainism, '*Tirthankara*', or the Ford-maker, is idolised as the spiritual and metaphysical epitome, reflecting austerity, discipline, meditation, and redemption that signify their transcendence of human attainments and the Karmic cycle of the physical world. Rishabh dev Ji, also known as Adinath Ji, is the foremost preceptor among the 24 Tirthankaras (Dundas, 2002). Representational norms of Jain art are grounded in its steadiness and restraints. Jina idols are characteristically engrossed in standardisation, symmetry, and composure; despite gestural actions, adornments, and prodigious narration, they are reflective personifications of meticulous meditative attainments (Bhattacharya, 1939). Jain cosmology has evolved over a long period and has been passed down through oral traditions, recorded in scriptures, and later manifested in the visual representations as artefacts in manuscript paintings (Chandra, 1949). It seems to be influenced and intermingled with parallel ideas of cosmology, such as the prevailing initial perceptions in the Vedic Samhitas of ancient India; these archetypes, though, cannot be considered as the basic models for Jain cosmology entirely; however, some common interpretation of elements, geo-celestial realms and terminologies can be observed clearly (Halbfass, 1991). Portrayals of the Jain cosmos, featuring celestial zones for deities, humans, and other living creatures, initially emerged in the 16th century in Gujarat and Rajasthan, commissioned by the wealthier Jain community.

4.1 Spatial mapping of the Jain cosmos (level-1)

Early depictions were marked by the minimal representation of the structure and form of the universe, exposing the centrally located Island *Jambudvipa* and the personified cosmic man '*Lokapuruṣa*' (Caillat & Kumar, 2024). Gradually, the simplified illustration evolved into complex depictions adapted by regional artisans with varying degrees of animus. Formal personification of the *Lokapuruṣa* model was not adopted within the canonical Svetambara discipline, despite the cosmos's linear structure. As speculated in texts, it somewhat resembles a human torso, a pattern that apparently later manifested in human form through artistic and appealing allegory (Balbir et al., 2006). Whereas this formation seems to be influenced by the prevalent Vedic notion of '*Puruṣa*' (the cosmos conceived as an enormous male human body), as mentioned in the Rigveda, the cosmos emerged from the sacrificed body of a veteran man by the deities (Jamison & Brereton, 2014). During the late medieval period, '*Lokaprakasha*' emerged as a significant paradigm on the Jain cosmic world within the Svetambara discipline, which emphasised the shape of the cosmos, and was followed by numerous later interpretations in the Svetambara and Digambara disciplines, such as '*Trailokyaprajnapati*' and '*Trailokyadipika*', among others, on the theme (Dehejia, 1997). The articulative human form of '*Lokapuruṣa*' emerged around the 16th century in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Illustrations of such themes mostly originate in '*Samgrahnisutra*' (compilation texts) manuscripts; these visual specimens, in addition to pictorial interpretations and documentation, served as aids for monks and devout folks (Shah, 1987). During sermon sessions and '*Paryūṣaṇa*' (Jain rituals related to the rainy seasons), they emphasise and celebrate the miraculous attainment of the Jaina Tirthankaras. Art-historically, the pre-modern visual culture of Jain served as the pedagogical model for visualising allegorical elements, geography, and didactic content for monks, practitioners, and the religious community (Cort, 2001).

4.2 Trailokyadīpikā

In the Jain conception of *Brahmāṇḍa*, the universe is a systematic and visually articulated cosmological model. Unlike mythic cosmologies, which narrate creation through divine intervention, Jain cosmology presents an eternal, uncreated universe governed by intrinsic laws of karma and substance (Dundas, 2002). Within this framework, significant cosmological formulations emerge as the textual and diagrammatic illumination of the three worlds in the *Trailokyadīpikā*, through schematics of the *Lokapuruṣa* and anthropomorphic visualisation of the universe, which embodies the cosmos as a human figure. *Trailokyadīpikā* systematises the cosmic structure through descriptive exposition and cosmographic measurements. It is a combination of two terms: *Trailokya*- three worlds and *Dīpikā*- illumination or enlightenment, also known as *Samgrahani Sutra* (Caillat & Kumar, 1981). A canonical treatise, adapted in Hindi by Muni Manik Maharaj in the early 20th century, sheds light on Jain cosmology, including interpretations of time, space, celestial realms and their measurements, mathematical calculations, and moralistic adjudication of human deeds (Rao, 1982). The text primarily describes the vertical embodiment of hells in the lower section of the cosmic male's body; the horizontal expansion of oceans and continents in the hip and loin portion; and multi-layered heavens in the upper section. They provide measurements in vast cosmological units, termed as '*Rajju*' (a spatial unit), and describe the classification of beings according to their deeds and righteousness (Willey, 2004). These representations attempt to translate metaphysical views into structured visual and conceptual systems, describing the development of Jain interpretation of cosmogeny, life predictions, morals, and visual culture into a coherent worldview (Caillat & Kumar, 1981).

4.3 Lokapuruṣa

Originating from two Sanskrit words: *Loka*, which refers to the world or universe, and *Puruṣa*, meaning a person (Man), *Lokapuruṣa* signifies the universe imagined as a cosmic figure, transcendental man or vice versa. According to Jain scriptures, *puruṣa* is not considered a deity, creator, or metaphysical being. It basically represents a transcendental man, a human being who emerged from normativity through the epitome of self-discipline and austerity. It creates a threefold visual diagram of human deeds culminating in the adjudged destinations, representing a simplified cosmography (Shah & Kumar, 2024). The cosmos is demonstrated through an upright human posture with broad shoulders, a narrow waist, and a slightly expanded lower section. This particular form is organised and premeditated, symbolising autistic height, cosmic proportionality, and measurements interpreted in Jain epistemology and cosmology (see Figure 4). On the contrary, the term *Puruṣa*, as defined in the *Puruṣa Sukta* of the "*Rigveda 10.90*", connotes God, creator, or supreme being (Doniger, 2009). *Lokapuruṣa* visually represents a three-way division of the *Brahmāṇḍa*, described as *Trailokya*, the three worlds in the statuesque formation of man. The lower cosmic body characterises '*Adho-Loka*' (the lower world), comprising seven descending regions from the lower torso to the legs of the cosmic figure (Shah, 1987). These hells are arranged vertically, with progressively more intense suffering. '*Madhya-Loka*', the middle world, corresponding to the waist region, is the recognisable world inhabited by humans, animals, and other ordinary beings. Featuring the central continent of *Jambudvīpa* (the apple-wood island), Mount Meru at its centre, surrounded by convoluted oceans and other continents (Caillat & Kumar, 1981). According to Jain ideology, salvation is envisaged through this mortal realm. The upper portion of the cosmic Man, imagined as '*Ūrdhva-Loka*', the celestial realms, further unfolds into seven ascending levels of heaven, the abode of deities and other sophisticated beings (Shah, 2004). The utmost crown region, referred to as '*Siddha-Shila*', is the abode of liberated souls, those who have transcended karma and achieved *moksha* (salvation), depicted as a thin, crescent formation at the top of the cosmic figure (Caillat & Kumar, 1981, see Figure 4).

4.4 Stylistic features (level-2)

Lokapuruṣa images are depicted as figurative cartographs, rooted in the descriptions of the *Trailokyadīpikā*, and rendered in vibrant colours. The anthropomorphic cosmic figure is proportionate and horizontally divided into several zones representing multiple virtues, adorned with a decorative head covering, calm eyes, curved shoulders, and inverted-folded arms often in 'Jnana' *mudra*, a gesture drawing from the Jain miniature painting tradition of western India (Doshi, 1985). Textual captions categorise each section, and distinct colours highlight the infernal, terrestrial, and celestial zones. Despite realistic representations of a human figure, they are, rather, stylised cosmographies that combine geometry and symbolism (Pal, 1994). Objectively designed to clearly communicate the origin of the world, purpose, ethics, and Jain epistemology to devotees, followers, and apprentices, the illustrations serve as pedagogical aids to convey the core philosophy through simple graphs (see Figure 4). Some other diagrams, based on the text descriptions, are geometric, designed in circular, rectangular, curvilinear, and crescent shapes, and in repetitive patterns, which depict elementary oceans, islands, and continents. Rectangular bands denote levels of hell, heaven, and celestial bodies. Overall, the drawings are geometric, precise, and symmetrical, maintaining order through mathematical calculations and measurements (see Figure 2). The visual language resembles architectural planning, as if the cosmos were an immense, carefully constructed edifice (Caillat & Kumar, 1981). Visual narratives and iconography of *Lokapuruṣa* continued the same style and pattern until the 16th to 19th century, with sparse variation, and artisans apparently emphasised the fundamental ideas of the Jain cosmos, i.e., Mount Meru, *Jambudvīpa*, oceans, islands, different levels of hells and heaven as a main theme composed in the foreground. These are arranged symmetrically and vertically within a front profile of a standing figure of a cosmic man. Artists have not even tried to visualise the supportive elements such as skyscapes, water bodies, landscapes, architecture, flora and fauna, as well as different infernal levels and heavens, which are also depicted with geometric continuity, without any pictorial speculations, presumably reducing to the textual traditions. The known middle world, as the habitat of mortals, is placed at the centre of cosmic man, symbolically as a circular diagram or geometric disc rather than any artistic lucidity or pictorial explorations. Depiction of *Lokapuruṣa* adorned with a long robe and a turban, with an allegorical 'Asoka' bud on the head; formation of facial gestures, figure, and limbs follows the painterly style of Western Indian miniatures to represent Jina. A vertical passage, extending from the neck to the ankles of the cosmic figure, connects each level from heaven to hell and permeates the human soul upward or downwards to its final destination, as per the karmic adjudication, also represented symbolically with minimal variations and pictorial details.

Table 2. Allegoric Interpretation

Visual Element	Symbolic Reading
Central radiating form	Axis mundi, representing Mount Meru, the cosmic centre/ of the known world/ middle world
Three or seven-layered zones	Correspond to hells (<i>nāraka</i>), earth (<i>madhya</i>), and heavens (<i>svarga</i>)
Circular petals or arms	Emblems of expansion from the Divine, sacred geometry of cosmic unity
Arcs and waves	Allegorically, the ring continents and oceans of <i>Jambudvīpa</i> .
Negative space/darkness	Represents cosmic void or base states of ignorance (<i>avidyā</i>)



Figure 4 & 5: Lokapuruṣa & Illustrations of the Jain Cosmology. Loka Puruṣa and Fourteen Rajlok or Triloka, Shape of the Universe as per Jain cosmology in the form of a cosmic man, Miniature from the 17th century, Saṃgrahaṇīratna by Śrīcandra, in Prakrit. Diagrams of Jain Cosmography from a 17th-century CE Manuscript of a 17th-century Saṃgrahaṇīratna by Śrīcandra, Jain text Sankhitta Sangheyani. (Image Source: https://Jain_cosmology/)

5. Visual rhetorics of the Lokapuruṣa and Anādi Pātan (level 3)

‘Anādi Pātan’ visuals presumably signify symbolic pretexts, according to Kapila Vatsayana on the Sanskrit tradition and art (1997): “Bindu at the centre refers to the metaphysical origin, circular motion defines cyclical time (*kāla*) and emanative world (*saṃsāra*), upward radiance suggests *Moksha* or spiritual transcendence, chromatic layers illuminate the gradation of consciousness” (p. 142). This system forms a visual grammar that aids interpretive engagement beyond literal reading. In the Satra tradition, the manuscripts are recited and experienced in sessions; viewers are encouraged to ponder the imagery as a path to internalising divine sublimity. The illustrations thus become a resort for *dhyāna* (meditation), making the invisible visible- allowing the devotee to muse on what it conveys symbolically. Illustrative practises in this tradition evolved into allegorical representations alongside devotional and enlightening engagements.

5.1 Mount Meru as the central Radiance

The iconograph of *Lokapuruṣa* presents a symmetrical, symbolic compass, a calm, unadorned form that encompasses the spatial universe and imbues spectators with introspective scrutiny. It provides a mechanised portal that posits the universe and primordial elements are eternal and exist without God’s intervention, referring to a calculative karmic culmination. Conversely, the former evokes a considerate dive, symbolically depicting the cosmos as an extension of divine perception and providing a path to redemption. In Jain, *Jambudivipa*, Mount Meru is a stylised cone or spatial centre; another one presents Meru through radiating colour and layered luminosity. Apparently, it is a glowing flame that transcends into sacred light, symbolising spiritual veneration. Art historian B.N. Goswamy (2003) remarks that -

“This evocation of Meru through light, rather than form, aligns with Vaishnava metaphysics, in which *prakāśa* (divine radiance) is the ultimate sign of the Absolute.”

5.2 Vertical stratification of Realms

The conceptual logic converges on the tripartite cosmic interpretations, despite the Jain vision of manifested physicality into a tripartite universe as a map of the three worlds, which is a symbolic and static vessel, expressed through the cosmic man, with circular and symmetrical arrangements. In Assamese imagery, the universe is depicted across different spatial realms: the infernal, the earth, and the heaven are dramatically rendered in horizontal and vertical layers. Colours are associated with lucid themes: hells are depicted in darker, eerie, and chaotic schemes, characterised by fire and demons; heavens are coloured with sophisticated, radiant hues; and earth shows mundane skits of deities. It explores lyrical revelation of primordial elements, oceans, Surya, earth, air and space creation by primal intervention of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, with creative and fluid pictorial depiction (Boruah, 2005).

5.3 Practice of Symbolic Motifs

Visual elements often carry significant symbolic meanings, such as lotus formations, which denote detachment, wisdom, and enlightenment. Mount Meru shows spiritual and conscious elevation; geometric grids and patterns depict celestial order; concentric and cyclic motion represent time, origin, destruction, the cycle of deeds, birth, and death. The vastness of the ocean, islands, heavens, hells and space symbolically pauses the identity of being and pushes forth towards the infinite and eternal force of the universe and sacredness. Colour grading of blues for oceans and deities, and reds for fire and the vitality of specific characters, creates a cohesive and captivating effect. Jain diagrams emerged from grim contemplation and highlight methodical and schematic order. While Assamese imagery engages with painterly emotion, abstraction, and visual poetics, it conveys its meaning to an attuned devotee through symbolic depth and spiritual aesthetics. Sattriya allegories, as interpretations of the Bhagwat Purana and Vedic traditions, explore an alternative mode of visualisation through artistic, devotional, and mythological Vaishnavite aesthetics, in which self-effacement, perpetuity, and abstraction become a means of access to the divine. Thereby, vibrant representations of worldly and otherworldly, celestial and metaphysical bodies, illuminating cosmic elements, heavens and hells, are governed by the supreme authority and subordinate deities, coherently venturing devotional submission and thriving as a sacred pictorial guide in Assam's visual culture.

Table 3. Jain vs Assamese Visual Cosmology

Aspect	Jain Cosmoramas	Assamese ' <i>Anādi Pātan</i> '
Visual lucidity	Geometric, measured	Abstract, luminous
Representation of Meru	Stepped or pyramidal form (physical)	Radiating centre of light (metaphysical)
Division of realms	Clear tiers with textual labels	Narrative, Coloured Scenes and Symbolic Zones
Purpose	Didactic, scriptural, meditative	Devotional, experiential, contemplative
Pictorial style	Minimalist, symbolic, mechanical	Painterly, expressive, devotional

6. Conclusion

Systematic comparison of both cases reveals the archetypal anthropoidal views of distant premodern approaches to socio-religiosity. Visual descriptions of the Lokapuruṣa and Anādi Pātan coalesce into the intangible cosmological ideology of devotional engagement. It thereby

continues the progression from the didactic and epistemic prototypes of the Vedic and Puranic traditions. Both the representations of premodern epistemic pursuits of devotion, cosmogeny, spatial coding, pedagogical access, and Karmic adjudication are rooted in their native cultural, religious, and independent visual lexicon, which has inculcated an extraordinary tradition of manuscript illumination under the vast umbrella of pan-Indian knowledge systems. Jain graphics represent a self-awakening and experiential notion of the cosmos (human conduct), ultimately culminating in a mechanised portal that adheres to the core teachings of austerity, meditation, and introspective enlightenment. Conversely, the Sattriya cosmogony of Assam embraces a subservient spirituality grounded in the rudiments of Vaishnavite devotion and extends beyond human physicality to the realm of infinity and divine consciousness, and stylistically excerpts *Anādi Pātan'* as the solitary specimen of the visual rhetoric on the theme in the entire genre.

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Dr Rajan Kumar Vaidhya serves as an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at Assam University, where he joined the faculty in 2010. Dr Vaidhya earned his PhD in Visual Arts from Assam University in 2015 and qualified for the UGC NET in 2006. He pursued Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Fine Arts (Painting) from the Rajasthan School of Art, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. During the period, he was awarded the State Award in the Artist Category twice by the Rajasthan Lalit Kala Akademi. He received a National Scholarship from the Department of Culture, MHRD, for Painting. He has participated in state- and national-level art exhibitions, workshops, and camps. As an art educator, he has been actively involved in teaching painting, photography, digital art, assemblage, installation, and performance art in the department. Four doctoral candidates have been successfully supervised to completion, and he has published a monograph and a body of research in relevant national and international journals and conference proceedings.
