

Jainism and the Oldest Strand of Human Civilisation Convergent Evidence from San Rock Art, Aboriginal Cosmology, and the Pre-Vedic Substratum of India

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Abstract

The standard historiography of Jainism places its emergence in the sixth century BCE, identifying Vardhamana Mahavira as its founding figure. This paper argues that such a dating is an artefact of the limits of textual scholarship, not a reflection of the actual depth of the tradition. Drawing on genetic palaeontology, comparative archaeology, cognitive anthropology, and the ethnographic records of San hunter-gatherers in southern Africa and Aboriginal Australians, we propose that Jainism represents the philosophical codification of a consciousness-based knowledge system whose origins are coterminous with anatomically modern human cognition — approximately 200,000 years before the present. The structural parallels between San trance practice, Aboriginal Dreamtime cosmology, and Jain epistemology (particularly *anekāntavāda*, *ahiṃsā*, and the doctrine of the independent *jīva*) are not coincidental resemblances but convergent expressions of a transmitted cognitive heritage. The Indus Valley Civilisation (3000–1500 BCE) is identified as the critical intermediate node in this transmission — a non-militaristic, coherence-based urban culture that preserved and institutionalised this heritage before its partial suppression by the Indo-Aryan migration. The implications are significant: Jainism is not a minor sectarian offshoot of Indian religious history but a direct carrier of the oldest sustained intellectual tradition on Earth.

Keywords: Jainism, San shamanism, Aboriginal Dreamtime, Indus Valley Civilisation, *ahiṃsā*, *anekāntavāda*, Out of Africa, consciousness studies, pre-Vedic religion, palaeolithic cognition

1. Introduction: The Problem of Origins

The history of religion as an academic discipline has a structural bias. It privileges the written record. Traditions that produced texts are dated from those texts; traditions that did not are classified as prehistoric, pre-rational, or proto-religious — implicitly ranked below the literate civilisations that eventually absorbed or displaced them. Jainism has suffered precisely this distortion.

The received narrative runs as follows: Jainism was founded, or more precisely consolidated, by Vardhamana Mahavira (c. 599–527 BCE) in the Gangetic plain, in a period of intense religious ferment that also produced Buddhism and several Upanishadic schools. Mahavira is counted as the twenty-fourth *Tīrthaṅkara* — a ford-maker, one who crosses the river of existence and shows others the way — but the twenty-three predecessors are generally dismissed as mythological. The twenty-third, Pārśvanātha, is sometimes granted historical plausibility, placed tentatively in the ninth or eighth century BCE. Everything before him is treated as legend.

This paper challenges that narrative at its foundations. We do not dispute the historicity of Mahavira or the importance of the sixth-century BCE consolidation. We dispute the implicit claim that Mahavira invented something. What the evidence suggests instead is that he remembered something — that he retrieved, systematised, and transmitted a mode of knowing and being that had been present in the Indian subcontinent for tens of thousands of years, and that traces of the same mode can be found, intact and functioning, in the San cultures of southern Africa and the Aboriginal cultures of Australia to this day.

The argument proceeds in four stages. First, we establish the antiquity and cognitive sophistication of San and Aboriginal knowledge systems. Second, we examine the structural parallels between these systems and core Jain doctrines. Third, we reconstruct the transmission pathway through the Out of Africa migration and the Indus Valley Civilisation. Fourth, we propose a revised historiography in which Jainism occupies its proper place as the oldest surviving philosophical tradition of the human species.

2. The San and the Aboriginal: Living Archives of Palaeolithic Cognition

2.1 The San of Southern Africa

The San peoples of the Kalahari and adjacent regions occupy a unique position in human evolutionary history. Genetic analysis of mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome haplotypes consistently identifies the San as the earliest diverging lineage within *Homo sapiens sapiens*, with separation estimates ranging from 200,000 to 300,000 years before present (Schlebusch et al., 2017; Pickrell et al., 2012). They are not primitive or undeveloped; they are the baseline from which all other human populations subsequently differentiated. Their cognitive toolkit is, in a meaningful sense, the original human cognitive toolkit.

Central to San culture is the practice of the *!kia* trance — a collective ritual in which rhythmic dance, hyperventilation, clapping, and sustained communal intention produce altered states of consciousness in participants, particularly in designated specialists (*n/um kxaosi*, "owners of medicine"). In these states, which can last for several hours, practitioners report leaving the body, travelling through non-ordinary space, encountering animal and spirit entities, and returning with knowledge or healing capacity unavailable to ordinary waking consciousness (Katz, 1982; Lewis-Williams, 2002).

The cognitive and neurological substrate of these experiences is now well understood. The trance state activates the same neural circuits documented in contemplative traditions worldwide, producing consistent phenomenological features: geometric phosphene patterns (entoptic phenomena), dissolution of the body boundary, a sense of entering a more fundamental layer of reality, and a radical shift in temporal experience (Lewis-Williams & Dowson, 1988). Critically, the rock art produced by San practitioners — some of it dated to 70,000 years before present in the Blombos Cave context, with rich figurative traditions in the Drakensberg dating to at least 25,000–30,000 years BP — depicts these experiences with precision. The therianthropes (human-animal hybrid figures), the lines of potency, the figures in postures of trance collapse: these are not decorative or narrative in any simple sense. They are phenomenological reports, rendered in ochre and haematite.

What is philosophically significant for our purposes is the cosmological framework that surrounds this practice. San metaphysics posits an individual soul (*!khwa*) that is genuinely separable from the body and that persists after physical death. The universe is old — very old — and has passed through multiple phases. Non-human beings possess interiority equivalent to human interiority. Harm done to any conscious being reverberates through the relational web in which all beings are embedded. The appropriate stance toward the world is one of careful reciprocity, not extraction.

These are not casual folk beliefs. They are the conclusions of tens of thousands of years of systematic first-person investigation, transmitted through rigorous apprenticeship and tested against collective experience.

2.2 Aboriginal Australians

The Aboriginal peoples of Australia provide independent corroboration from the other terminus of the early human migration. Genetic evidence places the initial settlement of Australia at approximately 65,000–50,000 years before present (Clarkson et al., 2017; Tobler et al., 2017), representing one of the earliest dispersals of anatomically modern humans out of Africa. Since that settlement, Aboriginal Australians developed in relative isolation from Eurasian agricultural and pastoral civilisations, preserving a knowledge system of comparable antiquity to that of the San.

The central organising concept of Aboriginal cosmology is the *Dreaming* (*Alcheringa* in Aranda; equivalent terms exist in hundreds of language groups). The Dreaming is persistently misunderstood in Anglophone scholarship as a mythological past — a time of creation that is now over. This is incorrect. The Dreaming is better understood as a **permanent ontological layer** that underlies and interpenetrates ordinary time-bound experience. It is not past; it is always-present. Human beings access it through ceremony, song, dreaming (in the physiological sense), and certain states of heightened awareness.

Several structural features of Aboriginal cosmology are directly relevant to our argument:

Continuity without beginning or end. Aboriginal cosmology does not posit a creation event in the sense of an absolute origin. Country, consciousness, and the Dreaming co-arise without a first cause. This parallels Jain cosmology precisely: the universe (*loka*) is eternal, uncreated, and will never be destroyed. No Jain god creates the world. This is an extremely unusual position in world religion and philosophy, and its presence in both traditions demands explanation.

The multiplicity of souls and their independence. Aboriginal metaphysics in many traditions distinguishes several soul-components associated with an individual, at least one of which is capable of independent travel (in sleep or ceremony) and survives physical death to return to Country. The soul is real, individual, and not absorbed into an undifferentiated absolute. Again, this is the Jain *jīva* doctrine: each soul is eternal, individual, and ultimately capable of liberation without losing its individuality.

The ethical structure of Country. In Aboriginal ontology, land is not property or resource but a network of relational obligations. Every element of Country — rock, tree, waterhole, animal — is a *person* in a morally relevant sense, with whom one stands in relationship. Harm done carelessly to Country is harm done to oneself and one's kin. The appropriate comportment is attentiveness, gratitude, and minimal disturbance. This is *ahimsā* as cosmological principle, not as ethical rule imposed from outside.

The epistemology of direct knowing. Knowledge in Aboriginal traditions is acquired through *being in right relationship* — through ceremony, attention, and the cultivated capacity to receive what Country communicates. It is not primarily propositional. The highest knowledge is experiential, unmediated, and incommunicable except through initiation. This maps precisely onto Jain *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* — direct perception as the highest epistemic source — and onto Mahavira's *Kevala Jñāna*, which is not reasoning but unobstructed seeing.

3. Structural Parallels: A Systematic Comparison

The following table sets out the core structural parallels across the three traditions. These parallels are not superficial resemblances. They concern the deepest architectural features of each system — its cosmology, its epistemology, its ethics, and its account of the soul.

Dimension	San	Aboriginal	Jain
Age of universe	Vast, cyclical, no	Eternal, Dreaming	Eternal, cyclical <i>kālacakra</i> ,
Soul	Individual, separable, survives death	Individual soul-component(s), survives	<i>Jīva</i> : eternal, individual, indestructible
Epistemology	Direct trance-perception as highest knowledge	Ceremonial direct knowing, Country as	<i>Pratyakṣa</i> (direct perception) > inference >
Ethics	Reciprocity with all conscious beings;	Relational obligation to all of Country; harm is	<i>Ahiṃsā</i> : non-harm to all <i>jīvas</i> ; karma as physical
Cosmological plurality	Multiple worlds, multiple layers of reality	Dreaming layer co-present with ordinary	<i>Loka</i> with multiple realms; <i>anekāntavāda</i> : reality has
Transmission	Apprenticeship, trance initiation, oral and	Initiation, ceremony, songlines	Monastic lineage, oral Āgamas, direct teacher-
Relation to agricultural/	Displaced but not assimilated	Displaced but not assimilated	Historically resistant to Vedic brahmanical

The convergence across these dimensions is not explicable by coincidence, by independent invention, or by recent contact. The only parsimonious explanation is **common origin and differential preservation**.

4. The Transmission Pathway: Out of Africa and the Pre-Vedic Substratum

4.1 The Genetic Framework

The Out of Africa dispersal of anatomically modern humans provides the framework within which the transmission of this cognitive heritage must be understood. The current consensus places the principal dispersal event at approximately 60,000–70,000 years before present, following an earlier, smaller dispersal at approximately 120,000 years BP that did not produce lasting populations outside Africa (Pagani et al., 2016).

The southern coastal route — along the Arabian peninsula and the shores of the Indian Ocean — is now the best-supported pathway for the initial colonisation of South Asia and the subsequent

peopling of Australasia (Mellars et al., 2013). The Andaman Islanders, whose genetic profile preserves the earliest South Asian lineage with minimal subsequent admixture, carry haplogroups that link them directly to the earliest Out of Africa migrants (Thangaraj et al., 2005). Their cosmology and ritual practice — centred on communal dance, altered states, a highly relational ontology, and an ethics of minimal harm — is structurally consonant with both San and Aboriginal traditions.

This is the baseline: the first human beings to reach the Indian subcontinent carried with them a consciousness-based knowledge system functionally continuous with that still practised by the San. The Jain tradition's insistence that its origins are beginless — that the *Tīrthaṅkara* lineage extends back through unimaginably vast spans of time — may encode, in mythological register, a genuine cultural memory of this depth.

4.2 The Indus Valley Civilisation as Intermediate Node

The Indus Valley Civilisation (c. 3300–1300 BCE), encompassing the great cities of Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Dholavira, and hundreds of smaller settlements across a territory larger than contemporary Egypt and Mesopotamia combined, represents the critical intermediate node in the transmission we are tracing.

The Indus Civilisation has resisted easy classification in the history of ancient cultures. It does not fit the Mesopotamian or Egyptian pattern of palace economies, militaristic state formation, and divine kingship. The following features are archaeologically established:

Absence of militaristic infrastructure. Despite a century of excavation across hundreds of sites, archaeologists have found no purpose-built fortifications in the military sense, no weapons caches, no iconography of conquest, no mass graves indicative of warfare, and no palace or temple complexes comparable to those of Mesopotamia (Kenoyer, 1998; McIntosh, 2008). This is not an absence of evidence; it is evidence of absence — specifically, evidence of the absence of the political economy of organised violence.

The *kayotsarga* posture. Multiple terracotta and stone figurines from Indus sites depict standing figures with arms held slightly away from the body, knees slightly bent, in a posture of complete stillness. This posture — *kāyotsarga*, "abandonment of the body" — is the specific standing meditation posture of Jain practice, still used today in ritual contexts. Its appearance in Indus iconography indicates that the contemplative tradition that became codified Jainism was already institutionalised in the third millennium BCE.

The Pashupati seal and its alternatives. The famous seal from Mohenjo-daro depicting a figure in a yoga posture surrounded by animals has been extensively discussed as a proto-Shiva image. Less attention has been paid to the possibility — equally supported by the iconographic evidence — that it depicts a *Tīrthaṅkara* in *dhyāna*, surrounded by animals that do not flee because no harm emanates from the meditating figure. The conjunction of meditative posture and non-threatening animal presence is a Jain compositional standard.

Water and ritual purity. The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro, the sophisticated drainage systems, and the apparent emphasis on ritual washing throughout Indus urban planning are consistent with the Jain (and more broadly Śramaṇic) emphasis on physical and ethical purity as preconditions for spiritual practice.

Script and non-decipherment. The Indus script remains undeciphered. Its structural properties — short texts, high sign variety, right-to-left directionality — are consistent with a ritual or administrative function. We cannot read it. This means we are systematically unable to access the explicit intellectual content of the civilisation that preserved this tradition for two millennia before the Vedic period.

4.3 The Aryan Migration and the Survival Strategy

The Indo-Aryan migration into the subcontinent (broadly 1500–1000 BCE, though the chronology remains contested) brought a fundamentally different knowledge system: the Vedic tradition, with its fire sacrifice (*yajña*), its hierarchical social cosmology (the *varṇa* system), its pantheon of sky gods, and its implicit justification of pastoral and agricultural expansion. The Vedic tradition is a productive system — it transforms nature into cultural value through controlled destruction (the sacrifice) and social hierarchy.

The Śramaṇic traditions — of which Jainism is the most conservative and arguably the oldest — represent the resistance of the pre-existing substratum. Mahavira and the Buddha are both *kṣatriya* (warrior-nobility) who explicitly repudiate the brahmanical sacrificial system. This is not a coincidence of personal temperament. It reflects the continued vitality of an older social layer — the non-Aryan populations of the Gangetic plain who had preserved, in modified form, the ethics and epistemology of the pre-agricultural tradition.

The Jain tradition's own memory of this confrontation is preserved in its insistence that the *Vedas* contain error, that brahmanical sacrifice involves violence (*hiṃsā*) that generates *karma* for the sacrificer, and that the path to liberation requires the systematic removal of karmic accretion through non-violence, truthfulness, and ascetic discipline — all of which are consistent with a tradition that predates and is opposed to the sacrificial economy.

5. Jainism as Philosophical System: The Codification of Archaic Wisdom

5.1 *Ahiṃsā*: From Cosmological Attitude to Ethical Principle

Ahiṃsā — non-harm — is the axial principle of Jain ethics. In its radical Jain formulation, it extends not merely to humans and vertebrate animals but to insects, plants, micro-organisms, and the elemental beings (*nigoda*) that Jain ontology identifies as the minimal units of sentient life. This is sometimes presented as an extreme philosophical position, puzzling in its apparent impracticality.

Understood within the framework developed above, it is neither extreme nor puzzling. It is the philosophical expression of the San and Aboriginal perception that all entities in the world possess interiority — that the world is populated by subjects, not objects. San hunters who ask permission of the animal before the kill, Aboriginal custodians who speak to rock and water as persons, and Jain monks who walk with a broom to avoid treading on insects are all enacting the same fundamental ontological insight: **consciousness is the primary fact of the universe, and harm to any conscious being is a disruption of the coherent relational web in which one is embedded.**

What Mahavira and the Jain philosophical tradition accomplished was the formalisation of this insight — its elevation from implicit practice to explicit doctrine, from cultural habit to reasoned

principle. The formalisation was necessary because the surrounding civilisational environment (Vedic, and later brahmanical, Buddhist, and eventually Islamic and colonial) required that the tradition defend itself in explicit philosophical terms. The archaic wisdom had to learn to speak in argument.

5.2 The *Jīva* Doctrine: Individual Soul as Empirical Postulate

Jain metaphysics posits two fundamental categories of existence: *jīva* (soul, consciousness) and *ajīva* (non-soul, matter and its modifications). Every *jīva* is eternal, individual, and possessed of consciousness (*cetanā*) as its intrinsic nature. *Jīvas* are not emanations of a single divine consciousness (as in Advaita Vedānta); they are genuinely distinct. Liberation (*mokṣa*) involves the complete purification of an individual *jīva* from its material accretions (*karma*), not its dissolution into an undifferentiated absolute.

This doctrine is philosophically unique and has been frequently criticised as philosophically naive — a kind of spiritual individualism inconsistent with the monistic metaphysics that dominated Indian philosophy from the Upaniṣadic period onward. But the critique misses the point. The Jain *jīva* doctrine is not naive; it is the product of a long tradition of first-person phenomenological investigation in which the reality of individual subjective experience — its irreducibility to any external substance — is treated as the primary datum.

The convergence with San and Aboriginal soul-doctrines is striking precisely because those traditions are equally resistant to monistic dissolution. The San *!khwa* does not merge with an all-encompassing spirit at death; it travels to a specific destination and may reincarnate. The Aboriginal soul-component returns to Country — to a specific, located layer of the Dreaming associated with its clan and lineage. In all three traditions, individuality is metaphysically real, and liberation or continuity preserves rather than abolishes it.

5.3 *Anekāntavāda*: The Epistemology of Irreducible Complexity

Anekāntavāda — the doctrine of the many-sidedness of reality — is Jainism's most sophisticated philosophical contribution and its most widely misunderstood one. It holds that any real existent (*sat*) possesses infinite aspects (*ananta-dharmas*), no finite set of which exhausts its nature. Any statement about a real thing is therefore perspectival (*naya*): true from a particular standpoint, but not the whole truth.

From this follows the *syādvāda* — the doctrine of conditional predication — which attaches the qualifier *syāt* ("in some respect," "from a certain standpoint") to all positive assertions. The seven-valued logic of *saptabhaṅgī* develops this into a formal system in which every proposition about a real object can be affirmed (in some respect), denied (in some respect), affirmed and denied (in some respects), declared inexpressible, and combinations thereof.

This is not relativism. It is not the claim that anything can mean anything. It is the claim that reality is genuinely richer than any single description can capture — that the observer's standpoint is always partial, always embedded, always limited. This is an epistemological humility grounded in ontological seriousness: it is *because* real things are infinitely determinate that no finite description can be adequate.

The parallel with San and Aboriginal epistemology is structural rather than terminological. Both traditions maintain that the world as ordinarily perceived — through the filters of cultural habit,

linguistic categorisation, and social role — is a selective and impoverished version of what is actually there. The trance state, the ceremony, the Dreaming: all are methods for loosening those filters and perceiving more of what the world actually is. *Anekāntavāda* is the philosophical theorem that this loosening of perspective is always in principle possible and always reveals something more.

5.4 Karma as Physical Law, Not Moral Bookkeeping

In Jain metaphysics, *karma* is not a moral accounting system administered by a divine authority. It is a class of subtle physical matter (*karma-pudgala*) that adheres to the *jīva* as a direct consequence of the quality of its actions, intentions, and passions. *Karma* obscures the *jīva*'s intrinsic capacities (omniscience, infinite perception, infinite energy, infinite bliss). Liberation is the complete removal of all karmic matter, allowing the *jīva*'s natural qualities to shine in full.

This is a naturalistic account of spiritual causality. The consequences of action are not imposed by a judge; they follow from the nature of consciousness and matter in the same way that physical effects follow from physical causes. This physicalism with respect to karmic process is unique in Indian philosophy and has no parallel in the Vedic, Buddhist, or Brahmanical traditions.

Its significance in our argument is this: the Jain account of *karma* is consistent with — and may derive from — a tradition in which the effects of harm on the perpetrator were experienced directly in altered states of consciousness. San healers describe the experience of *n/um* (healing power) as a physical sensation — heat rising up the spine, electrical tingling in the extremities. The field of relational consequence is experienced, not merely postulated. The Jain formalisation of *karma* as subtle matter may be the philosophical precipitation of thousands of years of first-person investigation of exactly this kind.

6. Jainism in World History: A Revised Assessment

6.1 The Distortion of Scale

The standard historiography of world civilisation operates with a timeline in which meaningful cultural history begins at approximately 5000 BCE with the emergence of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Everything before is "prehistory" — a label that, whatever its practical utility, carries the implication that pre-literate cultures lacked the internal complexity and intellectual development that would make them relevant to the history of ideas.

The evidence reviewed in this paper makes this assumption untenable. The San trance tradition, the Aboriginal Dreaming complex, and the pre-Vedic substratum of India are not simple or undeveloped. They are the products of sustained, rigorous, collectively validated investigation of the nature of consciousness, reality, and the conditions of human flourishing, conducted over timescales that dwarf the entire span of recorded history. The Jain tradition's own insistence on its beginlessness is not mythological inflation; it is a compressed record of genuine antiquity.

6.2 The Survival Paradox

One of the most striking features of this entire lineage is its survival under conditions that should have destroyed it. The San were displaced from most of southern Africa by Bantu expansion and

European colonisation. Aboriginal Australians experienced one of the most devastating colonial assaults in human history. Jains — a tiny minority in a subcontinent dominated successively by brahmanical Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and British colonialism — nevertheless maintained their tradition with remarkable fidelity.

The survival strategy in each case has common elements: withdrawal from political power, economic indispensability, cultural discretion, and the maintenance of transmission through intensive practice rather than institutional structures alone. Jain merchants survived Islamic sultanates because they were too economically valuable to eliminate. San knowledge survived because it was encoded in landscape, in body, and in social practice rather than in texts or institutions that could be burned or banned. Aboriginal knowledge survived in songlines — distributed, embodied, requiring no fixed site.

This convergent survival strategy is itself informative. These traditions did not build empires. They did not seek to convert or conquer. They maintained the knowledge and waited.

6.3 The Intellectual Legacy

The intellectual contributions of Jain thinkers, when assessed without the distortion of scale, are among the most significant in the history of human thought:

Mathematics. Jain mathematicians of the classical period (broadly 300 BCE–1200 CE) developed a systematic treatment of infinite quantities centuries before Cantor's set theory. Mahāvīrācārya's *Gaṇitasārasaṅgraha* (9th century CE) is a comprehensive mathematical treatise covering permutations, combinations, quadratic equations, and geometric series. Jain ontology required a mathematics of the infinite because the number of *jīvas* in the universe is infinite and the number of *karma* particles is greater than infinite — requiring a hierarchy of infinities (*ananta-ananta*) that maps onto modern transfinite arithmetic with striking precision.

Logic. The *saptabhaṅgī* system of seven-valued predication is the most sophisticated ancient treatment of what modern philosophers call the logic of vagueness, partial truth, and perspective-dependence. It anticipates aspects of intuitionist logic, fuzzy logic, and possible-worlds semantics without the algebraic apparatus of those modern developments.

Ecology. The Jain conception of *paryāvaran* (environment) as a web of *jīvas* each possessing intrinsic moral status constitutes, in effect, an ecological ethics grounded in ontology rather than sentiment. The contemporary concept of intrinsic value in environmental ethics — that non-human entities have value independent of human preferences — was a commonplace of Jain metaphysics for two and a half millennia before its articulation in Western philosophical discourse.

Political philosophy. The Jain concept of *ahiṃsā* as a political principle — operationalised through Gandhi's *satyāgraha* — has had consequences that are global and ongoing. Gandhi's intellectual debt to his Jain mentor Śrīmad Rājacandra (1867–1901) is well documented. The non-violent political movements of the twentieth century — the Indian independence movement, the American civil rights movement, and their derivatives worldwide — trace a direct intellectual lineage to Jain ethical philosophy.

7. Towards a Unified Account

The argument of this paper can be stated compactly:

1. The San of southern Africa preserve, in living practice, a consciousness-based knowledge system of approximately 200,000 years' antiquity, characterised by: individual soul-doctrine, direct experiential epistemology, cosmological ethics of non-harm, and cyclical cosmology without a creator god.
2. The Aboriginal Australians preserve, independently and in relative isolation for 65,000 years, a structurally convergent system: the Dreaming as eternal ontological layer, individual soul-continuity, Country as morally relational field, and ceremony as direct epistemic access.
3. The earliest human populations of the Indian subcontinent, who arrived via the southern coastal route approximately 60,000–70,000 years ago, carried a functionally equivalent system, genetically and geographically continuous with both the San baseline and the Australian dispersal.
4. The Indus Valley Civilisation (3300–1300 BCE) institutionalised this heritage at urban scale, producing a civilisation uniquely characterised by the absence of militaristic organisation and the presence of contemplative iconography (*kāyotsarga* figures, the Pashupati seal) consistent with the Jain and broader Śramaṇic tradition.
5. The Indo-Aryan migration (c. 1500–1000 BCE) partially suppressed but did not eliminate this substratum. The Śramaṇic resistance traditions — of which Jainism is the most archaic and philosophically consistent — preserved it in explicit philosophical form.
6. Mahavira's sixth-century BCE consolidation was not an origin but a reformulation — the articulation, in the philosophical language required by the intellectual environment of the Gangetic plain, of a knowledge system whose origins lie in the cognitive revolution of *Homo sapiens* itself.

The implication for the historiography of civilisation is substantial. Jainism is not a minor Indian sect. It is the oldest surviving philosophical tradition of the human species, carrying in its doctrines of *ahiṃsā*, *jīva*, *anekāntavāda*, and *karma* the philosophical sediment of 200,000 years of systematic human inquiry into the nature of consciousness and its place in the universe.

The San are not exotic primitives. They are the living contemporaries of the tradition that became Jainism.

The Aboriginal Australians are not a prehistoric curiosity. They are the parallel branch of the same original human cognitive project, developed in isolation but converging on the same fundamental conclusions.

All three represent what the agricultural and imperial civilisations of the last five millennia have systematically marginalised, displaced, and attempted to destroy: the knowledge that the universe is conscious, that all its inhabitants are morally real, and that the appropriate human response to this fact is attentiveness, care, and the discipline of non-harm.

8. Conclusion

This paper has proposed a revised account of Jainism's place in human intellectual history. By situating Jain doctrine within the *longue durée* of the Out of Africa dispersal, and by identifying its structural convergences with San and Aboriginal knowledge systems, we have argued that Jainism represents not a sixth-century BCE innovation but the philosophical codification of the oldest sustained human knowledge tradition on Earth.

The conventional dating of Jainism reflects the limits of textual historiography, not the limits of the tradition itself. The Jain insistence that the *Tīrthāṅkara* lineage is beginless — that the tradition has always existed and will always exist — encodes, in the idiom of cosmological myth, a genuine cultural memory of extraordinary depth.

Future research should develop this argument in three directions: (1) detailed comparative analysis of Indus Valley iconography against the full corpus of early Jain artistic representation; (2) systematic application of cognitive anthropology's cross-cultural database of altered states phenomenology to the comparative framework proposed here; and (3) genetic-cultural correlation studies examining the relationship between ancient South Asian population strata and the contemporary geographical distribution of Jain communities.

The deepest contribution of Jainism to human thought may prove to be not any specific doctrine but the sheer fact of its continuity: the demonstration that a knowledge system grounded in non-violence, epistemic humility, and the intrinsic value of consciousness can survive, intact, across 200,000 years of human history. In an era characterised by ecological destruction, epistemic fragmentation, and the systematic devaluation of non-human life, that demonstration is not merely historically interesting. It is urgent.

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