

TARANGA IS A FAMOUS PLACE IN VADNAGAR OF GUJARAT IS THE OLDEST JAIN TEMPLE IN THE 12TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Taranga is located 128 km north of Ahmedabad, and only 20 km from Vadnagar, the 3-peaked hill is significant for Buddhists and Jains. While the oldest Jain temple was built in the 12th century, Buddhist monuments dating back to the 4th century on this hill. Reaching the hilltop involves a trek. On reaching you can see small shrines dedicated to Buddhist Goddess, Devi Taranamata. Weathered terracotta images of Buddha and four carved images of Dhyani Buddha on a stone plate can be seen in cave formations. The Taranga Jain Temple is further up from here. This 12th century derasar is one of the best-preserved temples in Gujarat. There is a five-metre tall sculpture of the 2nd Jain Tirthankara, Shri Ajitnath, who represents inner stillness. The **Svetambara** complex consists of 14 temples, but there are 5 other **Digambara** shrines as well. Taranga is a Jain pilgrimage center near Kheralu in Mehsana district, Gujarat, India, with two compounds of Jain temples that are important examples of the Māru-Gurjara style of architecture.

KEYWORDS: tirthankara, digambara, svetambara, derasar, ajitnath, aravalli range.

INTRODUCTION

The earliest archaeological activity in 1938 reported that this was historically a Buddhist site from the 4th-5th century. According to Jain researchers, this place was known as Tarvur, Taravar Nagar, Tarangiri or Tarangarh. The holy book, 'Kumarpal Pratibodh' by Acharya Shri

Somprabhsurishwar records the establishment of the temple of Shashanadhishtatri Shri Siddhadayika Devi by the then ruler King Vatsrai during the 6th century. Another legend states that the local Buddhist King Veni Vatsaraja and Jain monk Khaputacharya built a temple for goddess Tara together.

Taranga is a Jain pilgrimage center near Kheralu in Mehsana district, Gujarat, India, with two compounds of

Jain temples that are important examples of the Māru-Gurjara style of architecture. The Ajitnatha temple, was constructed in 1161 by the Solanki king Kumarapala, under the advice of his teacher, Acharya Hemachandra. Both the main sects of Jainism are represented, with adjoining walled compounds: the Śvetāmbara compound consists of 14 temples in all, and there are also five Digambara-affiliated temples at Taranga hill.

Taranga Hill is a significant pilgrimage site in Gujarat, India, known for its religious and natural attractions, including a 12th-century Jain temple and ancient Buddhist monuments. Located in the Aravalli range, it is a popular destination for Jains and Buddhists, as well as for trekkers, due to its blend of historical resonance, lush landscapes, and scenic views. The site is approximately

128 km north of Ahmedabad and is accessible by road or a local train from Mehsana.

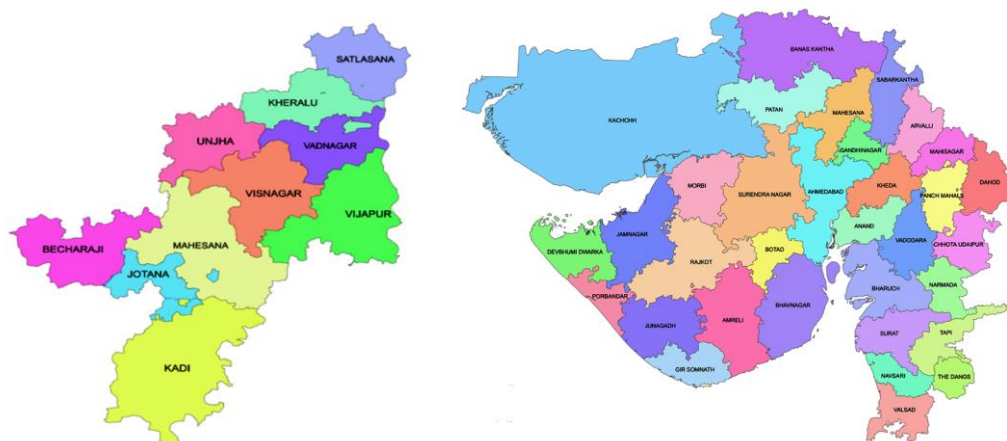


Figure 1: Map of Mehsana and Gujarat.

Jainism: The 12th-century Taranga Jain Temple, also known as the Ajitnath Temple, is the main attraction. The temple complex consists of 19 Jain temples and requires climbing nearly 700 steps to reach.

Buddhism: The hill has ancient Buddhist monuments dating back to the 4th century and was historically a refuge for Buddhist monks.



Figure 2: Taranga temple.

Nature: The area includes Taranga Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, offering nature walks and scenic views.

Trekking: The hills are popular for trekking, rock climbing, and bouldering.

History: The site offers a glimpse into the history of the Solanki Rajputs, who were responsible for the preservation of the derasar (temple). The Taranga temple

is a Jain pilgrimage site in Gujarat's Mehsana district, dedicated to Ajitnath, the second Tirthankara. Built in the 12th century by King Kumarapala, it is a significant historical and religious site for both the Svetambara and Digambara Jain sects, featuring 19 temples in total (14 Svetambara and 5 Digambara).

Dedicated to: The temple's central idol is of Ajitnath, the second Tirthankara of the current age in Jainism.



Figure 3: Temple sculpture and deity [Ajitnathji].

Location: Taranga Hills, near Kheralu in the Mehsana district of Gujarat, India.

Construction: Built in 1121 AD under the guidance of Acharya Hemachandra by the Chaulukya king Kumarapala, according to Gujarat Tourism and Wikipedia.

Architectural style: The temple showcases the Māru-Gurjara style of architecture.

Temple complex: It comprises two compounds of Jain temples: one belonging to the Svetāmbara sect with 14 temples, and another with 5 Digambara shrines.

Historical significance: The site was formerly a Buddhist site from the 4th-5th century, and a legend connects it to a Buddhist King Veni Vatsaraja and Jain monk Khaputacharya.

Accessibility: The temple is wheelchair accessible and open to visitors from 9 AM to 6 PM daily.

A "digambara murti" refers to a statue of a Jain Tirthankara, particularly those from the Digambara sect, which is characterized by a lack of clothing and ornamentation, reflecting the sect's emphasis on asceticism. These murtis are often depicted in a serene, meditative posture, symbolizing spiritual detachment and enlightenment. They are made from various materials like stone, marble, and brass and are housed in temples or used for personal worship. Digambara is one of the two major schools of Jainism, the other being Śvetāmbara (white-clad). The Sanskrit word Digambara means "sky-clad", referring to their traditional monastic practice of neither possessing nor wearing any clothes. Nakedness was the ideal practice of lord Mahavira and his immediate followers. Mahavira emphasised the importance of nakedness for monks.



Figure 4: Aravalli range.

It symbolizes complete detachment and is an ideal form of conduct. Mahavira believed that renouncing clothes made the body immune to external influences like heat and cold, increasing resilience. Without clothes, a monk would avoid the distractions of acquiring, maintaining, and washing garments, allowing him to focus on spiritual growth and self-discipline. The Śvetāmbara also spelled

Shwetambara, Shvetambara, Svetambara or Swetambara) is one of the two main branches of Jainism, the other being the Digambara. Śvetāmbara in Sanskrit means "white-clad", and refers to its ascetics' practice of wearing white clothes, which sets it apart from the Digambara or "sky-clad" Jains whose ascetic practitioners go nude.



Figure 5: Svetambar & Digambara.

Śvetāmbaras do not believe that ascetics must practice nudity. The Śvetāmbara and Digambara traditions have had historical differences ranging from their dress code, their temples and iconography, attitude towards Jain

nuns, their legends and the texts they consider as important. Śvetāmbara Jain communities are currently found mainly in Gujarat, Rajasthan and coastal regions of Maharashtra. According to Jeffery D. Long, a scholar

of Hindu and Jain studies, about four-fifths of all Jains in India are Śvetāmbaras.

CONCLUSION

Taranga Hill is a significant pilgrimage site in the Aravalli Range in Gujarat, India, known for its importance to both Jain and Buddhist followers. It features a 12th-century Jain temple, Buddhist monuments dating back to the 4th century, and cave formations. The location also has trekking opportunities and a nearby wildlife sanctuary, making it a multifaceted destination for tourists and nature lovers.

- Jain Temple: A 12th-century temple, also known as the Ajitnath Temple, was built by the Solanki dynasty. It is dedicated to the 12th Tirthankara, Dhamma. You can reach the temple by climbing approximately 700 steps.
- Buddhist Heritage: The hills have ancient Buddhist monuments, including cave formations with weathered terracotta images of Buddha. They served as a refuge for Buddhist monks in the past.
- Three-peaked hill: The hill is characterized by three peaks and offers a blend of ancient temples, lush landscapes, and historical resonance.
- Wildlife Sanctuary: A Taranga Hill Wildlife Sanctuary is located nearby, offering a nature and wildlife area for visitors.
- Activities: Visitors can go trekking, rock climbing, or bouldering, as well as visit the temples.

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