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Shreyas Rajagopal April 10, 2024

Journeys to the Transcendent: Finding Mount Kailāsa in Texts, Topography, and Temples

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the evolution of Mt. Kailāsa's religious significance across Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, throughout textual sources and the cultural landscape. Kailāsa is today considered a mountain peak in the Kailash Range that is the site of pilgrimage for followers of these three religious traditions. However, its initial appearances do not speak of a physical mountain but rather a heavenly one that is beyond the quotidian experiences of humans.

Kailāsa's religious significance was a process, one that I argue reflected a desire to render accessible that which is inaccessible. The diverse textual representations of Kailāsa, through powerful celestial beings and unique geographical features, allude to a mountain that is supernatural and difficult to access for ordinary mortals. Especially at a time when Śaivism was booming, the medieval representations of Kailāsa elevate its attraction by positing it as an inaccessible and heavenly mountain. That inaccessibility drove certain attempts to render Kailāsa accessible, specifically in the field of pilgrimage and temple construction. Pilgrimage today brings followers as close as possible to the physical mountain, and aspects of temple construction—specifically the Kailāśanātha and Choṭā Kailāsa—bring representations of Kailāsa itself to the kingdoms in which followers reside.

To say that accessibility is the sole driver, however, is an oversimplification that ignores external factors. For example, the establishment of pilgrimage as a larger-scale process was substantially catalyzed by political, economic, social, and even alchemical factors. Similarly, it is difficult to assert temple construction was directly modeled off textual descriptions of Kailāsa as inaccessible. These suggest that the Kailāsa of texts may not be the physical mountain that is understood as Kailāsa today, nor the Kailāśanātha temple that shares its namesake. Nevertheless, the accessibility-inaccessibility argument put forth in my thesis offers a useful heuristic to explain how and why Kailāsa came to possess mass religious significance both textually and through cultural practices.

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Introduction

According to modern atlases, Mount Kailash, or Mt. Kailāsa, is a mountain in the Kailash range, located in the Southern Tibet region, nearly 300 km north of the Nepalese and Indian borders.[1] Adjacent to the mountain are two lakes—Lake Mānasarōvar and Lake Rākṣasatāla.[2] Together, these make up a site that is worshipped across various faiths, with Hindus and Buddhists (and Jains to a lesser degree)[3] making pilgrimage to the site because of the significance of the location as well as the potential religious rewards and cleansing effects of making the journey.[4]

However, according to medieval Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain texts, Mt. Kailāsa is beyond the physical realm. In Hinduism, it is traditionally known as the abode of Śiva, the god of destruction, who resides there alongside his consort Pārvatī or Umā and their sons Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya.[5] In Buddhism, Kailāsa is loosely linked to the mountain at the center of the universe—Mt. Meru—which plays an important role in Buddhist geography and cosmology. It also serves as the home of the deity Cakrasaṃvara, also known as Śrī Heruka.[6] For adherents of Jainism, Kailāsa is associated with Aṣṭapada, the mountain where the first Jain tīrthaṅkara, Ṛṣabha, attained liberation and gave his first sermon.[7]

Kailāsa, then, is a recurring symbol that shapes the cultural landscape of these religious traditions. Representations and narratives of Kailāsa are present today across many facets of life.

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[1] Andrew Alter, "Himalaya Region," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1010020030
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] "Full moon night in Manasarovar on 04 June 2023 (Purnima)," *Kailash Tour Package*, accessed March 6, 2024, https://www.kailashtourpackage.com/kailash-jain-followers-tour-package.html
[4] Martin Gray, "Mt. Kailash," *World Pilgrimage Guide*, https://sacredsites.com/asia/tibet/mt_kailash.html
[5] Alter, "Himalaya Region."
[6] David B. Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: the discourse of Śrī Heruka (Śrīherukābhidhāna)* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2007), 380.
[7] John Cort, *Framing the Jina: Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 115.

Kailash has even made its way into pop culture, being the interest of documentaries attempting to prove the existence of superhuman species and aliens as the creators and residents of the mountain.[8] Pilgrimages to the mountain continue to attract more people each year.[9] The growth of Kailāsa impact on religious and cultural practice that has compounded over time has been coupled with a heightened fascination, warranting an analysis that examines why and how Kailāsa evolved to be a symbol of spirituality.

Though there is extensive literature on Kailāsa in Hinduism and Buddhism, and some on the mountain in Jainism, there is a dearth of research that ties together the discussions of the mountain across these three traditions. Much of this work centers on either on Kailāsa's textual foundations,[10] on motives that drive pilgrimage to and from the mountain as a physical site,[11] or on Kailāsa's symbolism across painting,[12] sculpture,[13] and architecture.[14] Often, these approaches do not overlap. Studies of textual descriptions of Kailāsa in Hindu texts, for example, do not reference pilgrimage to the modern site in Tibet, while examinations of the architecture of the eighth century Kailāśanātha temple to Śiva in Ellora do not examine in detail textual representations of the mountain. With this lack of connection, questions arise regarding not only the influence of texts on cultural practices and vice versa, but whether the Kailāsa of texts is the same as the mountain to which people embark on pilgrimage. Putting different approaches to

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[8] Sadhika Sehgal, "Wait A Minute: There Are Aliens At Kailash Parvat?" *MensXP*, December 28, 2022, https://www.mensxp.com/special-features/features/125637-aliens-at-kailash-mansarovar-actual-sightings-videos.html

[9] Sonam Tenphel, "Kailash Mansarovar Yatra: Follow the 9 Steps in 2024," *Tibet Vista*, January 05, 2024, https://www.tibettravel.org/kailash-tour/kailash-mansarovar-yatra.html

[10] Alex McKay, *Kailas Histories* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2015), 115-120.

[11] K. T. S. Sarao, "Pilgrimage to Mt Kailash: The Abode of Lord Shiva," *Dialogue* 16, no. 2 (Oct-Dec 2014): 218.

[12] Pratapaditya Pal, "Introduction," in *The Peaceful Liberators: Jain Art from India* (Los Angeles: Museum Associates, 1994), 30.

[13] M. K. Dhavalikar, "Kailasa — The Stylistic Development and Chronology," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 41 (1982): 33.

[14] Gianni Dubbini, "Mount Kailāśa In Mahārāṣṭra: Reconsidering the Role of Cave 16 in the Rock-Cut Temple Architecture of Ellorā," *Quaderni Asiatici* 116, (Dec 2016): 9.

Kailāsa in conversation with each other is a prerequisite to understanding what attracts followers of distinct religious traditions to Kailāsa as a symbol, its tie to medieval texts, and how it varies for different aspects of the cultural landscape, such as pilgrimage and temple construction.

In this thesis, I argue that Kailāsa's ability to function both as a source and symbol of spirituality stems from a common theme: its characterization as an inaccessible mountain that transcends the quotidian experience of humans, who then seek to render it accessible through cultural practices like pilgrimage and prayer. Access is a spectrum, with different representations of Kailāsa showing different ways in which the mountain is difficult to access by mere mortals. Similarly, access is not the sole factor. In fact, I argue that external factors complicate the validity of the accessibility thesis when explaining the initial establishment of pilgrimage as well as the construction of the Kailāśanātha temple. However, across the texts and practices of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, what is evident is a vision of Kailāsa that is otherworldly and ethereal, a theme that is evoked in pilgrims today as well as the artistic representations of temples that share its name. Thus, the consistent image of Kailāsa as otherworldly sustains the attraction to the mountain as a marker of holiness.

Part 1 examines the origins of Kailāsa in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain texts, arguing that the celestial figures as well as organismal and geological appearances suggest a supernatural characteristic of the mountain. I read these, especially the celestial figures and their attributes, in the context of the rise in Śaivism, explaining why it may have been advantageous to incorporate the language and imagery of Kailāsa into the folds of other religious traditions. Part 2 explores Kailāsa's impact on cultural practices and constructions, with a focus on pilgrimage to the mountain site as well as temple architecture within the Ellora caves and temples that share the namesake Kailāsa. Here, too, I tie together previously established themes in texts while also

offering new explanations such as the rise in Śaivism as well as even alchemical properties to explain the motives behind the symbolic elevation of Kailāsa spirituality. However, I also attempt to clarify whether the Kailāsa of pilgrimage and prayer is the same as the Kailāsa of texts, and if so, the extent of the connection. When understood in tandem, Kailāsa's depictions as a mountain that is not only difficult to access but represented as a place that is not encountered in the daily lives of human allows competing religious traditions to use it as a source of spirituality and mold it to fit their needs.

Part 1: Kailāsa in Medieval Texts

I. Hinduism: Kailāsa as Śiva's Transcendent Abode

Mt. Kailāsa is of great importance in Hinduism and is known as the abode of Lord Śiva. Though its sources in religious scriptures are extensive in nature, some of the most in-depth information about Kailāsa is revealed in the Purāṇas. There are many medieval texts written that describe Kailāsa; however, a large focus of this section is on the Purāṇas. This is primarily due to three factors. First, the Purāṇas were constructed over an extended period.[15] Though the term itself translates to "old" or "ancient," the Purāṇas consist of a diverse body of literature, dated starting at early centuries of the common era; however, they are continuously updated.[16] Second, their prominence in Hindu traditions is vast, indicating a larger geographical scope than more localized, vernacular texts. This is important for later analysis that attempts to tie textual representations to specific, contextual, cultural examples; such comparisons are easier when the origin text's breadth is larger, from which a specific application can be observed. Third, a

[15] Greg Bailey, "Purāṇas," in Brill's *Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2020070
[16] *Ibid.*

purpose of the Purāṇas, one that emerged after the Gupta empire and their archival synthesis of these texts, is their placement at pilgrimage sites as well as temples.[17] Those two specific purposes possess explicit connections to what this paper covers, making the Purāṇas an apt source for analysis and focus of this section.

The verses themselves across many different Purāṇas contain a wealth of information pertaining to Kailāsa: the beings that occupy it, its flora and fauna, its geography, and its cosmological significance, to name a few. However, there is a common theme that unites nearly each verse across these categories: transcendence of the quotidian experience. There is something mystical and mysterious about Kailāsa that separates it from any other location or symbol. In the categories presented above, there is the presence of subjects and objects that extend beyond what is traditionally encountered on a day-to-day basis by mortals.

Celestial Figures on Kailāsa in Hindu Purāṇas

First, Kailāsa appears to be restricted to celestial figures, closed off from humans. There is an implicit difficulty for humans to access this mountain, mainly generated by the descriptions of who frequents or resides at the mountain. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is one source that elucidates such a theme. Thought to be composed around the ninth or tenth century centering Kṛṣṇa, his worship, and role in the cosmos while also covering various other topics, the authorship of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* remains unknown, though is it attributed to the grammarian Vopadeva or the sage Vyāsa.[18] Following the traditional conversation style of Purāṇas,[19] it describes Kailāsa as

[17] Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas*, ed. Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978): 7-8.
[18] Jonathan Edelman, "Bhāgavatapurāṇa," In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1010068427
[19] *Ibid.*

"inhabited by gods who have attained superhuman powers (*siddhis*) by their (superiority in) birth, or by drugs, penance, *mantra* (incantation of mystic power) or the practice of *yoga*. It is always crowded with Kinnaras, Gandharvas (celestial musicians) and celestial damsels."[20] Such celestial figures are also represented in vernacular sources describing Kailāsa such as the 16th century text *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu*, which describes Kailāsa as shining in power with the presence of these celestial figures such as Gandharvas and Apsaras.[21] For example, the text notes:

> "The best of snakes played lifted their hoods and danced hearing the songs of Gandharva women, Caves were wrapped in darkness in the darkness brightened with the splendor from the jewels hoods on those serpents, waterfalls flowed with pure water with a ghuma-ghuma sound resounding in those caves, sages who were immersed in yogic trance of ultimate samādhi on the banks of those waterfalls, Pramathagaṇas came with devotion to protect the tapas of those sages to be completed without obstacle, along with wives of Pramathagaṇas, Pārvati was overjoyed— with all those, Kailāsa mountain shone."

The superhuman power of residents and the celestial nature of existence all point towards this central argument of inaccessibility for mortals. Siddha women are said to "sport along with their lovers" at the mountain.[22] The term "Siddha" means one that is realized or perfected, with differing meanings across different regions of India and sects of Hinduism.[23] For example, in the Deccan, Siddhas is commonly used as Maheśvara Siddhas, referencing worshippers of Śiva,

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[20] Bhāgavata Purāṇa IV.6.9. trans. in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Part 2,* vol. 8, trans. G. V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1950), 448.
[21] *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu,* trans. Harshita Kamath, 4.152.
[22] BhP IV.6.11., *BhP Part 2*, 448.
[23] David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

whereas Nāth Siddhas in Northern India dispersed tantric and alchemist traditions.[24] Many Siddhas are semi-divine, with their world representing "a place of sensual gratification and freedom from the human condition."[25] The reference to celestial women and their heavenly vehicles as well as Siddha women who occupy an area and positionality separate from those of humans not only point to the sacred and magical nature of Kailāsa, but also frame it in such a way that it is difficult to access, if possible, by humans.

Nowhere is the mountain's supernatural powers more evident than in the description of perhaps the most important figure in relation to Kailāsa: Lord Śiva, for whom the mountain is an abode. Śiva is described in further chapters as the "foremost of gods seated along with his divine Consort on the mountain" to whom "they (the celestial patriarchs) paid obeisance" and "offered their prayer."[26] He is many times referenced with the moniker "the Lord of mount Kailāsa," suggesting close association.[27] In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Śiva is described as having "three eyes" and as "the enemy and destroyer of Cupid."[28] This same reference is made in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, where "on the beautiful peak of Kailāsa Lord Śiva who had destroyed Madana (god of love) was comfortably seated on a charming golden rocky slab embellished with pearls, jewels and gems."[29] The reference to destroying Madana or Cupid speaks to a unique power of Śiva—his third eye. The immense power possessed within his third eye and its capacity to destroy other gods within a simple gaze is clearly reflective of how powerful Śiva and the stories surrounding him and Kailāsa are.

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[24] *Ibid.*, 2-3.
[25] *Ibid.*, 3-4.
[26] Bhāgavata Purāṇa VIII.7.20. trans. in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Part 3,* vol. 9, trans. G. V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1955), 1032.
[27] BhP IV.30.2., *BhP Part 2*, 621.
[28] Matsya Purāṇa 54.3. trans. in *Matsya Purāṇa*, vol. 1, trans. A Board of Scholars, ed. K. L. Joshi (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2007), 214.
[29] Vāyu Purāṇa 54.30-43 trans. in *Vāyu Purāṇa*, vol. 37, trans. G. V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960), 375.

Even if not directly tied to an event on the mountain, the reference to the mountain as where a deity with supernatural powers resides certainly enhances its spirituality to an extent. For example, vernacular texts such as the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* show the how the powers of Śiva spill-over onto the mountain, as "Śiva (shone) with a pale white light from all of these, wandering on the slopes of that mountain," such that "when seeing that mountain," it was perceived to possess "immeasurable splendor that shone entering/spreading the three worlds."[30] These are powers quite inaccessible to mortals, yet the strength they represent and the fear they potentially catalyze could be both considered major drivers behind the inter-linking of Kailāsa and Śiva, as his powers are demonstrated upon the mountain. Thus, Kailāsa becomes a platform where Śiva demonstrates and delivers his immense powers, marking it as a source of spirituality that people might towards.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s, there is this idea whereby gods and celestial beings pray towards Śiva and Kailāsa or seek guidance at the mountain. In many of these references, the relationship between Kailāsa and Śiva is once again emphasized. This is seen in the invited sages who "came to that region (Ilāvṛta) to pay visit to god Śiva, the lord of mount Kailāsa, dispelling darkness from all quarters."[31] Ilāvṛta here is one of the seven regions of Earth, referenced in the cosmological traditions of Hinduism and other South Asian religions. Durvāsas, a sage, also approaches "god Śiva on mount Kailāsa, for seeking asylum" after being turned away by Brahmā who refused to offer protection from Viṣṇu and his discus, which threatened Durvāsas.[32] Beyond sages, Viṣṇu and Brahmā—important gods in Hinduism alongside Śiva—also worship Śiva on the mountain. Skanda X, Chapter 89 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes how "from the assembly

[30] *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu*, trans. Harshita Kamath, 4.153.
[31] BhP IX.1.29., *BhP Part 3*, 1128.
[32] BhP IX.4.55., *BhP Part 3*, 1128.

of god Brahma, he repaired to mount Kailāsa" such that "God Mahadeva was delighted (at his brother's surprise visit)."[33] Hari—an alternate name of Lord Viṣṇu—is said to have "propitiated Siva," and "having pleased the god residing on mount Kailāsa, with his penance, Lord Hari got a son from Rukmiṇī called Pradyumna."[34]

Turning towards Śiva is not constrained to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As the *Brahmānda Purāṇa* details the story of Paraśurāma (an avatāra of Viṣṇu), there are multiple verses where Paraśurāma proclaims his obedience to and veneration of Śiva during the story of how protects a boy from a tiger. One verse even explicitly references Kailāsa as Paraśurāma states his "obeisance to the lord who resides perpetually in the cremation ground; obeisance to the lord who dwells on the Kailāsa mountain."[35] Here, Kailāsa is depicted not necessarily as a physical abode, as Śiva is simultaneously said to have reside perpetually in the cremation ground. This suggests that Kailāsa, as opposed to a site, is instead a state of being that Śiva occupies. The idea of physical residence returns when Kailāsa is discussed in the context of the stories of Kubera. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, Kubera, who is a "glorious lord residing in Kailāsa" and "the lord of Yakṣas," also worships Śiva alongside "Sanatkumāra and other sages."[36] Kubera is not only the lord of Yakṣas, but also represents wealth, abundance, as well as the oceans and the moon.[37]

The Purāṇas describe how Kubera came to be associated with and reside on the mountain. After the cleansing of Laṅkā by Viṣṇu and Śiva, due to it being ruled by demons and evil spirits, Kubera took hold there, establishing his rule over the yakṣas—nymph-like semi-

[33] Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.89.5. trans. in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Part 4,* vol. 10, trans. G. V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1955).
[34] BhP X.55.1-2., *BhP Part 4*, 1603-1604.
[35] Brahmāṇda Purāṇa 2.3.25.9. trans. in *Brahmāṇda Purāṇa Part 2*, vol. 23, trans. G. V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1958), 612.
[36] VyP 30.85., *VyP*, 197.
[37] Vettam Mani, *Purāṇic Encyclopedia* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 434-5.

divine creatures[38]—that roamed Laṅkā.[39] After being run out of Laṅkā by his brother Rāvaṇa, Kubera flees alongside is yakṣa attendants to the north, establishing the city of Alakā.[40] The location of this city is disputed, with some Purāṇic sources indicating its presence on Kailāsa[41] whereas others suggest its location atop Mt. Gandhamādana, another important celestial mountain in Hindu cosmology.[42] What is well-established, however, is his connection and with Śiva, who is described as a "good friend" who "very often visits him."[43] This friendship is exemplified throughout many Purāṇic stories. One such story involves Śukra, a yogi, that asks for money from Kubera, who rejects the offer.[44] Śukra then possesses Kubera and forces him to give away his wealth; luckily Śiva immediately comes to the defense of Kubera and tortures Śukra by swallowing him.[45] Thus, Kubera's worship of Śiva forms in relationship to Śiva's sustained protection of Kubera. Kubera's powers described in Purāṇic sources are also interesting, as he is said to shape-shift, curse others, and rule many semi-divine creatures through his regal city.[46] Across these examples, we see the scope of Kailāsa's spiritual and mystic nature continue to expand. Its potency is not only observed in how important Śiva is as a spiritual figure, but how other important spiritual figures equally perceive Śiva and Kailāsa as sites of worship.

Vernacular sources such as classical Telugu poetry offer an interesting distinction that emerges between Kailāsa, one of the North and the South, as they detail the power of Śiva.

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[38] Anne Keßler, "Yakṣas and Yakṣiṇīs," In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_000202.
[39] Mani, *Purāṇic Encyclopedia*, 435.
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] VyP 30.85., *VyP*, 197.
[42] Mani, *Purāṇic Encyclopedia*, 435.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *Ibid.*, 437.
[45] *Ibid.*, 437.
[46] *Ibid.*, 434-6.

Dhūrjaṭi, a sixteenth century Telugu poet, writes the *The Story of Natkīra*, a poet that resides in the king's court. When a Brahmin presents a poem given to him by Śiva in exchange for money during a famine, Natkīra laughs in his face.[47] Śiva, out of anger, curses Natkīra with leprosy and must make the journey to Kailāsa to get cured.[48] The journey is already an arduous one, and it becomes even harder as Natkīra is inflicted with illness.[49] As he is enduring this, Kārttikeya, Śiva's son, attempts to mitigate his pain and suffering, reminds him that a trip to the Southern Kailāsa is sufficient to cure his leprosy, where he can bathe in the waters of a holy lake.[50] In this lake, Natkīra composed 100 verses about Śiva and his family, gaining the lord's blessing and being cured of his disease.[51] Though this story indicates the presence of an alternate Kailāsa, or even many more physical mountains that may be Kailāsa, the power rests in the namesake itself, rather than one individual mountain. Even if there are multiple Kailāsas, the story of Natkīra suggests that traversing any one of them brings about the magical properties of healing disease and cleansing of curses, because the name Kailāsa itself is associated with Śiva.[52]

What is clear in the descriptions of Kailāsa that emerge in these Purāṇic texts is its description as less of a physical location with intrinsic spirituality, and more of modifier that is tied to Śiva. As gods like Viṣṇu and Brahmā, alongside Kubera and even sages turn towards the mountain, they are praying towards Śiva, who is described as residing on Kailāsa. Not only is it not portrayed as a physical place that may be accessible to humans, but it is almost entirely perceived as a component of one such form that Śiva presents as: at his abode. Such a reading of Kailāsa marks it as truly inaccessible and renders it as not a location, but a state of being, almost,

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[47] Dhūrjaṭi, "The Story of Natkīra," in *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology*, trans. Velcheru Narayana Rao, ed. David Shulman, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002), 195.
[48] *Ibid*., 196.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] *Ibid.*, 199-200.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] *Ibid*.

that is nearly exclusive to Śiva, marks it as distinct from both the world and experiential capacity of humans. Thus, Kailāsa is described as a symbol of heightened spirituality that transcends the quotidian experiences of humans.

The Flora, Fauna, and Geology of Kailāsa in Hindu Purāṇas

Alongside descriptions of celestial beings that might roam Kailāsa are the lists of geological formations, flora, and fauna found throughout the mountain. In these lists, the collective existence of unique gems, plants, and creatures creates a singular spot, something that is not encountered in the human world. The summit of Kailāsa is said to be "made up of various kinds of gems" that are "covered with various kinds of trees, creepers and shrubs."[53] The *Vāyu Purāṇa* offers a more in-depth of explanation of these gems, as it describes Śiva seated atop the mountain "on a charming golden rocky slab embellished with pearls, jewels, and gems" with the mountain's peak being made up of "variegated minerals."[54] These minerals and gems appear in the water-reservoir that is present in Kailāsa, referred to as Mandākinī in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, with an "embankment [that] has steps plated with gold and studded with gems."[55] The broader geography of the region is marked by "ridges abounding in hedges, bushes, fountains, caves and precipes."[56] Flowing through and from the mountain are the rivers Nandā and Alakanandā, "endowed with excellent qualities" and "used by celestial sages."[57] These are holy rivers, "highly sanctified with the dust of the ever-hallowed feet of Vishnu."[58]

[53] BhP IV.6.10., *BhP Part 2*, 448.
[54] VyP 54.30-43., *VyP*, 375-376.
[55] VyP 41.14-17., *VyP*, 268-269.
[56] VyP 41.27-8., *VyP*, 269.
[57] VyP 41.18., *VyP*, 269.
[58] BhP IV.6.24., *BhP Part 2*, 449.

Therefore, not only is there on this mountain an abundance of minerals and gold – a rare sight – but these precious metals are also presented in unique combinations —pearls, jewels, and gems, especially pearls, are not traditionally found atop mountains. This suggests that the throne of Śiva that is constructed from the geology of Kailāsa is not naturally occurring but contains a layer of otherworldliness embedded in the mountain. This is especially interesting because Śiva himself is not commonly understood nor depicted as a royal deity; rather, he is portrayed in a reclusive fashion as someone who does not engage in the flashiness that accompanies power. What follows is an interesting juxtaposition between expensive gems that constitute his throne, creating an aura of regality, whereas the deity himself does not necessarily embody that. What this could suggest is the throne's regality is the norm on Kailāsa—what is seen as unique gems converging for mortals is just "natural" on Kailāsa. Though this is a common motif for mountains writ large across South Asian texts, when coupled with the rivers of immense spirituality, the theme of inaccessibility once again emerges. Scattered amidst familiar geographical phenomena are many unique aspects of Kailāsa that when brought together, symbolize the hardships of placing it within the scope of quotidian experiences.

A similar theme of combining distinct geographic and natural phenomena in one location is found within the plants that appear in Kailāsa. Kailāsa is "full of vegetation."[59] The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* indicates the presence of "highly raised boughs of wish-yielding trees," the Kalpavṛkṣa trees that appear in many South Asian religions as divine trees that fulfill wishes.[60] The mountain is also said to be "beautified with trees such as (the heavenly) Mandāra and Pārijāta" among many other varieties.[61] The Mandāra and the Pārijāta specifically are trees that appear in Indra's

[59] VyP 41.1., *VyP*, 267.
[60] Shantha Nair, *The Holy Himalayas: An Abode of Hindu Gods: a Journey Through the Mighty Himalayas* (New Delhi: Hindoology Books 2007), 65.
[61] BhP IV.6.14-15., *BhP Part 2*, 448.

heavenly kingdom,[62] said to fall under the Kalpavṛkṣa classification, possessing wish-fulfilling properties.[63] Independently, the connection to Indra's garden that these natural aspects of Kailāsa establish contributes to its mystical representation because of the connection to the king of the gods, Indra, who is traditionally represented in a much more regal way than Śiva is. There are also golden lotuses, spices, fragrant flowers, fruit trees, herbs, bamboos, lilies, and many more botanical elements that compose Kailāsa's rich, diverse environment.[64] The Purāṇa also mentions the city of Alakā on the mountain, "with its garden called Saugandhika, where grew the species of lotus, bearing the same name (Saugandhika)."[65] In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, the descriptions of these lotuses flourish: there are "gold lotuses with sweet smell, touch, etc., great blue lotuses with leaves and petals a blue as lapis lazuli. The reservoir is beautified with lilies and lotuses of great fragrance."[66] In fact, the entire region of mountains is referred to as the "play-grounds of Rudra abounding in flowers of manifold colors and fruits of various shapes and sizes," where Rudra is another name for Śiva.[67] In the mountain itself, there are Jāti creepers that beautified it.[68] One of the most in-depth descriptions of what plants occupy Kailāsa occurs in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which explicitly lists various strains of trees, bushes, and other plants found on Kailāsa.[69]

The supernatural nature of Kailāsa here does not necessarily stem from the individual placement of particular plant species, but rather their unique combination that cannot be found elsewhere. For example, there is a reference to tree varieties such as Saralas that are endemic to

[62] Mani, *Purāṇic Encyclopedia*, 328.
[63] *Ibid*., 378.
[64] BhP IV.6.16-19., *BhP Part 2*, 448-449.
[65] BhP IV.6.23., *BhP Part 2*, 449.
[66] VyP 41.14-17., *VyP*, 268-269.
[67] VyP 41.33., *VyP*, 270.
[68] VyP 54.30-43., *VyP*, 375-376.
[69] BhP IV.6.14-15., *BhP Part 2*, 448.

the North Indian, mainly Himalayan region. In that same list, there is mention of the Punnaga tree, found predominantly in coastal regions, especially in South India.[70] Then there are trees like the Kadamba tree, which span throughout the subcontinent, from Northern, mountainous regions to southern, tropical climates. Each of these individually can be considered "accessible" to mortals; their unique combination, however, is a phenomenon unique to Kailāsa, contributing to its labeling as a mountain that transcends what would commonly be encountered by mortals. Both the presence of wish-fulfilling trees and diverse trees from across the subcontinent suggest that Kailāsa is expansive and all-encompassing, contributing to the understanding that it is a mountain that is not localized nor geographically constrained, but omnipresent.

Accompanying a unique combination of different plant varieties, the Purāṇas also depict a convergence of profane and sacred animal creatures in one location, enhancing its spiritual potential. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* notes that the mountain "is resonant with the cries of the peacocks, melodious humming of bees intoxicated with honey, loud notes of cuckoos and warbling of birds."[71] Other species that resided at Kailāsa include mythological creatures like Gavayas and Sarabhas,[72] which are multi-legged part-lion creatures, as well as "beasts called Karṇāntra, one-footed animals, horse-faced animals, wolves, muskdeer."[73] Here, we see a unique convergence of profane and sacred creatures. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, not only is the mountain home to animals that humans would encounter daily, but it is also home to heterogenous spiritual creatures that are neither fully animal nor fully human. That combination transcends the daily experience of humans by coalescing animals they might encounter into a category that also includes spiritual beings alike to those animals yet are distinct from them. Thus, inaccessibility is

[70] *Ibid*.
[71] BhP IV.6.12., *BhP Part 2*, 448.
[72] BhP IV.6.20., *BhP Part 2*, 449.
[73] BhP IV.6.21., *BhP Part 2*, 449.

emphasized once again, embedding a fascination within the mystic and mysterious nature of Kailāsa that eludes the quotidian.

The idea of Kailāsa being otherworldly, inaccessible, and distinct from the world humans encounter in their day-to-day life resonates throughout the Purāṇas. Representations of celestial beings that reside on or are associated with the mountain like Śiva and Kubera possess supernatural powers that exceed the capacity of humans. Similarly, the landscape of Kailāsa characterizes it as a nexus that derives uniqueness not solely from new creatures distinct from the biological presence on Earth, but the convergence of diversity found in the Indian subcontinent within one singular mountain. Together, these descriptions found in the Purāṇas offer an idea of how Kailāsa was understood in these Hindu texts: a site whose spirituality became established through aspects that transcended encounters expected and experienced by mortal beings.

II. Jainism: Kailāsa's Connection to the First Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha

Kailāsa is of significant importance for Jainism and its followers. The idea of a celestial mountain emerges early in both Digambara and Śvētambara Jain texts through the name Aṣṭapada—meaning "eight steps,"[74] but by seventh century, we find in the Digambara text the *Padma Purāṇa* by Raviṣeṇa that Aṣṭapada became synonymous with Kailāsa for Jains.[75] What begins in early texts as solely Aṣṭapada undergoes a process of coupling with Kailāsa, one that expands the scope of the audience to whom Aṣṭapada is accessible while simultaneously enhancing its mystic characterization.

[74] Maharaj K. Pandit, "The Himalayan Memoir," in *Life in the Himalaya: An Ecosystem at Risk*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 45.
[75] Raviṣenācārya, *Padma Purāṇa*, vol. 1, trans. Shantilal Nagar (New Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2008), 26-31, 44.

The Religious Significance of Aṣṭapada

Early Jain literature identify the location of the death and liberation of the first tīrthaṅkara—supreme Jain spiritual teacher—Ṛṣabha, as the mountain Aṣṭapada.[76] The Kalpa Sutra, a sixth century text from the Śvētambara sect of Jainism, details the life of Ṛṣabha, where Aṣṭapada is mentioned in the context of his death:

> When his fourfold Karman was exhausted, and in this Avasarpi*n*î era the Sushamadu*h*shamâ period had nearly elapsed, only three years and eight and a half months being left, in the third month of winter, in the fifth fortnight, the dark (fortnight) of Mâgha, on its thirteenth day, in the early part of the day when the moon was in conjunction with the asterism Abhig*i*t, (*Ri*shabha), after fasting six and a half days without drinking water, on the summit of mount Ash*t*âpada, in the company of ten thousand monks in the Samparyaṅka position, died, &c. (all down to) freed from all pains.[77]

Aṣṭapada here is a place where one can be freed from the suffering of life on Earth quite literally detaches it from the normal life encountered, instead positing it as a gateway for a transition away from this world.

Another early description of Aṣṭapada is found in the Śvetāmbara text from the early centuries CE, the *Āvaśyaka Cūrṇi*. This text recounts the story of how Goyama—a disciple of Mahāvīra, the last tīrthaṅkara—ascends Aṣṭapada to worship its shrines, searching for liberation while also becoming the teacher to monks that are initially skeptical of his powers.[78] Goyama is unique in that the mountain's ascension is associated with supranormal powers, but the

[76] John Cort, *Framing the Jina*, 114.
[77] "The Kalpa Sutra," in *Jain Sutras Part I*, trans. Hermann Jacobi (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1884), 25.
[78] Dundas and Bisschop, "The Ascetics," 207.

traditional lean ascetic body figure is not what is seen with Goyama; rather, he is corpulent and larger.[79] In the Āvaśyaka Cūrṇi, Dundas and Bisschop note that "the ascetics on the lower reaches of Aṭṭhāvaya are suspicious of Goyama who is unemaciated by comparison with themselves."[80] They are suspicious, that is, until Goyama flies to the mountain top using his magic powers—something that other ascetics do not possess.[81] His physical appearance counterposed to his superhuman feat of reaching the mountain's summit attributes to him a supernatural power that transcends what is available even to most other ascetics, let alone ordinary mortals. The text reflects on the mountain and concludes explicitly that it cannot be climbed by mortals, and even ascetics require intense preparation.[82] Goyama's powers do not just pertaining to reaching the mountain top, but also to his capacity to produce as much food as needed for ascetics on that same journey.[83] The result is a convergence of two previous arguments made for the spiritual nature of Kailāsa. First, inaccessibility is the guiding principle behind the veneration of Aṣṭapada. The story of Goyama and monks delineates the powers of everyday humans from the powers of monks and spiritual beings who can reach the summit of Aṣṭapada. This demarcation is clear in the especially in the Śvētambara texts that Dundas and Bisschop utilize, and it suggests a sacred nature to the mountain that is fascinating, attractive, and most importantly, transcends the quotidian experience of humans who follow the Jain tradition. Second association with the mountain offers superhuman powers that in turn also enhance the mountain a spiritual significance. Whether it was his power of flying or concocting food immediately for ascetics on their journey through Aṣṭapada, the extra-human acts that

[79] *Ibid*., 242.
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] Granoff, *Victorious Ones*, 284.
[82] *Ibid.*, 243.
[83] Granoff, *Victorious Ones*, 243.

Goyama performs in relation to the mountain mark Aṣṭapada as a spiritual center that warrants worship and prayer. In these early texts, however – the Kalpa Sūtra and Āvaśyaka Cūrṇī – Aṣṭapada is still just that—Aṣṭapada. The name "Kailāsa" is yet to emerge as an alternate label for Aṣṭapada.

Linking Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa

Medieval Digambara texts mark the turning point in the association of Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa, making the connection between the two mountains explicit. The ninth century Digambara text *Ādipurāṇa* by Jinasena details stories pertaining to Ṛṣabha and his son Bharata, the first universal emperor (*cakravartī*). In chapter 33 of the *Ādipurāṇa*, the Cakravartī makes his way to the mountain, because of its location as the site where Ṛṣabha achieved liberation. As he traverses the mountain and reaches the top, two verses signify the connection between Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa in an explicit manner. The *Ādipurāṇa* states that the naming of Kailāsa as Aṣṭapada is intentional: "*Aṣṭapada* whose name is quite purposeful, serves the mountain which would achieve the same name after your climbing over it."[84] Bharata then proceeds to give homage to each of the tīrthaṅkaras, embedding the mountain into Jain texts as an otherworldly, extra-human site of worship. Because Bharata climbs over the mountain in eight steps, and it takes eight steps to arrive at the temple that Bharata establishes in honor of Ṛṣabha,[85] there becomes a clear connection between the two.

However, this is not exclusive to the *Ādipurāṇa*—another text that links Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa is the *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* (TŚPC)—a 12th century Śvētambara text narrating important beings such as the tīrthaṅkaras and cakravartins. In this text, after the death of Ṛṣabha,

[84] Jinasena, *Ādipurāṇa*, volume 2. trans. Shantilal Nagar, (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2011), 829.
[85] *Ibid*., 828-829.

his son Bharata constructs a memorial shrine that not only honors Ṛṣabha, but all other tīrthaṅkaras, atop Aṣṭapada. In the TŚPC, the synonymous nature of Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa is evident: Bharata is said to have "made eight steps around it in the form of terraces impossible for men to cross and a yojana apart. From that time the mountain was called 'Aṣṭapada.' Among the people it was known as 'Harādri,' 'Kailāsa,' and 'Sphaṭikādri.'"[86] Dundas and Bisschop note in their work that the TŚPC is also an early explanation behind the name Aṣṭapada, which refers to the eight steps created by Bharata, continuing the definition established by the *Ādipurāṇa*.[87]

In both examples of medieval Jain texts, what is clear is the conflation of Kailāsa and Aṣṭapada. Both are unified by the conflation occurring at Bharata traversing the mountain to honor Ṛṣabha. This conflation emerges in a context that depicts the mountains, together, as inaccessible. For example, the *Ādipurāṇa* says that "the special feature with the mountain Kailāśa had been that it was inaccessible like the Cakravartī emperor and was the king of all the mountains like Bharata."[88] Its descriptions of various creatures atop the mountain mimic the Purāṇic descriptions of Kailāsa.[89] Similarly, in the TŚPC, Bharata "cut off the projections on the mountain with the staff-jewel, and it, straight, became as impossible for men to climb as a pillar."[90] Here, there is a clear reference to Aṣṭapada/Kailāsa as an unclimbable supernatural mountain that is sacred. In both examples, however, the theme of inaccessibility is used to enhance the spirituality of Bharata, depicting his supernatural powers by comparing the grandiosity of the mountain to his kingly nature, using its magnitude to describe how he traversed it in a mere eight steps, showing he was able to cut off projections on the mountain.

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[86] *Ibid.*
[87] Dundas and Bisschop, "The Ascetics," 232-33.
[88] Jinasena, *Ādipurāṇa*, 826.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] Hemacandra, *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, vol. 1, trans. Helen M. Johnson (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1931), 370.

The conflation of Kailāsa and Aṣṭapada and the similar descriptions of inaccessibility that are prevalent in these moments of conflation offer an instance in which both Aṣṭapada and Bharata are viewed as possessing powers that exceeds the quotidian experience of humans. Thus, the conflation of Kailāsa and Aṣṭapada elevates the role of both an important mountain and figure in Jainism, enhancing their spirituality.

In earlier Jain texts, it is unclear whether Aṣṭapada has a material manifestation on Earth,[91] but these sections of the *Ādipurāṇa* suggest that Kailāsa becomes Aṣṭapada as soon as Bharata ascends it, because of both his and the mountain's qualities.[92] The regality and weight that is placed upon Aṣṭapada gets transferred to Kailāsa upon such a statement.

Also, the pivotal religious value of the samavasaraṇa—the divine Jain preaching hall for tīrthankaras—continues to grow in this chapter and becomes attached to the label of Kailāsa in this chapter, magnifying its role as a source of spirituality. When on Kailāsa, "Bharata Cakravartī, who had been the foremost of the people of wisdom, had just walked ahead a little, when he spotted the *Samavasaraṇa* of lord Jinendra."[93] The samavasaraṇa is of utmost importance in Jainism. Within the classification of samavasaraṇas, that of the very first tīrthaṅkara commands the attention of "all the gods, demons, waiting for the divine voice."[94] In fact, the second half of this Parva entails almost a soliloquy rendered by Bharata that praises the importance of Ṛṣabha, who possesses "enormous and astonishing glory to [his] credit," as well as his samavasaraṇa, which is at one point described as "beyond controvercy" and "cannot minimise the extend of [his] *vairāgya*," showing the absence of an upper bound on his

[91] Dundas and Bisschop, "The Ascetics," 232.
[92] Jinasena, *Ādipurāṇa*, 826.
[93] *Ibid.*, 830.
[94] *Ibid.*, 831.

sacredness.[95] This, coupled with mirrored descriptions of extra-human beings on Kailāsa, massively increases its spiritual appeal that separates it from the daily encounters of mortals and portrays it as a node that converges various mystical beings and sources.

Aside from the stories of key figures like Ṛṣabha and Bharata, the literary legacy of Kailāsa is not nearly as extensive as it is in Hindu sources. However, any mentions of the mountain nevertheless include depictions that transcend of the human quotidian. The demon Rāvaṇa is said to have attempted to destroy the mountain and the shrines Bharata built when he was unable to pass over it; however, a sage performing austerities on the mountain was able to use his powers to press the mountain back down with his toe.[96] Seeing the immense power of this sage, Rāvaṇa becomes his ardent devotee and prays to him at the shrine.[97] Inaccessibility is implicit here—if the mountain is so grand that even Rāvaṇa—a powerful demon—is unable to cross it, then certainly it is not possible for humans to do so. Inversely, the mountain granted such strong powers to the sage that he was able to prevent Rāvaṇa with merely his foot, marking the mountain's mystic nature. Finally, the shift from Rāvaṇa's fierce hatred towards the mountain to reverence once he realizes its powers serves as a model for humans. For those who cannot best the mountain's powers, the logical solution is to submit to its greatness and pray towards it and its shrines, as Rāvaṇa does.

Why Is Aṣṭapada Linked to Kailāsa?

The interchangeable nature of Kailāsa and Aṣṭapada begs the question: were the two mountains always synonymous, or was there some evolutionary incorporation of Kailāsa into the

[95] *Ibid.*, 839.
[96] Phyllis Granoff, *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2009), 286.
[97] *Ibid.*

Jain geographical and cosmological lexicon? The answer could lie within a phenomenon that appears at the start of the medieval period in South Asia, starting approximately in the sixth century CE: a massive rise in the popularity of Śaivism.[98] Alongside the growth and imposition of Brahminism by kings at this time was the adoption of worshipping certain religious traditions, of which the most popular was Śaivism.[99] Its influences were not just confined to its own traditions, but expanded to and influenced other religious pathways that were competing for political and social prominence at that time.

In his seminal article, titled "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period," Alexis Sanderson notes certain key facets of Śaivism that prompted its rapid and popular uptake into royalty and political processes. The Śaiva royal initiation from brahmin preceptors possessed a level of flexibility that maintained the king's personal lifestyle while conferring upon him not only supposedly supreme powers in the battlefield, but also the authority to dictate, rule, and maintain the socio-cultural order at home.[100] Kings placed great values upon this process, which could only be achieved through the brahmin preceptors present in their court. The result was a *positive feedback loop*—a heightened demand for Śaivite Brahminism in courts with large amounts of wealth given to these preceptors, who in turn continued to expand Śaivism through the construction of monasteries.[101] What also follows is the kingdom-sponsored construction of Śaiva temples, the appointment of priests by the royal court itself, as well as the alignment of temple festivities with the life of the king, whether it be rituals that protect him and his family or celebrations "timed to coincide with the day of his natal

[98] Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, 2009), 43-44.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] *Ibid.*, 257-258.
[101] *Ibid.*, 260-264.

asterism."[102] With the expansion of kingdoms came the setting up of new towns and economic systems, and with each step of the process, Śaiva officiants became present to conduct rituals for the consecrations of various edifices such as wells, reservoirs, and even irrigation systems.[103] The implication is that Śaivism becomes an everyday part of life throughout kingdoms of the subcontinent, predominantly in the South, that was inseparable from the functioning of a successful kingdom and society, enabling its instant integration to Indian society during the medieval period.

Sanderson briefly mentions the primary instance in which this uptake occurred with Jain royalty: a tantric ritual culture for the propitiation of Mantra-goddesses. For example, the *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa,* composed by the Digambara monk Mallişeṇa, equates Padmāvatī (the Yakṣī attendant of the tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha) with Śakti goddesses that constitute the Śākta Śaivas.[104] The *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* written by Merutuṅgācārya details how Digambara monks propitiated to the goddess to prevent a Muslim army from invading their kingdom.[105] The *Jvālāmālinīkalpa* written by the Digambara monk Indranandin contains spells and benefits that can be advantageous in the battlefield if the goddess Aparājitā is prayed to.

Beyond tantric practices, there were other ways in which Śaivism influenced Jainism, however, and we can see it in the linkage of Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa. With linkages centering around the tīrthaṅkaras and directed towards the goals of enhancing a king's supernatural power and benefits provided to his kingdom, the logic of attaching Kailāsa to Aṣṭapada becomes almost *inevitable*. Sanderson's argument most certainly implies that Śaivism becomes a vehicle for kings and regimes to enhance power, but many of the examples that he provides that drive the

[102] *Ibid.*, 276-279.
[103] *Ibid.*, 280-282.
[104] *Ibid.*, 243.
[105] *Ibid.*, 244.

popularity of Śaivism enhance power by bringing both the king closer to the supernatural and the supernatural closer to the king. As rituals enhance and elevate the battlefield tactics of the king and his army, similarly, the establishment of temples dedicated to prominent celestial beings intertwined within the Śaiva tradition bring that which is spiritual closer to the people that turn towards and worship it (temple-building as it relates to this exact connection between the transcendent to the everyday will be a prominent focus of the next chapter). This argument possesses a persuasive explanatory power behind the linkage of Kailāsa to Aṣṭapada that also emerges while Śaivism gains immense popularity. It also sets the basis for textual incorporation into subsequent Jain literature as nearly each example Sanderson mentions is scriptural in nature. With the specific Jain incorporations focusing on connecting tīrthaṅkaras to the Śaiva tradition, what better way to do so than to label Aṣṭapada—the location where the first tīrthaṅkara gained enlightenment—to Kailāsa, which is perhaps the most venerated mountain in Śaivism.

This interrelation between Kailāsa and Aṣṭapada is not simply abstract but borne out of surprising commonalities between Ṛṣabha and Śiva. At perhaps the most fundamental level, the name Ṛṣabha translates to "bull" in Sanskrit, which alludes to Śiva's mount, Nandi, who is a bull in form.[106] Ṛṣabha is also often depicted as a tīrthaṅkara with long hair and an ascetic appearance, something that is also true of Śiva. An alternate explanation is offered by Paul Dundas and Peter C. Bisschop in their work "The Ascetics of Mount Aṭṭhāvaya Become Jain Monks." Dundas and Bisschop argue that the Prakrit terminology for Aṣṭapada—Aṭṭhāvaya—can also refer to a gameboard and the rolling of dice, something that Śiva is seen doing in the Mahābhārata as a representation of his constant involvement in the cosmic process.[107] "Dice-

[106] Paul Dundas and Peter C. Bisschop, "The Ascetics of Mount Aṭṭhāvaya Become Jain Monks," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 66, no. 3 (Aug 2023): 240, https://doi.org/10.1163/15728536-06603002
[107] *Ibid.*, 234.

rolling" is not necessarily a spiritual act; rather, the reference contains a level of mockery to it, but it nevertheless is a connection between the location and a figure that lies at the center of the Śaivite tradition.[108] In that sense, the association with a pre-existing sacred being—Śiva—enhances the spirituality of Aṣṭapada and aids in its linkage to Kailāsa, something likely driven by the desire for patronage from Saivite rulers of the time.

III. Buddhism: Kailāsa, Meru, and Cakrasaṃvara

Just as Kailāsa becomes attached to Aṣṭapada in Jainism, a similar phenomenon emerges in Buddhism, with the ties between Kailāsa and Meru. Mt. Meru is considered one of the central mountains of not just Buddhist, but also Jain and Hindu world systems. However, sources on Buddhism, especially, claim Mt. Meru and Kailāsa to be synonymous.[109] Many Hindus themselves attribute an identical characteristic between Mt. Meru and Kailāsa.[110] In *India: A Sacred Geography*, Diana Eck notes that in both Hinduism and Buddhism, "Kailāsa is most often identified as Mount Meru, the mythic mountain standing at the center of the world."[111] This alignment between Kailāsa and Mt. Meru continues in modern day descriptions of Kailāsa for Buddhists, who label it as identical to Meru.[112] However, the textual foundation for this connection is not apparent. I will explore how the two become tied to each other, and the incentives for attaching Meru to Kailāsa, and how such representations connect to the theme of transcending the quotidian.

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[108] *Ibid.*
[109] Winand M. Callewaert, "On the way to Kailash," in *Pilgrimage in Tibet,* ed. Alex McKay (Curzon Press, 1998), 108-117.
[110] *Ibid*.
[111] Diana Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, (New York: Harmony Books, 2012), 199.
[112] Resham Sengar, "Mount Kailash facts: mindboggling things you may not know about Lord Shiva's home," *TimesTravel*, November 8, 2019, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/destinations/mount-kailash-facts-mindboggling-things-you-may-not-know-about-lord-shivas-home/articleshow/61220500.cms

An Abhidharma Reading of Meru

In Buddhist cosmology, Mt. Meru sits at the center of the middle world, where plants, animals, and humans reside. Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé, a nineteenth century scholar of Tibet, describes Mt. Meru as resting at the center of the universe and formed by the churning of a great mass of water.[113] It rises "eighty thousand [leagues] above the ocean" with four sides "composed of crystal, blue beryl, ruby, and gold," a regal description that matches gems said to also exist upon Kailāsa from previous Purāṇic scripts.[114] The Abhidharma canonical Buddhist texts, which emerged in Northern India around the third century BCE, also describe Mt. Meru as a phenomenon whose grandiosity exceeds that experienced by humans. Though seemingly minor, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*—a fourth or fifth century Abhidharma text written by the Buddhist master Vasubandhu—delineates between Meru and the other nine great mountains that comprise Buddhist cosmology.[115] It notes that "seven mountains are made of gold; the last is made of iron; and Meru is made of four jewels."[116] This suggests that there is something unique in the convergence of four gems within the faces of Mt. Meru, contributing to its spiritual elevation. The central position of Mt. Meru in Buddhist cosmography not only separates the heavens from the hells, but also the four continents themselves, which are "semi-circular, trapezoidal, round, and square" in shape.[117] Demigods and great kings are said to reside on the terraces of Mt. Meru, and it is said to also rest adjacent to the great lake Anavatapta from which springs four major rivers—Ganga, Vakṣu, Sindhu, and Sītā.[118]

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[113] Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé, *Myriad Worlds*, (Snow Lion, 1995), 109.
[114] *Ibid.*, 109-10.
[115] Collett Cox, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (New York: Gale, 2004), 7.
[116] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, vol. 2, trans. Leo M. Pruden (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press 1998-90), 452.
[117] Tayé, *Myriad Worlds*, 109-10.
[118] *Ibid.*, 112-15.

The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* confirms that Meru is beyond an ordinary mountain. For example, Chapter 3 notes that "at mid-Meru lie the moon and the sun" with dimensions of "fifty and fifty-one leagues" that are far smaller than the height of the mountain or its depth into the ocean from which it emerges, which are 80 thousand leagues and 24 thousand leagues, respectively.[119] The Trāyastriṁśas—thirty-three gods—are said to reside atop the mountain, with multiple cities and palaces filled with many gems also occupying locations on Meru.[120] Across both primary and secondary interpretations of Abhidharma texts, the grandeur of Meru and the absence of human life on or atop it (nearly every description of beings attached to the mountain possess some level of godliness) indicate its inaccessibility to humans and thus, attribute to it the utmost spirituality that exceeds human existence.

Again, a similar disconnect appears as seen in Jain literature, where a holy mountain exists with key similarities to descriptions of Kailāsa yet is not mentioned in the context of Kailāsa—mere comparisons are not substantial nor sufficient evidence to assume that Kailāsa and Meru are identical. Subsequent Theravada canonical texts reference features such as the great lake (Anavatapta) snowy mountains that are integral to descriptions of the world-mountain cosmology that is developed in Buddhism.[121] In *Kailas Histories*, Alex McKay indicates that these texts represent a flexibility when referencing mountains, especially the phrase "snowy mountains." This is not only the approximate meaning of *Himavat,* one of the mountains in the sacred list described in the cosmological component of these texts but possess a "blurred meaning" that "allowed the toponymical flexibility to interpret Himavat, Gandhamadana, Kailas, and Meru and other peaks as, according to context, one mountain, a range of mountains, or the

[119] *Ibid.*, 453-60.
[120] *Ibid.*, 463.
[121] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 115.

same mountain(s)."[122] This makes possible the naming and re-naming of mountains, especially between Kailāsa and Meru, something justified through the story of Śrī Heruka in the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra.

Meru and Kailāsa in the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra

The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* is an eigth century Buddhist text which not only marks a turning point in the connection of Meru to Kailāsa but also contributes to the transcendental nature of the mountain. [123] The Tantra accounts the life and deeds of Cakrasaṃvara, known also as Saṃvara or Śrī Heruka, who is the primary deity worshipped in this text. However, a key story associated with Śrī Heruka that appears in this Tantra is the subduing of Bhairava and Kālarātri, who are widely understood as *avatāra*s or manifestations of Śiva and his consort Umā. David B. Gray's translation of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* indicates that it is "on the summit of the mountain" that Śrī Heruka "treads upon Gaurī's Lord." [124] Gray's commentary on this statement indicates that the Sanskrit manuscript's usage of *gauryāḥ patiṁ* "refers to the Hindu deities who are under Śrī Heruka's feet," and many translators concurring that this is a reference to some iteration of Śiva and his wife.[125] Though the actual text at this point does not specify the name of the mountain, the vast pre-existing Purāṇic literature by now has established by now the summit of Kailāsa as the abode of Śiva. It is difficult to conceptualize a mountain other than Kailāsa atop which one would find Śiva and Umā. It is this close-to-explicit reference to Kailāsa that may have established the modern Buddhist idea we've seen that Meru and Kailāsa are identical —

[122] *Ibid.*, 126.
[123] Note here the similarities in the name, especially to Cakreśvarī, the primary goddess who became associated with Ṛṣabha.
[124] Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra,* 380.
[125] *Ibid*.

various commentaries of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* attach the name "Meru" to the mountain on which this story of Śrī Heruka's takes place. For example, Gray translates Indrabhūti's commentary dated to the tenth century, as follows, using the name Mahādeva in reference to Śiva:

> As soon as he uttered [the syllable] *hūṃ*, luminous light from the heart of Vajrapāṇi pervaded all of the three realms. The great god Mahādeva, and so forth, surrounded by a great host of [beings] who dwelt everywhere, in all of the realms, far-flung clouds and oceans of the world, were summoned by the iron goad of the *samaya* of all the tathāgatas, and gathered there. All the lords of the three worlds such as Mahādeva completely surrounded the palace [on Mt. Sumeru], aghast with their jaws dropping, muttering anxious words, and seeking refuge in Vajrapāṇi. The god known as Mahādeva fell to the ground unconscious.[126]

Gray also translates the Buddhist monk Abhayākaragupta's commentary on the Saṃvara maṇḍala, which likely was composed around the eleventh to twelfth century, using the name Bhairava, usually understood as a fierce avatāra of Śiva:

> In the Saṃvara maṇḍala there is a variegated lotus atop Mount Sumeru with an adamantine tent (*vajrapañjara).* Placed on it is a double vajra, which sits as the base of a court in the middle of which is the Blessed Lord. He stands in the archer (*ālīḍha*) stance on Bhairava and Kālarātri who lie on a solar disk atop the pericarp of the lotus.[127]

Both these commentaries suggest that Śrī Heruka subdues Śiva (note the translation as Mahādeva, a much more direct name for Śiva, as opposed to Bhairava, who is more of an avatāra) and Umā on Meru, where he also establishes a palace to govern with his consort,

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[126] *Ibid.*, 47.
[127] *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Vajravārāhī. Again, there is a blurring of the lines between Meru and Kailāsa. The idea of Śrī Heruka taking over the mountain and subduing Śaiva figures seems to mark a deliberate transition between the great mountain as representative of the Śaiva tradition with Śaiva worship to one where the Śrī Heruka prevails over Śaiva forces, imposing a Buddhist dominance of the mountain and labeling it as Meru, the mountain that lies at the foundation of Buddhist cosmology.

Across these beings and stories related to Meru/Kailāsa in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* are clear associations to the mountain possessing a level of inaccessibility to mortals and disconnection from their daily experience. First, nearly every figure mentioned in relation to the mountain contains supernatural powers. Whether it is Vajrapāṇi's light that emanates across all realms or the might of Samvara or even the power to summon all celestial beings to the mountain, there is clearly a supreme force vested in these beings as well as a heightened spiritual significance in the mountain.

The Buddhist Incentive for Tying Meru to Kailāsa

Returning to Sanderson's work on the Śaiva age can help us to posit an explanation for how the incorporation of Śaivism takes place in Buddhism in the context of narratives surrounding Meru. Throughout the Indian subcontinent, the medieval period was also marked by the royal patronage of Buddhism.[128] This was not uniform but heterogenous—whereas Āndhra kings strongly emphasized the role of Buddhism in their kingdom, others like the Pāla emperors and East Indian dynasties retained the foundations of Śaivism both in the court and the sustenance of their empire.[129] The addition of Śaivism to Buddhist texts is particularly evident in

[128] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 83-97.
[129] *Ibid.*, 111-15.

the writing of tantric texts because their reliance on spiritual mantras and mudrās mimics the function of Śaivism that is particularly appealing to royalty—it's capacity to grant powers to the king and his society. For example, the performance of fire-sacrifice—homaḥ—as a means to ensure peace to the kingdom and control rain for effective agriculture by tantric rituals displays the merging of Buddhist traditions with traditionally Śaiva spaces.[130] Sanderson views this as integral to Buddhism's royal elevation, as "such rituals enabled it to match the Śaivas by promising kings more tangible benefits than the mere accumulation merit through the support of the Buddha, his teachings, and the Saṅgha."[131] Like the previous argument made in the context of Aṣṭapada and Kailāsa, there is a strategic utility in incorporating components of Śaivism into Buddhist doctrine. This is especially true of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, which was written at a time of heightened Śaivism in the Indian subcontinent. David B. Gray notes that the tantra was "noticeable for the conspicuous presence of Śaiva deities and terminology and absence of Buddhist terminology," going so far to say that "it may be naïve to presuppose an 'enlightened' and apolitical *siddha* elite for whom religious identity would not be a compelling issue."[132] In other words, for the siddhas that took part in transcribing the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra, political power, prestige, and prowess were vital, and the incorporation of Śaiva practices into Buddhist texts offered an effective avenue to achieve that.

To reconcile the authenticity of such tantric practices with the seemingly obvious parallels to previously existing Śaiva traditions, tantric texts and preachers of this tradition seem to adopt a revisionist approach. For example, the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, a sixth century Buddhist text, and its reference to Śaiva mantras becomes a vehicle for medieval Buddhists to assert that

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[130] *Ibid.*, 124.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] David B. Gray, "The Cakrasamvara Tantra: Its History, Interpretation, and Practice in India and Tibet," *Religion Compass*, no. 1 (Oct 2007): 700-02.

"what people have come to refer to as the Śaiva, Gāruḍa, and indeed Vaiṣṇava Tantras are in fact Buddhist, since they were first taught by Mañjuśri in this 'vast Kalpa.'"[133] The idea of Buddhists reclaiming from Śaivism what was once theirs is particularly applicable to Śrī Heruka and his narratives within the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*. The depiction of Heruka wearing Bhairava's skin over his soldiers or his defeat of both the masculine and feminine Śaiva deities tell the story of subduing that takes part on Mt. Meru. But the narrative itself becomes an act of purification as it frames Buddhism's relationship to Śaivism as "one that has conquered that tradition, transforming it, as it were, from within into a vehicle for Buddhist salvation."[134] This is particularly evident in the physical characteristics and descriptions of Śrī Heruka, Vajravārāhī, Bhairava, and Kālarātri. I have established the connections between Bhairava and Kālarātri previously, but the descriptions of Śrī Heruka and Vajravārāhī in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and other medieval texts closely mirror those of Śiva and Umā. For example, he presents as black-bodied, with three eyes in his faces, a trident, a tiger-skin garment, and a Brahmanical cord made from a snake—characteristics clearly attributable to Śiva.[135] This suggests that the narrative of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* is not one where Śaiva deities are subordinated or eliminated, but rather transformed from "pre-Buddhist identities" into ones that have achieved "transcendence."[136] This narrative of reclamation situates Meru or Sumeru as synonymous with Kailāsa in location. By viewing Mt. Meru as the location atop which Śrī Heruka stands after dominating Bhairava and Kālarātri, Buddhists reclaim the holy mountain by attributing to it a name that is central to Buddhist cosmography.

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[133] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 130.
[134] *Ibid.*, 155.
[135] *Ibid.*, 170.
[136] *Ibid*., 172.

Part 2: The Cultural Landscape of Kailāsa

The previous chapter's textual analysis and incorporation of Mt. Kailāsa into the folds of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism suggest that it is undoubtedly a symbol of spirituality. Across the three religious traditions, there is a sustained theme of transcending the quotidian that is displayed in relationship to Kailāsa. This theme is primarily driven by its inaccessibility—in the depictions of Gods and otherworldly beings—but also maintains some connection to human encounters, both of which draws followers of each religion in.

What these followers of various faiths do, perform, and create with the mysticism that underpins Kailāsa will be the focus of this chapter. Just as the cultural landscape of Śaivism influenced the incorporation of Kailāsa into certain religious scriptures, Kailāsa's image and spiritual power in turn influenced other components of the cultural landscape.

To distinguish this from the previous chapter, the term cultural landscape is of importance. The *Brill Dictionary of Religion* defines landscapes as appearing "by way of the perception and formation of the 'natural environment.' They are the consequence of special forms of subsistence ('cultured landscapes'), and the expression of social conceptions of order."[137] The word "cultural" as a modifier signifies not just a human component, but a human practical and experiential component. To study the cultural landscape of Kailāsa is to study how humans have grappled with and responded to its existence, whether it be physically at its site or other modifications of the landscape that symbolize Kailāsa.

Whereas the previous chapter approaches the study of Kailāsa from a textual perspective, this chapter reverses the script, considering how the textual construction of Kailāsa's holiness

[137] Ursula Pieschel, "Landscape," in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad (Brill Reference Online)

converged with a trajectory of religious and cultural traditions that engage with so-called landscapes of the mountain. Specifically, this chapter focuses on two examples of how Kailāsa has influenced the cultural landscape: pilgrimage and temples. Pilgrimage to and from the mountain that now represents the physical manifestation as Kailāsa—which I will distinguish as Mount Kailash—is as popular as ever and considered a rite in many traditions, one that takes place at the mountain itself—the source of spirituality. It represents an important point of translating a mythical mountain into one that is physically on this Earth. On the other hand, temples like the Kailāśanātha temple in the Ellora Caves that carry the mountain's namesake or resemble the mountain represent how Kailāsa as a symbol of spirituality has carried on beyond the mountain's geographical confines. In the exploration of both, this chapter understands that the theme of "transcending the quotidian" results in attempts to render the inaccessible accessible within the cultural landscape, a motive that is not the sole driver yet prominent factor in pilgrimage and temple construction surrounding Kailāsa. Thus, Kailāsa—at its source and through its symbolic representations—is sustained as a site of spirituality through the circulation of ethereal properties, giving credence to the title of this thesis.

I. Pilgrimage: The Journey To, From, and Around Mount Kailash

Pilgrimage in South Asian traditions—specifically those covered by the scope of this paper—is traditionally considered as a *tīrtha-yātrā*.[138] The word *tīrtha* independently indicates a "crossing-place," where the delineation between the sacred and the profane is blurred, whereas the word *yātrā* suggests a journey to a particular location.[139] In conjunction, the two suggest that

[138] C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 205.
[139] *Ibid.*

tīrtha-yātrā is a process by which one journeys to a place that is holy and not confined to the rules that dictate human mortal life. Rather, this location is spiritual in nature. This is reflected in broader definitions of pilgrimage; for example, the *Brill Dictionary of Religion* labels it as a "devotional journeying" "underlain by the belief that the local presence of a deity, a hero or a saint in this specific place makes transcendence in immanence especially effective and available to experience, and thereby especially efficacious for one's own concerns."[140]

Why pilgrimage? The previous chapter detailed the religious significance behind representations of Kailāsa that arise from various textual descriptions across South Asian religious traditions. However, why does that not merely warrant a worship of the mountain? Why is its impact on the cultural landscape one that draws followers to the site of practice? This subsection attempts to answer this question with the concept of a spill-over effect that ties the mountain to a geographical location. Because religious representations of the mountain foundationally utilize extra-human, mystic descriptions, traditions, those who practice it tend to view pilgrimage as the most proximate mechanism to maximize access to that spirituality. However, that is not without significant political and economic incentives also offered by the process of pilgrimage. After briefly examining the historical drivers of pilgrimage and how it translated from a mythological mountain to a geographic one, I will turn towards describing aspects of pilgrimage that exist today, and how these connect to the theme of transcending the quotidian.

The Historical Drivers of Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash

[140] Pieschel, "Landscape."

Pilgrimage to Kailash is not a time-old tradition across Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. In fact, it's appeal as a site for people to visit is one that truly gained traction only in the twentieth century, far after its consistent appearance textually in the medieval period.[141] This likely stems from its consistent depiction as an inaccessible site, one that those with supernatural powers occupy.[142] The fascination that this generated within worshippers is distinct from the motives to actually visit the mountain, which until then, was confined to a small number of renunciates.[143] Even these renunciates focused less on the mountain and more on other features, such as Lake Mānasarōvar.[144] The mountain described in texts as Kailāsa is distinct from the geographic Mt. Kailash that is encountered by pilgrims in that area—texts describe a mythical mountain, not a specific, worldly location.[145] That disconnect can explain the capacity for the symbol of Kailāsa to proliferate in temples and other cultural aspects while not becoming popular as a physical site of visit. The catalyst behind translating Kailāsa as a heavenly and mythological mountain to one that is on the ground and can be perceived by humans occurs earliest by Buddhists, for whom pilgrimage sites had initially been in modern day India as the location where Buddha lived his life.[146] Milarepa, a eleventh century Tibetan yogi who became a revered Buddhist in Tibet, especially within the Kagyu sect,[147] first claimed the mountain for Buddhism during his life.[148] Occurring at a time where Buddhism was booming in Tibet, Milarepa joined a "process of transference of Indic Buddhist sacred geography to the Tibetan plateau" that the Kagyu sect of Buddhism engaged in.[149] The establishment of Tibetan rule,

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[141] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 4.
[142] *Ibid*.
[143] *Ibid*.
[144] *Ibid*., 2.
[145] *Ibid*., 3.
[146] *Ibid*., 2
[147] Tsangnyön Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa*, trans. Andrew Quintman, (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 4-5.
[148] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 7.
[149] *Ibid.*

separate from the Śaiva influence also booming in the medieval period,[150] benefited from the "imaginal and ritual imposition onto the landscape" as it offered cohesion for a Tibetan state, reversing previously dispersed communities.[151] With such a state possessing strong Kagyu political influence, it also makes sense why Milarepa's claimed mountain became a focal point. As a result, "local identities then began to be subsumed in the transformation of the site into Buddhist sacred space and the subsequent political unification of the Tibetan plateau."[152] This marks a turning point in the flow and magnitude of Buddhist pilgrimage to the region—though it was likely occurring prior to this times, the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism was vital in the establishment of many monasteries and centers of meditation both along the path of pilgrimage as well as Lake Mānasarōvar, beginning in the twelfth century.[153] After the opening of the first pilgrimage site in 1215, which involved the establishment of particular temples around the mountain that became claimed as Kailash, the region became subject to various annexations from the kingdom of Ladakh as well as a later expanding Tibetan state, well into the seventeenth century.[154] But throughout this time, Bhutani notes that "the Tibetans came from the east, north and central parts of the country, to what had become a major centre of revived Buddhism in Tibet, maintaining close and constant contact with the centres of Buddhist learning in neighbouring Kashmir and distant Bengal."[155] Hindu pilgrimage to what is now known as Mt. Kailash has its earliest concrete evidence also in the seventeenth century, where the Garhwal and Kumaon kingdoms sent forces through the Himalayan region in protection of pilgrims.[156] There are also mentions of "peripatetic groups such as the *Pasupatas* travelled widely in the

[150] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 43-44.
[151] *Ibid*.
[152] *Ibid*.
[153] S.K. Bhutani, "Kailash-Manasarover," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 1, no. 1 (Jun 1992): 17.
[154] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 7.
[155] Bhutani, "Kailash-Manasarover," 17.
[156] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 92.

Himalayas" that may have potentially explored Kailāsa.[157] However, large-scale pilgrimage, especially for Hindus, is still not a commonplace at this time.[158]

Competing political claims over Kailash, especially in the context of Buddhist statehood, offered a source of colonial exertion that truly marked the beginning of pilgrimage as a large-scale process across multiple religions. With Tibetan political interests, as well as even Bön claims that the mountain was the center of an ancient Bön kingdom, disputes certainly created a political elevation of Kailāsa as a whole.[159] Discrete yet increasingly popularized representations of Kailāsa were capitalized upon by British colonial officers in the region, seeking to increase revenue through taxation of visitors.[160] When understood alongside other parties such as an explorer "glorifying his own achievements" and a Hindu renunciate that engaged in "reformulating Hindu sacred geography through a creative combination of the scientific and the visionary study of its earliest texts," what we see is a structural incentive for many different parties, whether it be financial, political, publicity, or even religious curiosity, coalesce in the early twentieth century to establish Kailash as "the most sacred place in Tibet."[161] Thus, the transition from Kailāsa as a mythological mountain to a geographically accessible (yet nevertheless arduous) location, though kickstarted by Buddhists in the medieval period, really emerged as a widespread process during the time of colonial control in the Himalayan region.

As this process of pilgrimage emerged with Buddhist and subsequent colonial rule, a concurrent yet decentralized process of pilgrimage emerged within renunciates during the medieval period, who coalesced under the seemingly spiritual experience derived from

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[157] *Ibid.*, 93.
[158] *Ibid*.
[159] *Ibid*., 8.
[160] *Ibid*.
[161] *Ibid*.

substances located around and on the way to Kailash. Alchemy became a motivating force for pilgrimage, as "this ideology may have led renunciates to the Kailas-Manasarovar region, for it was a bountiful source of alchemical agents they could consume or trade."[162] Some examples of commonly found items like mercury, mica, sulfur, calcium carbonate, gold, ochre, borax, arsenic sulfates, and medicinal stones can be found at Kailāsa. What distinguishes these items from other minerals or materials is their symbolic religious meaning. For example, mercury is seen as divine semen, sulfur was considered to be the menstrual blood of Umā, and mica as the sexual fluid of Umā.[163] The divine properties found during pilgrimage not only mark a holiness surrounding the locations from which these are derived, but a sanctity to the path of pilgrimage itself. There is also a psychotropic component to such resource extraction that is especially prominent in the Tantric tradition, which is known for the utilization of hallucinogenic agents.[164] One such agent is Datura—a white flower considered sacred to Śiva that also appears in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and the *Vajramahābhairava Tantra*.[165] Its proximity in growth locations to the Himalayan region, especially Kailāsa, may have drawn Buddhist renunciates to the region.[166] The utilization of cannabis also became abundant by renunciate Tantric and Śaiva groups that reached the mountain. Not only did it offer psychotropic, illusory effects that mystified what would otherwise be encountered on a quotidian basis by humans, but it also offered physical endurance in the harsh Himalayan environments.[167] Thus, the harvest and utilization of both symbolically religious flora but also that which created extra-human experiences within its consumers marks another driver behind pilgrimage to the region. Entering the realm of Kailash

[162] *Ibid*., 100.
[163] *Ibid.*, 102.
[164] *Ibid*., 105.
[165] *Ibid*., 106.
[166] *Ibid*.
[167] *Ibid*., 108.

through pilgrimage not only offered a spiritually saturated environment, but a landscape that opens a window for experiences that transcended the quotidian. Psychotropic substances and the effect that they create when consumed were interpreted as an experience that eluded the confines of humanity.

Though there is the aspect of trade that may drive such paths of pilgrimage, there is an undeniable spiritual connotation, especially in the context of escaping the confines of mortality by coming closer to God. For example, McKay notes a transactional component to this practice of pilgrimage, whereby offerings are made in exchange for the extraction of tradeable and usable resources, which suggests that even trade as an explanatory valuable fall under the umbrella of spiritual significance, as offerings become a precursor to extraction. Accompanying the potent spiritual energy and value of visiting Kailash, he suggests that "the most probable impetus to renunciate travel to the Kailas-Manasarovar region was the demand for alchemical agents" that themselves represented agents of spirituality and mysticism.[168] With such minerals and items found on the spiritual path to and around Kailash and Mānasarōvar, there becomes significant spirituality attributed to the process of pilgrimage.

Today, pilgrimage to Kailash is an industry. It's a source of economic income for many trade operators in the region, for the Chinese government through visa applications, as well as local communities, hotels, and travel agencies.[169] However, individual pursuits to the region rely upon understanding the mountain providing access to a focal point of spirituality that was otherwise rendered inaccessible. The physical translation of Kailāsa from a heavenly space to a geographic one coupled with the process of pilgrimage formulates the capacity for access.

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[168] *Ibid.*, 103.
[169] Sangam Prasain, "Pilgrims to Kailash discouraged by new Chinese rules," *The Kathmandu Post*, May 8, 2023, https://kathmandupost.com/money/2023/05/08/pilgrims-to-kailash-discouraged-by-new-chinese-regulations

For Hinduism, the textual foundation and understanding of Kailāsa establishes its inaccessibility to mortals through its routine descriptions of all that is spiritual, from the beings that reside it to the creatures that roam it. However, those same texts include stories that hint at characteristics that mortals would encounter in day-to-day fashion (specifically in Hinduism, this could include the flora and fauna of the Indian subcontinent that are found throughout it, albeit not all together in one location). Essentially, Hindu understandings of Kailāsa utilize mortal descriptions to establish its immortal nature—a unique oxymoron that lies at the heart of why it matters to the extent it does. With that gravity attached to the mountain, pilgrimage is especially an attractive act today because it brings the follower as close to Lord Śiva and all else that contributes to Kailāsa's spirituality as possible, without truly being able to access it in its entirety (which would functionally be immortality). It is quite literally the point in the world where the mortal meets the immortal, as it is the abode of Śiva and his manifestation on this planet. It is nearly identical to what Mircea Eliade describes in *The Sacred and The Profane* as "an axis mundi connecting earth with heaven" that "touches heaven and hence marks the highest point in the world."[170] The drive within *homo religiosus*—the religious entity that resides within us all—to carve and seek out sacred spaces in search of hierophanies is an apt explanation that Eliade offers that gets to the heart of the value that pilgrimage offers. With each step of the path, whether it be circumambulating Kailāsa or bathing in the sacred waters of Mānasarōvar, *homo religiosus* moves closer and closer to the sacred and farther and farther away from the profane.[171] With that also comes rewards associated with sacredness, such as the absolution of sins one may have accumulated.

[170] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harcourt, 1987), 38.
[171] *Ibid*., 25.

For Buddhists, though the mountain functions as an *axis mundi* that connects the spiritual heavens with the mortal Earth, there is a unique focus on certain features of the path that attracts pilgrims. As will be detailed further, the emphasis on locations, multiple paths, and parikramā that involves full body prostrations, it is clear the defining features of Buddhist pilgrimage are particularly attuned to the path that one takes. Though the mountain is thought to transcend the quotidian with its strong spiritual meaning, the path to and around the mountain is equally filled with spiritually potent edifices that also escape the category of mortality. As Sarao eloquently describes it, "every step of the sacred route encircling Kailash and Manasarovar has its own legend, and every rock, hill, and spring its own god: an outpouring of myth and belief which confirms by its very abundance the presence of the sacred."[172] Nearly each monastery has a story associated with it of Buddhist monks and figures with powers that transcend what is accessible to humans. Parts of the physical path represent aspects of the Buddha himself, such as the footprints, and others like the Dolma La Pass represent a transition from a sinful state to one that is pure. What is clearly observed in the Buddhist parikramā (the term kora is more accurate to describe the circumambulation path for Buddhists) is that not only is the mountain mystic, but the physical path around it is filled with spiritual powers that are not accessible to humans otherwise. Thus, there is a unique emphasis on physical pilgrimage as a process, not just abstract veneration of Kailāsa. McKay notes that:

> Tibetan Tantric understanding of the sacred landscape itself as empowered means that the centre of the sacred site is perceived as the palace of the deity. There, 'the vital bodily

[172] K. T. S. Sarao, "Kailās," in *Buddhism and Jainism*, ed. J. D. Long, (Encyclopedia of Indian Religions, 2017), 612.

substances of the chosen meditational deities can be found and extracted from the landscape itself, as their bodies are the body of the summit.'[173]

With this brief overview of pilgrimage's emergence and labeling of Kailāsa as a physical site on Earth, as well as its historical drivers, I will explain the current process that is traditionally embarked on by individual pilgrims of these religious traditions. Before that, however, it is important to emphasize that there is no one overdetermining motive for why pilgrimage takes place. Multiple competing, and often co-existing reasons exist for why humans have, do, and will continue to pursue pilgrimage to Kailash. However, explaining why there are political contestations at the mountain, economic incentives for the mountain specifically, and even alchemical driver return to the root as Kailāsa being a mountain that transcends the quotidian experiences of humans. It is that significance from its mythological spirituality that exacerbates its political, economic, and social significance. Today, this mystic and often inaccessible mountain not only draws people towards the abstract spiritual conception of the mountain, but its physical geography itself, of which pilgrimage is the most effective vehicle. This theme resonates across the many groups of each religious tradition that took part in the process of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage to Kailash Today for Hindus and Buddhists

Today, pilgrimage to Kailash differs for Hindus and Buddhists, with each religion emphasizing a different endpoint of pilgrimage. For Hindus, it is commonly referred to as the Kailāsa-Mānasarōvar Yātrā, with the inclusion of Mānasarōvar indicating the coupling of the lake's holiness to the mountain. This is because "the lake is also considered as the abode of

[173] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 101.

celestial spirits and the water of it is symbolic of nectar."[174] This lake is "the paradise land of Lord Brahma and by circumambulation of the lake, they could earn the merit to get rid of all the evil deeds performed in a mundane life."[175] For Buddhists, on the other hand, we see an emphasis on the traditional practice involves the circumambulation of the mountain itself; referred to as *parikramā* or *kora*.[176] It is a form of *pradakṣiṇā*, which is the circling of objects based off their sacred properties.[177] The process of circumambulation "is instrumental to destroy the sins, which motivates the Hindus for a pilgrimage overcoming all the hardships to a contested site, characterized by conflict over its access and usage."[178] Broadly, "one action is instrumental in bringing reaction and if sin is committed, prosecution is inevitably awaiting in due course."[179] This isn't to say that Buddhists do not visit Lake Mānasarōvar or Hindus do not circumambulate the mountain; rather, the vast majority of current Buddhist pilgrimage is focused on circumambulation[180] whereas Hindu pilgrimage tends to be geared towards visits to Lake Mānasarōvar.[181]

Pilgrims desiring to circumambulate the mountain follow traditionally a similar path. Buddhists and Hindus are said to conduct their parikramā in a clockwise fashion, whereas followers of Bön do so counterclockwise.[182] This process begins at Darchen—a town situated to the south of Kailāsa that is considered the "gateway to the Kailash pilgrim's circuit."[183] On the

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[174] Chakrabarty and Sadhukhan, "Destination Image," 76.
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Sarao, "Pilgrimage to Mt Kailash." 218.
[177] *Ibid.*
[178] Premangushu Chakrabarty and Sanjoy Kumar Sadhukhan, "Destination Image for Pilgrimage and Tourism: A Study in Mount Kailash Region of Tibet," *Folia Geographica* 62, no. 2 (Oct 2020): 77.
[179] *Ibid.*
[180] Eugene Kaspersky, "A three-day kora around Kailash," *Nota Bene*, December 9, 2019, https://eugene.kaspersky.com/2019/12/09/a-three-day-kora-around-kailash/
[181] Epic Yatra, "The Kailash Manasarovar Yatra Overview," LinkedIn, January 12, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/kailash-mansarovar-yatra-overview-epic-yatra
[182] Kevin Bubriski and Abhimanyu Pandey, *Kailash Yatra* (Penguin Random House India, 2018): 174.
[183] Bubriski and Pandey, *Kailash Yatra*, 11.

opposite side of the mountain across the Sutlej River is Diraphuk, a Buddhist monastery.[184] Further along the path is the Dolma La Pass—the highest altitude in the parkiramā as well as the location of the Gaurī Kuṇḍa or Lake of Mercy.[185] It also connects Diraphuk to Zutrulphuk, another stop in the circumambulatory path.[186] Finally, pilgrims make it back to Darchen, which marks the end of their path around the mountain. This path is by no means definitive—in fact, neighboring mountains such as Nandi Parvat that don't fit into the traditional path still have routes carved out for pilgrims to stop and prostrate at, a practice more commonly engaged in by Hindus, however.[187] Another example is the hour-long hike from Diraphuk to the north face of the mountain; pilgrims get the opportunity to walk alongside glacial meltwater as they approach the mountain at one of the closest points.[188] However, there does exist a commonly traveled path that approximately covers 52 kilometers and is more commonly embarked upon than other paths.[189]

However, certain key distinctive factors separate the process of circumambulation for Buddhists. Specifically for Buddhists, pilgrimage involves a five-day visit is accompanied by five consecutive circumambulations.[190] For them, *parikramā* is itself considered an avenue for enlightenment, where 108 *parikramā*s equate to achieving this.[191] Tibetan Buddhists believe that "the potential for enlightenment, which, according to Buddhism, all sentient beings possess, is activated by the mere sight" of the mountain.[192] The amount of parikramās thus corresponds to

[184] *Ibid.*, 13.
[185] *Ibid.*, 189.
[186] *Ibid.*, 14.
[187] Sarao, "Pilgrimage to Mt Kailash," 219.
[188] Bubriski and Pandey, *Kailash Yatra*, 174.
[189] *Ibid.*, 151.
[190] *Ibid.*, 191.
[191] Sarao, "Pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash," 220.
[192] *Ibid.*

the absolving of certain sins—one for ordinary sins, two for murder, and so on.[193] For Hindus, such rigidity is not found in the process of parikramā—it is the spiritual communion received from the principal deities that represents the value of the parikramā.[194] They adhere by the general principle that pilgrimage and circumambulating the mountain offers an enhanced spiritual function that brings the worshipper closer to enlightenment by absolving them of their many sins.

External to the parikramā, a key distinction arises between Hindu and other traditions in the importance of sacred cleansing, particularly in relationship to the Lake Mānasarōvar. Sarao notes that "ritual bathing is an integral part of Indian pilgrimage though for the Tibetans it does not seem to hold any importance."[195] There is a process of cleansing that is said to occur when one undergoes bathing in the waters of Lake Mānasarōvar or Lake Gaurī Kunda, so much so that the *only* thing those that embark on a pilgrimage return with is the waters of these lakes.[196] This is a stressed component of the pilgrimage, especially for Hindus, though it is also occasionally practiced among Buddhists because of the spiritual elevation of Lake Anavatapta, which is associated with Mānasarōvar. There lay also multiple Buddhist monasteries along the shores of Lake Mānasarōvar.

Similarly, for Buddhists, there is a much larger emphasis on the monasteries and other key points within the journey which have religious symbolism beyond the mountain. Specifically, "the parikramā route is lined with reminders of a spiritual reality, signs left by gods, Buddhas, and holy men of such power that the rocks they stood upon still bear the imprints of

[193] *Ibid.*
[194] *Ibid.*, 219.
[195] *Ibid.*, 218.
[196] *Ibid.*

their feet (called *shapje* by the Tibetans) and hands (called *chakje* by the Tibetans)."[197] There are even multiple different pilgrimage paths for Buddhists, though one is much more commonly taken than the other: the outermost path is the longest one and is intended for humans, the middle one is for ḍākas and the ḍākinīs—celestial beings—and the innermost one for the 500 arhats.[198] The most glaring aspect of pilgrimage for Buddhists is that each step of the path has a religious significance and story associated with it. Thus, pilgrimage is more than just honoring the spiritual legacy of the mountain and the benefits that come with offerings to it; rather, each stop along the path at various monasteries and other Buddhist sites of worship are accompanied by a unique religious preface and story that essentially culminate around one location: the mountain.

As it is mostly Tibetan Buddhists that engage in circumambulation, many of the sites surrounding the mountain on the circumambulatory path are Buddhist in nature. For reference, hundreds of thousands of Hindus make the visit to Lake Mānasarōvar each year,[199] whereas tens of thousands of Buddhists engage in circumambulating the mountain.[200] The most important elements along the path are the five monasteries, the four prostration points, the Buddha footprints, and transition points like the Shiva-stal and the Dolma La Pass. Each of these landmarks possess a unique story of spiritual beings or figures with extra-human powers; thus, performing prostration, meditation, or other acts of veneration are accompanied by a history of spirituality that is accessible nowhere else. For example, the Driraphuk Gompa is dedicated to the "famous monk named Götsangpa, the discoverer of the Kailash route."[201] As a pilgrim who ventured to Mānasarōvar, "he chased a female yak (dri): cornered in the cave of Drira, she

[197] *Ibid.*, 612.
[198] *Ibid.*, 612.
[199] Epic Yatra, "The Kailash Manasarovar Yatra Overview."
[200] Kaspersky, "A three-day kora around Kailash."
[201] K. T. S. Sarao, "Kailās," 614.

revealed her true nature as a ḍākinī ("kodarma" in Tibetan). A ḍākinī is one of the magical legions of female spirits who are the keepers of mystic intuition."[202] Similarly, the Shiva-stal is a location where "Tibetan pilgrims offer a piece of clothing, a lock of hair and even a drop of blood to propitiate Yama, the God of Death."[203] Sarao notes that "these offerings are meant to create a physical link between the spirit and this holy site and to prepare the soul for its long journey between this life and the next," essentially cleansing it.[204] Objects along the path, like the Dolma Stone, are "smeared with butter and surrounded by prayer flags, it is the object of veneration by the Tibetan pilgrims."[205] Deities are venerated at certain sites, such as the Zuthulphuk monastery where Milarepa triumphs the Bönpo shaman Naro Bönchung in an argument regarding the direction of circumambulation.[206]

It is important to note that pilgrimage to a mountain is not nearly as much historically observed for Jains as it is for Hindus and Buddhists. Though modern-day pilgrimage packages offered by vendors often include Jainism, these are little tailored to a Jain experience beyond brief mentions of the importance of Aṣṭapada in a synonymous manner with Kailash; in fact, they seem to be littered with Śaiva imagery, suggesting little distinction between Hindu pilgrimage packages to the mountain.[207] This isn't to say that there aren't meaningful distinctions between Hindu and Jain iterations of Kailash; rather, it suggests that the process of translating the mythic Kailāsa to a physical mountain on Earth did not necessarily spillover into Aṣṭapada to the extent that it did for Buddhists and Hindus. Whereas the location of pilgrimage to Kailash

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[202] *Ibid.*
[203] S.K. Bhutani, "Kailash-Manasarover," 17.
[204] K. T. S. Sarao, "Kailās," 615.
[205] S.K. Bhutani, "Kailash-Manasarover," 17.
[206] *Ibid*.
[207] "Kailash Jain Followers Tour," Kailash Tour Package, accessed March 16, 2024, https://www.kailashtourpackage.com/kailash-jain-followers-tour.html

today is fairly solidified for Buddhists and Hindus,[208] the location of Aṣṭapada is substantially contested, with expeditions and satellite observations contending that what is understood as the geographic Mt. Kailash is not the location of Aṣṭapada.[209]

Returning to the definition of pilgrimage posed in the beginning of this subsection, the theme of a crossing-place is truly embodied by the pilgrimage to Kailash. Whether the focus is on Kailash, Mānasarōvar, the monasteries and pathways surrounding it, or the resources it offers, each has a spiritual connotation that exceeds the human experience. The entirety of the spirituality encompassed by the mountain and what it stands for may not be accessible to humans, but pilgrimage today offers the possibility for accumulating as many spiritual experiences as possible. For Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, the parikramā around the mountain or a visit to Lake Mānasarōvar represents a cleansing of one's sins and the creation of a newer and purer life. For subsects of these traditions such as Siddha, Śaiva and Tantric renunciates, the resources along the path and their symbolic meaning contribute towards the experiential mysticism offered by a pilgrimage to Kailash.

However, such modern-day representations and meanings of Kailāsa are not the result of textual representations of Kailāsa gradually transitioning into practice. Rather, they seem to be tied to historical advantages offered by the process of pilgrimage, whether it be political and economic leverage, or even alchemical properties that produce a different state of mind. Today's Kailash is distinct from the Kailāsa depicted in the texts or even the Kailāsa Tibetan Buddhists brought from myth to reality. Though labeled as the abode of Śiva, pilgrimage's purpose surrounds the blessings one receives and cleansing sins, as opposed to locating Śiva as the

[208] S.K. Bhutani, "Kailash-Manasarover," 17.
[209] "A Talk About the Latest Research on Ashtapad Tirth," Institute of Jainology, accessed March 17, 2024, https://www.jainology.org/latest-research-ashtapad-tirth/

primary motive.[210] A similar sentiment resonates, as Buddhists do not arrive at Kailash expecting to see Meru or Śrī Heruka, but instead seek the divine benefits offered by pilgrimage.[211] However, the frame for divinity derived from pilgrimage and its framing as a process that transcends the quotidian is one set through the political and economic incentives that favor doing so. Thus, though pilgrimage offers the potential to bringing followers as close to transcending the quotidian as possible, that same argument is too narrow to explain the complex factors that brought the mythic mountain described in texts as heavenly to the realm occupied by humans.

II. Art and Architecture: The Kailāsa Temple at Ellora

Whereas Buddhists seemed to place emphasis on pilgrimage to the physical manifestation of Kailāsa in the Himalayas, there emerges within Hinduism and Buddhism representations of Kailāsa in art and culture. Specifically, temple architecture emerges as one such site where Kailāsa becomes popularized. The way that these temples are represented, viewed, and described sustain the central argument of transcending the quotidian, whereby certain qualities of the temples and their connection to Kailāsa depict it as otherworldly yet simultaneously render it accessible through the form of a temple. However, within temple architecture pertaining to Kailāsa, there rest divergences between the textual representation of Kailāsa and its artistic implementation.

To examine the artistic creation of Kailāsa, the Kailāśanātha Temple and Choṭā Kailāsa makes an excellent case study. These temples are one of the most magnificent of the places of worship in the Ellora Caves of India, proximate to the city of Aurangabad in the state of

[210] Chakrabarty and Sadhukhan, "Destination Image," 76.
[211] Sarao, "Pilgrimage to Mt Kailash." 218.

Maharashtra. They are famous temples that share the namesake Kailāsa in the world and are located amidst caves that were created to honor Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, posing a unique convergence of the three religious traditions that Kailāsa poses significant implications for.

Specifically, I argue that the Kailāśanātha, in its name, history, and architecture, was not constructed with Kailāsa in mind, whether it be from a Purāṇic source or its physical manifestation in the Himalayas. However, within the social context of Śaivism that expanded during the medieval period,[212] the temple's parallels to the mountain became a vehicle for humans to maximize their access to that which is framed as inaccessible through texts—the mountain. With the mythical and scriptural Kailāsa being a strong symbol of that which is truly spiritual, labeling the temple as Kailāsa becomes one of its manifestations on Earth, maximizing the worshipper's capacity to transcend the confines of human and mortal experience. Choṭā Kailāsa on the other hand, while likely also influenced by the rise in Śaivism, more directly connects to textual representations of Kailāsa or Aṣṭapada, as it was commissioned by a Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler who patronized the Jinasena, the author of the *Ādipurāṇa.* Both Kailāśanātha and Choṭā Kailāsa, however, were influenced by the motives of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa and the boom of Śaivism, which influenced their representation as sites that bring the supernatural qualities of Kailāsa to the worshiper, giving them access to a symbol that transcends the quotidian experience of humans.

The Structure and Symbols of Kailāśanātha

[212] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 43-44.

The Kailāsa Temple is Cave 16 of Ellora Caves and is thought to have been constructed around the mid eighth century by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa Monarch Krishna I. It is a rock-cut temple that was carved into a cliff face.[213] It is not entirely clear who commissioned this temple. For example, "there are a number of panels in the Kailasa complex which do not stylistically conform to the Rashtrakuta style but belong more to the Chalukyan school."[214] There is speculation that the Chalukyan artists that took part in the construction of the Pattadakal Virūpāksha Temple also were utilized for the construction of the Kailāsa at Ellora, suggesting the stylistic similarities.[215] However, there appears to be some consensus that large portions of the Ellora Caves were executed by monarchs in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty, from Dantidurga to Krishna I, who completed the work.[216] Much of the temple architecturally also mimics other pre-existing temples associated with Kailāsa such as the Pattadakal Virūpāksha Temple or the Kānchīpuram Kailāśanātha Temple.[217]

As one enters the temple, the images of "Śiva Nataraja, Narasimha, Trivikrama, Vishnu as varāha, Vishnu with Garuda and Brahma" frame one's pathway, with "The entrance door is also flanked by Ganga & Yamuna."[218] The left wall depicts "carved panels showing Mahiṣamardini, Krishna lifting Govardhana, and Kāma, the god of love and his consort, Rati."[219] Dhavalikar notes that "perhaps the most important and the most artistic of the sculptures in Kailasa is the panel on the south which depicts Ravana shaking the Kailasa mountain," carved in the very traditional Rāṣṭrakūṭa style.[220] Another defining feature of the temple is the narratives of both the

[213] Dhavalikar, "Kailasa," 33.
[214] *Ibid*., 38.
[215] *Ibid*., 39.
[216] Hermann Goetz, "The Kailāsa of Ellora and the Chronology of Rāshtrakūta Art," *Artibus Asiae* 15, no. 1/2 (1952): 92.
[217] *Ibid*., 93.
[218] Dhavalikar, "Kailasa," 34.
[219] *Ibid*.
[220] *Ibid*., 39.

Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, "which are featured in parallel friezes on the lower exterior walls of the front porch."[221] These cycles display nearly the entire archive of the traditional stories associated with each epic. For example, Stephen Markel notes that stories from the "pursuit of the golden deer" to "Hanumān finds Sitā" in Lanka are all intricately carved into the friezes.[222] The Kṛsṇacaritra—the life of Kṛsṇa—is also present on the Kailāsa temple, depicting twelve episodes from various parts of his childhood.[223]

The connection between the Kailāsa of the Kailāśanātha temple and the Kailāsa of the Purāṇas, however, is tenuous. Though there are certain Purāṇic stories repeated architecturally, such as Rāvaṇa shaking the mountain,[224] as well as Śiva as a central deity in the form of a liṅga,[225] these don't suggest a strong connection to the Purāṇic Kailāsa, per se. Though Rāvaṇa uprooting Kailāsa is mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,[226] it is certainly not its focus in terms of Kailāsa-related stories, with other extensive sections dedicated to its appearance and distinctive characteristics that enhance its supernatural quality.[227] In fact, Dhavalikar notes that "in the mediaeval times it was popularly known as Manikeshwar and perhaps earlier still as Ghrishneshwar, and was regarded as one of the twelve *jyotirlingas.*"[228] The name Manikeshwar honors the legend of the queen Manikavati, who was married to the king of Elapura that helped commission the temple.[229] The fact that the temple, even if influenced by the Purāṇas or built

[221] Stephen Markel, "The "Rāmāyaṇa" Cycle on the Kailāsanātha Temple at Ellora," *Ars Orientalis* 30, no. 1 (2000): 59.
[222] *Ibid*., 63-66.
[223] John Stratton Hawley, "Scenes from the Childhood of Kṛṣṇa on the Kailāsanātha Temple, Ellora," *Archives of Asian Art* 34, (1981): 74.
[224] Dhavalikar, "Kailasa," 39.
[225] *Ibid*., 41.
[226] BhP X.88.16., *BhP Part 4*, 1828.
[227] BhP IV.6.14-15., *BhP Part 2*, 448.
[228] Dhavalikar, "Kailasa," 42.
[229] *Ibid*.

alongside their writing, was not called Kailāsa until later on reveals a key disconnect between the Kailāśanātha temple and the Purāṇic representations of Kailāsa.

In *The Himalayas in Indian Art*, E. B. Havell puts forth an argument for how Kailāśanātha connects not necessarily to the Purāṇic Kailāsa, but is modeled from the physical mountain that later became the site for pilgrimage. He indicated that specific moieties within the temple's architectural construction offer clear allusions to aspects of the mountain. For example, he compares seven waterfalls that are present near the mountain, which supposedly reference the birth of the Ganges River, and compares it to the one waterfall present proximal to the Ellora caves.[230] He identifies other notable features, such as an original chunam coating on the temple's exterior that was "dazzling white in sunshine like the snow-peaks of Kailāsa," or even the plinth of the temple and its imagery of "low-lying banks of clouds" that emulate "the natural phenomena of the Himalayas."[231] Other scholars indicate other similar features, such as "the rock-cut pyramid of the Kailāśanātha of Ellora clearly resemble the black Himalayan rock of the sacred mountain."[232] Though these may resemble aspects of the physical mountain, nothing about the temple mimics a unique characteristic of it, given the fairly broad connections Havell draws to the Himalayan region. Even the presence of waterfalls is not exactly mirrored, with seven observed in the Himalayan region of the physical mountain and only one near the temple.[233] The more clear-cut tension within Havell's argument is the lack of institutional pilgrimage, especially within Hindus, occurring as early as temple construction.[234] With Rāṣṭrakūṭas not gaining territorial holding in the Gangetic plains region of the subcontinent until

[230] E. B. Havell, *The Himalayas in Indian Art* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1986): 25-26.
[231] *Ibid.*, 27.
[232] Dubbini, "Mount Kailāśa In Mahārāṣṭra," 17.
[233] *Ibid.*, 25-26.
[234] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 3-7.

the tenth century, it becomes difficult to conceive of how this temple was built to resemble the Kailāsa's physical manifestation in the Himalayas.[235]

With varying names associated with the temple throughout its existence and allusions to the Himalayan region but nothing intrinsic to Kailāsa's physical manifestation, it's difficult to argue that Kailāśanātha is modeled off the Purāṇic or physical manifestation of Kailāsa. Little is known about the specific motives behind this project, how it varied, and how it was influenced by Śaivism throughout the medieval period. However, it is very possible that those same forces that elevated Kailāsa textually and increased its popularity contributed towards drawing those connections between the temple and the mountain. Śaivism played a very important role in temple construction, and there is evidence of Śaiva influence in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty.[236] Within Śaiva royal influence, temple construction played an important role, one that will be further discussed.[237] Such social contexts suggest that Śaiva features of temples, that offered advantageous benefits for rulers,[238] slowly evolved into the namesake Kailāśanātha as Kailāsa gained popularity, thus creating the incentive for drawing connections between both Purāṇic and physical manifestations of the mountain. Such a theory is difficult to falsify, as it would require tracking the name evolutions of the temple in Rāṣṭrakūṭa royal documents, but it aligns with the boom of Śaivism[239] as well as the values central to Rāṣṭrakūṭa control and expansion.[240] These motives will be further explored below, after a brief exploration of the Jain cave.

Choṭā Kailāsa: Ellora's Jain Excavation

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[235] Goetz, "The Kailāsa of Ellora," 96.
[236] N. T. Gangamma, "Art and Architecture under Rashtrakutas of Malkhed," *Review of Research* 1, no. 9 (Jun 2012): 2-4.
[237] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 274.
[238] *Ibid*.
[239] *Ibid*., 270.
[240] Dubbini, "Mount Kailāśa In Mahārāṣṭra," 15-16.

Choṭā Kailāsa, which roughly translates to "Little 'Kailāsa," is Cave 30 of the Ellora Caves. It is dedicated not to Śiva, but to the Jain tīrthaṅkaras, yet its similar architecture to the popular Kailāśanātha temple has given it the shared namesake.[241] Knowledge of the Choṭā Kailāsa's construction and commissioner is limited—what is popularly understood is that it was also commissioned by a king within the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty known as Amoghavarṣa I, between 814 to 880 CE.[242] A patron of Jinasena,[243] Amoghavarṣa's Jain rule is said to have influenced the construction of the Jain caves at Ellora, as these similar deities make structural appearances.[244] In fact, Jinasena "claims he was the chief preceptor of Amoghavarsha," with Amoghavarṣa's affinity for Jainism spilling out from speech into practice.[245] Lisa Owens in "Kings or Ascetics? Evidence of Patronage in Ellora's Jain Caves" notes however that there remains no concrete evidence that Amoghavarṣa visited the site or ran its construction; rather, such arguments tend to emerge from correlating timelines and his prominence as a Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler that followed Jain traditions.[246] What is well known and verifiable, however, not only within Choṭā Kailāsa but across all the Jain caves, is the appearance of important Jinas through sculptures. Particularly of interest is the Jina Pārśvanātha, whose sculptures appear five times in Choṭā Kailāsa.[247] Pārśvanātha is said to be a protector of snakes, having attempted to save snakes from a Hindu sacrifice in his previous life, before being reborn as the twenty-third Jina.[248] Thus, there is a special protection awarded to him by Padmāvatī—the serpent queen.[249] Though Owen seems to

[241] Lisa N. Owen, "Kings or Ascetics? Evidence of Patronage in Ellora's Jain Caves," *Artibus Asiae* 70, no. 2 (2010): 188.
[242] *Ibid.*
[243] Anant S. Altekar, *The Rāshṭrakūṭas and Their Times* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1934), 88-89.
[244] Owen, "Kings or Ascetics," 188.
[245] Altekar, *The Rāshṭrakūṭas*, 88-89.
[246] Owen, "Kings or Ascetics," 188.
[247] *Ibid*., 210.
[248] *Ibid*.
[249] *Ibid*.

suggest that a reverence for snakes is not one that is immediately attributable to the worship of Śiva,[250] Sanderson argues that the figure of Padmāvatī herself and her association with Pārśvanātha evolved through the uptake of Śaivism in the form of śākta goddesses. This is best seen in the *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa*, a medieval text composed by "the Digambara Mallisẹṇa's Paddhati on the propitiation of Padmāvatī."[251] Here, s Padmāvatī is equated with "Totalā, Tvaritā, Nityā, Tripurā, and Tripurabhairavī, all well-known Mantra-goddesses of the Śākta Śaivas."[252] These connections hint at the absorption of Śaiva influences driving not only the construction of Hindu caves like the Kailāśanātha, but also Jain caves. That same process can help explain the absorption of Kailāsa as a motif for cave construction for Jain rulers during the medieval period. Even though the name Choṭā Kailāsa was given due to its architectural similarity to Kailāśanātha, Śaiva influences can help explain certain architectural choices made. With each massive Jina sculpture being counterposed to a small, human-like figure that sits at the Jina's foot, there is a grand and supernatural display of the Jina in relationship to the human. In this specific case, the elevation of a Jina with connections to the spread of Śaivism magnifies the spiritual node that Choṭā Kailāsa represents.[253]

Apart from the unique figures present within Choṭā Kailāsa, much of its construction resembles the larger Kailāśanātha temple, hence the modifier *choṭā*; thus, architectural designs that enhance the religious value of Kailāśanātha spill over to influencing Choṭā Kailāsa as well. For example, the carving such that it is enclosed by walls creates the perception of a heaven on Earth, where "the temple tower is seen to rise from the Earth and support the heavens above."[254]

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[250] *Ibid*., 192.
[251] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 243.
[252] *Ibid*.
[253] Lisa N. Owen, "Absence and Presence: Worshipping the Jina at Ellora," in *Archaeology and Text: The Temple in South Asia*, ed. Himanshu Prabha Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 109.
[254] *Ibid.*, 103.

Though this may seem coincidental, Owen notes that such seemingly neutral features are actually "common features of celestial structures described in Hindu and Jain Purāṇic literature."[255] Their architectural plans and placement of rooms also substantially differ from those of other Hindu and Jain caves, suggesting an important connection between Kailāśanātha and Choṭā Kailāsa,[256] which can potentially be explained the Śaiva absorption theory posed by above.[257] When coupled with imagery of "gaṇas, flying celestials, and aquatic or vegetal designs,"—also themes present in concurrent Purāṇic developments—there exists a "prelude to coming into contact with the divine housed deep inside the mountain," but through the temple as a vehicle.[258] This doesn't necessarily indicate a sequential basis, whereby textual descriptions of Kailāsa directly the architectural design of the mountain. It is much more probably that there was a combination of direct and indirect influence, whereby the temple was informed by both Amoghavarṣa's affinity for Jinasena, author of the *Ādipurāṇa*,[259] as well as the rise in Śaivism during the medieval period.[260] Whereas the texts utilized such imagery to outline Kailāsa inaccessibility, architectural translations within temples "assist in establishing the temple as a heavenly residence on Earth" while simultaneously also developing the image of Kailāsa as a spiritual focal point for Jains, ultimately manifesting an accessible iteration of that which is otherwise not available to humans.[261]

The Rāṣṭrakūṭa and Śaiva Motives for Kailāśanātha's Creation

[255] *Ibid.*
[256] *Ibid.*, 104.
[257] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 243.
[258] Owen, "Absence and Presence," 106.
[259] Altekar, *The Rāshṭrakūṭas*, 88-89.
[260] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 43-44.
[261] Owen, "Absence and Presence," 106.

The impetus behind such construction is well explained by the imperial power and patronage provided by temple-creation. Though this seems to be generally true of temples, the pedestal of religious significance represented by Kailāsa comes with a heightened sense of power and patronage alongside temple-creation in its honor. Essentially, "the monument replicates Mount Kailash both as the centre of the world, and as the centre of the universe, because Kailash has been often associated with Mount Meru, the centre of the cosmos for both Hindū and Buddhist mythology."[262] Thus, by constructing the Kailāśanātha temple, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty extends the center-of-the-world status provided by Kailāsa to their very own kingdom. Though they sponsored other temples, this expansion was important as it carried with it the weight of religious significance being attributed to Kailāsa during Purāṇic construction. This process transfers power from abroad back home, whereby the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty asserted supremacy in the region, "as a claim of direct and supreme overlordship of the earth directly from the previous Cālukya dynasty."[263] The idea of conquering space and time was symbolically powerful for the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty, and most dynasties for that matter, but Kailāsa, its religiosity, and positioning at the center of the Earth represents an important stronghold for establishing kingdom credibility and expansion, especially when "the Rāṣṭrakūṭas' imperial dreams was an artistic and political enterprise of conquering space and time in India." Thus, relocation of the divinity within Kailāsa serves to function as a vehicle for Ellora to be perceived as the "centre of the world and as a supreme artistic replica of Mount Kailash and the mythical world of the Himalayas."[264]

[262] Dubbini, "Mount Kailāśa In Mahārāṣṭra," 10.
[263] *Ibid*., 15.
[264] *Ibid*., 16.

The effects of such processes for the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty did not solely coalesce in the symbolic realm but translated to the material elevation of their dynasty. Dubbini notes that not only did a practice of pilgrimage evolve at the mountain, but it brought travelers from around the world. For example, al-Masudi, an Arab geographer, wrote descriptions on the splendid nature of the temple Ellora, as well as the large swaths of believers that partook in pilgrimage.[265] This influx of residents into the realm of Ellora clearly benefits the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty, as it materially contributes towards its growth and brings it closer to achieving the expansive scope that lies at its foundation. Dubbini also notes that kingdoms across faiths, to tap into the power of Ellora, began moving their kingdoms closer, a prime example being sultan Muhammed bin Tughluq in the fourteenth century.[266] The network of kingdoms that coalesced under the banner of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa's Ellora galvanized the growth of the dynasty while significantly raising the spiritual importance of the Kailāśanātha temple.

Sanderson further builds on this argument, adding an alternate factor that dictated the move to temple-construction as a vehicle for accessing spirituality: Śaivism. Though he agrees that the "proliferation of land-owning temples" had the important purpose of giving "material form to the legitimacy and solidity" of a kingdom's power, the medieval period of Kailāsa's construction coupled with its namesake and the Śivaliṅga being a central figure places it within the historical context of Śaivism.[267] This was its boom and massive rise in popularity, which involved the construction of temples that venerated Śiva alongside royal patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty. Royal patronage's main evolution stemmed from the vast benefits offered by attaching one's rule to Śaivism. Temples are particularly important for this, as it became

[265] *Ibid*., 19-20.
[266] *Ibid*., 20.
[267] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 274.

associated with certain ceremonies such as the rājarakṣā (an act performed for the king's protection) as well as utsavaḥs (temple festivals).[268] These would "coincide with the day of his natal asterism or of that of a member of his family" so as the align the temple calendar of festivals with that of the king and his lineage's lives.[269] The temple's importance tied to Śaivism not only originated from it being a location of important rituals and rites tied to the king's life, but also a determinant of his future power. Sanderson notes following:

> Indeed, the texts place a great emphasis on the connection between the temple and the welfare of the ruler and his kingdom, warning repeatedly that while the proper maintenance of the temple and its ceremonies will benefit both, deviations or neglect will have dire consequences for them.[270]

Failure to adhere to its regulations and tend to the needs of the temple thus brought upon the kingdom demise, whereas abiding by its requirements was a foolproof measure to ensure the kingdom flourished.

Such an argument presupposes a uniform Śaiva focus across the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty that sustained the importance of the Kailāsa temple; however, the elevation of Śaivism at that time coupled with the focus of the kings that oversaw its construction and maintenance. The religiosity and religious diversity of Rāṣṭrakūṭa monarchs was diverse. For some, Śiva was the primary deities, whereas for others Viṣṇu was the deity of choice, with there even being prominent Jain kings that aided the formation of the Jain caves at Ellora.[271] Expansive diversity in following certain deities and even different religious traditions suggests overall tolerance during the Rāṣṭrakūṭa rule that ensured even if Śaivism was not placed in the forefront and above

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[268] *Ibid*., 279.
[269] *Ibid*.
[270] *Ibid.*
[271] Gangamma, "Art and Architecture," 3.

all other religious traditions, it was respected and included in the archive of texts that influenced the dynamics of the kingdom. When it came to priests and officiating certain temples and rites, Śaiva priests were thought to assume the role of not necessarily Śaiva-related officiations, but others as well. There developed during this time a set of literature called the Pratiṣṭhātras, that specialized in "setting out the rituals of installation (*pratiṣṭhā*) and defining the norms for the form of the Liṅga, the iconography of ancillary images, and the architectural design of the various temple types.[272] They spilled outside to realms beyond officiating solely Śiva temples, as "the Śaiva Sthāpaka, the specialist who performed these rituals, is competent not only in the Śaiva domain but also on all the levels that the Śaivas ranked below it" including the "consecration of non-Śaiva deities such as Viṣṇu."[273] Thus, Śaivism became embedded in the very fabric of the kingdom and the temple, even if it were not the focus of the king himself. The king's preference may have produced the construction of certain temples, but the priests within the royal court and their deference towards Śaivism, as well as their capacity to officiate other temples under the banner of Śaivism, ensured that temple creation during this time period largely remained within the brackets of Śaivism.

The implication is two-fold: Śaivism not only ensured that temples were a key avenue for public religious life to flourish and kings to exert their power, but temples symbolically served as nodes of power, solidifying the hold of Śaivism and its heightened significance compared to other deity-based traditions, especially at a time when Śaivism was booming. The Kailāśanātha temple in Ellora is truly an apt exemplar. Sans contextualization to the psychological drivers of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty and the historical expansion of Śaivism, there is already a strong case for temples mattering in centralizing spiritual power as seen in the work of Mircea Eliade. The

[272] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 274.
[273] *Ibid.*

sacred mountain that Eliade labels as "an *axis mundi* connecting earth with heaven"[274] becomes materialized on a more accessible plane through temples, which serve as "replicas of the cosmic mountain and hence constitute the pre-eminent 'link between earth and heaven.'"[275] This is linked with the *homo religiosus*, where there is a drive to carve out such sacred spaces in search of hierophanies, a sociological point of view that offers an adequate answer to the question of "why temples" posed initially in this chapter. When coupled with its role as a nexus for the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty to project power and the popular Śaivism's privileging of temples with royal support, the spiritual importance brought forth by temples is only strengthened, providing an even more robust argument for why Kailāsa's religious significance is substantially enhanced by rendering it as a temple.

Conclusion

When traced from its textual origins to social influence on the cultural landscape, it becomes evident that Kailāsa emerges as a source and symbol of spirituality for followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. This is not a one-off process but rather evolves from early representations in religious texts, all centered around the idea of an inaccessible mountain that goes beyond what is encountered daily by humans. These characterizations of the mountain are quite diverse in nature—whereas Hindu *Purāṇas* and Buddhist texts emphasize the divinity of spiritual figures associated with Kailāsa and the unique convergence of plants, animals, and gems on the mountain,[276] Jain texts focus on Aṣṭapada as a site of religious sermon, transcendence, and even death for tīrthaṅkaras.[277] Whether given the moniker of Kailāsa,

[274] Eliade, *The Sacred,* 38.
[275] *Ibid*., 59.
[276] BhP IV.6.14-15., *BhP Part 2*, 448.
[277] Jinasena, *Ādipurāṇa*, 828-829.

Aṣṭapada, or Meru, what is evident across examined scriptures in these three religious traditions is the figure of a holy mountain that is heavily influenced by the rise in Śaivism during the medieval period.[278] The impact of this influence differs. Jain texts largely incorporating Śaiva aspects to elevate the prospects of royal patronage.[279] Buddhist texts seem to take a more complicated path, attempting to both distinguish themselves from Śaiva figures in relation to Kailāsa while simultaneously engulfing Śaiva and Śakti tantric themes.[280] Regardless, what is clearly observed in both scriptural and social contexts is Kailāsa as a site of layering, whereby Hindu, Buddhists, and Jains all assert in an overlapping and occasionally contrasting fashion, relations to the holy mountain by attributing to it important spiritual qualities of those respective traditions. Each of those qualities is brought together by a common theme of transcending the quotidian, depicting that which does not exist in the mortal realm.

That exact spiritual elevation supplements political, economic, and social motives for incorporating Kailāsa into the cultural landscape. This is especially true in the late-emerging[281] practice of pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash that today suggests mystic properties associated with the mountain, whether it be the holy waters of Lake Mānasarōvar[282] or the physical establishment of Buddhist shrines and temples around the pathway of circumambulation.[283] However, the initial establishment of these suggests incentives that differ from the attempt to render the inaccessible accessible; instead political, economic, and social drivers influenced the creation and enlargement of pilgrimage as a practice.[284] An alternate root of mysticism also emerged in the alchemy derived from the nature that not only surrounds the mountain, but also the path to get to

[278] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 250-260.
[279] *Ibid., 274.*
[280] *Ibid*., 155.
[281] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 3-4.
[282] Sarao, "Pilgrimage to Mt Kailash." 218.
[283] K. T. S. Sarao, "Kailās," 612.
[284] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 7-8.

the mountain in the first place.[285] This suggests that the Kailāsa of the Purāṇas cannot be equated to the mountain that was established as Mt. Kailash for the sight of pilgrimage, though this synonymity exists currently. Together, these sources of holiness suggest that transcending the quotidian is offered through the process of pilgrimage today which increases proximity, yet its origins are defined through political and economic motives that sought to solidify Buddhist and colonial statehood.[286]

Temples that share its namesake bring Kailāsa from the heavenly realm to the world of humans, offering another approach to an otherwise inaccessible node of spirituality. The Rāṣṭrakūṭa's construction of both the Kailāśanātha temple and the Choṭā Kailāsa in the Ellora caves of Aurangabad offer an interesting case study as their rule existed alongside the boom of Śaivism during India's medieval period.[287] The evidence for their construction being modeled off textual representations of Kailāsa or Mt. Kailash is weak.[288] However, when read alongside the motives of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty and the influence of Śaivism in royal courts during this time, what can be seen is temples functioning as a site for Śaivism to cement its foothold while offering royals an avenue for expanding their influence, with Kailāsa a symbol that offers the ability to do that.[289]

Ultimately, Kailāsa, from its textual origins to its impact on the cultural landscape, functions as a source and symbol of spirituality. The roots of these are diverse and so are their contexts and applications, but they share a theme that converges these distinctions: transcending the quotidian. Kailāsa time and time again is presented as either a source that is inaccessible to

[285] McKay, *Kailas Histories*, 100.
[286] *Ibid*., 7-8.
[287] Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 43-44.
[288] Goetz, "The Kailāsa of Ellora," 96.
[289] Dubbini, "Mount Kailāśa In Mahārāṣṭra," 10.

humans or a symbol that elevates one beyond the mortal world, eluding the everyday experience of human beings. In response, through pilgrimage, temple construction, and other interactions with the cultural landscape, the inaccessible Kailāsa is rendered accessible, driven by motives that expand beyond spirituality. This heightened religious significance that is continuously emphasized across Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism allows it to function as a node of mysticism that attracts followers to it even today.

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