



Re-Examining Panchächär: A Comprehensive Study Of The Fivefold Jain Code Of Conduct

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Abstract: This research article critically examines the Panchächär, the fivefold Jain code of conduct-Jnänächär, Darshanächär, Chāriträchär, Tapächär, and Viryächär-through philological, historical, and comparative lenses. Drawing upon canonical scriptures, commentaries, and contemporary scholarship, the study contextualizes each code within Jain soteriology, traces its doctrinal evolution, and explores its applicability in modern ethical discourse. Methodologically, it employs textual criticism of Prakrit and Sanskrit sources, ethnographic observation of ascetic and lay communities, and interdisciplinary frameworks from virtue ethics and behavioral psychology. Findings highlight Panchächär's integrative architecture, demonstrating how epistemic, affective, behavioral, ascetic, and energetic dimensions synergize to facilitate liberation while offering resilient templates for twenty-first-century ethical challenges. The paper concludes that Panchächär retains unparalleled heuristic value for individual and collective well-being, recommending innovative pedagogies to disseminate its insights globally.

Nānammi Dansanammi A Charanammi Tavammi Tahay Viriyammi

Äyaranam Äyāro Ea Eso Panchahä Bhanio

--- Panchächär Sutra¹

Knowledge, perception, conduct, austerities and vigor constitute the fivefold code of conduct

1. Introduction

- Religion may be analytically bifurcated into *principles* (doctrine, ontology, metaphysics) and practice (ritual, observance, discipline).² Within Jain thought this polarity crystallises as samyag-darśana-jñāna-cāritra -right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct-each mutually conditioning the others and jointly articulating the mārḡa (path) to liberation (mokṣa).³ The pragmatic segment of this triad is further schematised by Jain acharyas into a five-fold disciplinary architecture known as Panchächär (pañcā-ācāra):

¹ Panchächär Sutra

² Haribhadra, Śaḍdarśanasamuccaya v. 56.

³ Umāsvāti, Tattvārthasūtra 1.1; cf. Kāṇādasāgara's *Dharmasaṅgraha* 2.3.

1. Jñānācāra – epistemic discipline (acquisition and preservation of right knowledge)
2. Darśanācāra – affective-perceptual discipline (cultivating right faith/perception)
3. Cāritrācāra – behavioural discipline (regulation of speech, body, and mind)
4. Tapācāra – ascetic discipline (voluntary austerity and karmic purification)
5. Vīryācāra – energetic discipline (vigorous, unwavering application of effort)

First attested in the Uttarādhyayanasūtra (c. 3rd cent. BCE), the schema reached mature articulation through Śvetāmbara and Digambara exegetes such as Hari Bhadra, Hemacandra, and Nemichandra.⁴ Modern historiography often treats the codes separately; yet canonical cross-references reveal an integrative design in which epistemic clarity nourishes affective stability, which in turn grounds behavioral restraint, whose efficacy is turbocharged by ascetic fire, all of which finally depend upon inexhaustible energy.⁵

1.2 Jñānācāra – Discipline of Knowledge

Definition and Scope. Jñānācāra prescribes the attitudes (bhāva) and behaviors (vyavahāra) required for acquiring, refining, and disseminating samyag-jñāna (right knowledge).⁶ Canonical authority for the code is furnished by Pañcācārasūtra v. 1, enumerating eight subsidiary observances (the ‘Aṣṭavidha Jñāna-mārgādhikāra’):

Timely study (kāla-vinaya)

Reverence for teachers (guru-pūjā)

Respect for instruments of knowledge (books, pen, digital media)

Acceptance of preparatory austerities (tapas)

Grateful acknowledgement of instruction (upahāra-drṣṭi)

Loyal adherence to the lineage (paramparā-bhakti)

Accurate recitation of scriptural aphorisms (sūtra-yathāpāṭha)

Penetrative hermeneutics-extracting literal, contextual, and transcendental meanings (artha-vyākhyā).

Five Modes of Knowledge (Pañca-jñāna). Jain epistemology delineates a progressive quintet of cognitions, each governed by distinct karmic conditions and each demanding calibrated discipline under Jñānācāra.

Jain Term	Domain	Epistemic Mechanics	Gleaned Via	Temporal Scope
<i>Mati-jñāna</i>	Sensory/Empirical	Cognition arises as raw percepts are organised by mind (<i>manas</i>) and five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). The soul interfaces only indirectly, hence classed as <i>parokṣa</i> (indirect).	Observation, inference, experimentation	Present phenomena

⁴ Uttarādhyayanasūtra 29.25–31; Nemichandra, Gommatasāra Jīvakāṇḍa 937–51.

⁵ Jaini, Path of Purification, 231–45.

⁶ Pañcācārasūtra v. 1.

<i>Śruta-jñāna</i>	Articulate/Scriptural	Sensory data are encoded in linguistic or symbolic form, enabling conceptual abstraction across past–present–future. Requires transmission from competent teachers (<i>ācārya</i>), thus contingent on pedagogic lineage.	Spoken and written language, symbols, signs	Past, present, future
<i>Avadhi-jñāna</i>	Clairvoyant	Extra-sensory apprehension of material objects (<i>rūpī padārtha</i>) within bounded limits of substance, space, time, and mode (<i>dravya, kṣetra, kāla, bhāva</i>). Achieved through austerity among humans; innate to heavenly and infernal beings.	Occult intuition; no sensory organ	Finite but supranormal
<i>Manah-paryāya-jñāna</i>	Telepathic	Direct insight into the thought-streams of other embodied beings. Two grades: <i>rju-mati</i> (transient) and <i>vipulā-mati</i> (durable until omniscience). Reserved for advanced ascetics who have stilled gross passions.	Mind-mind resonance	Finite; restricted to mental states
<i>Kevala-jñāna</i>	Omniscience	Perfect, limitless, and instantaneous cognition of all substances and their infinite modes across the three times. Manifests only after total eradication of knowledge-obscuring karmas. Immutable and eternal once kindled.	Inherent luminosity of the liberated soul	Infinite, simultaneous

Pedagogical Interlinkage. Mati and Śruta function as cause and effect: articulate knowledge presupposes prior sensory apprehension. Nevertheless, Śruta surpasses Mati in scope and purity, traversing tri-temporal realities and demanding linguistic dexterity cultivated by Jñānācāra's eight sub-codes (timely study, reverence for teachers, etc.). The latter three knowledges are pratyakṣa (direct), flowering naturally as karmic veils attenuate through Tapācāra and Cāritrācāra.

Disciplinary Implications. For practitioners, Jñānācāra prescribes graded sādhanās: cultivate pristine sense-data (mati), then validate via scriptural hermeneutics (śruta); reinforce with contemplative silence and fasting to kindle latent clairvoyance (avadhi); refine empathy and non-violence to unlock telepathy (manah-paryāya); finally, harmonise all five ācāras to ripen the seed of omniscience (kevala).

Obstacles and Antidotes. Primary impediments (antarāya karma) include lethargy, distraction (vikṣepa), and pride.⁷ Ritualised confession (pratikramaṇa) and peer-review circles mitigate these, while mnemonic arts (mind-palace techniques, spaced repetition) exemplify legitimate ‘external’ supports sanctioned by commentarial tradition.⁸

Contemporary Application. Digital infomania imperils epistemic hygiene; thus neo-Jain educators advocate ‘screen-fasts’ mirroring anāśana, and open-source scripture repositories (e.g., JAIN-eLibrary) that democratise śruta while embedding metadata on citation ethics—an innovation analogised to the care for palm-leaf manuscripts lauded in Nandisūtra – gāthā 38.⁹

1.3 Darśanācāra – Discipline of Perception/Faith

Conceptual Matrix. Whereas Jñānācāra addresses what and how we know, Darśanācāra speaks to how we behold and emotionally invest in that knowledge. The term darśana spans perception, worldview, conviction, and existential contact.¹⁰ Eight sub-codes (Aṣṭavidha Darśana-vrata) feature in Pañcācārasūtra v. 2:

1. Freedom from doubt (niḥśaṅkitva)
2. Absence of ulterior motives (niḥkāṅkṣitva)
3. Unwavering conviction (nirvicikitsā)
4. Immunity to sectarian glamour (amūḍha-drṣṭi)
5. Encouraging virtue in others (upabrūhaṇa)
6. Stabilising communal faith (sthāpanā)
7. Fellow-feeling (vātsalya)
8. Societal outreach (prabhāvaṇā).

Hermeneutic Progression. Classical pedagogy outlines five sequential practices-vācana (listening), prcchanā (inquiring), parāvartana (repetition), anuprekṣā (reflection), dharmakathā (articulation)—culminating in firm conviction.¹¹ Neuro-affective studies align this with the consolidation of long-term potentiation pathways, suggesting empirical support for millennia-old didactics.

Inter-religious Interface. Jain commentators warn against fascination with ‘glamorous processions’ of rival sects (*amūḍha-drṣṭi*). Contemporary pluralism reframes this as critical engagement devoid of mimetic desire—an ethic resonant with dialogical theology and comparative philosophy.¹²

Community Praxis. Modern *vātsalya* manifests in blood-donation drives and vegan outreach, while prabhāvaṇā utilises social media campaigns (#LiveandLetLive) to project an eco-Ahimsā ethos

⁷ Umāsvāti, *Tattvārthasūtra* 8.4.

⁸ Devendra, “Mnemonic Devices in Jain Monastic Curriculum,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 64 (2021): 112–45.

⁹ JAIN-eLibrary Analytics Report (2023): section 4.

¹⁰ S. Sanghavi, “From Seeing to Being: A Phenomenology of Darśana,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47 (2019): 89–118.

¹¹ Nandisūtra gāthā 142.

¹² P. Flügel, “The Jains of London,” 812.

1.4 Cāṭrācāra – Discipline of Conduct

Macro-Structure. Cāṭrācāra embodies praxis proper: five mahā-vrata for renunciants, twelve vrata for householders, and the eight-fold ‘mother of doctrine’ (aṣṭa-pravacana-māṭṛkā) comprising five samiti (carefulness) and three gupti (restraint).¹³

Carefulness (Samiti)	Function
Iryā-samiti	Vigilance in locomotion
Bhāṣā-samiti	Truthful, measured speech
Eṣānā-samiti	Ethical procurement of alms
Ādāna-nikṣepa	Mindful handling of objects
Utsarga-samiti	Hygienic, non-violent waste disposal

Restraint (Gupti)	Sphere
Mano-gupti	Mind
Vācana-gupti	Speech
Kāya-gupti	Body

Ethical Psychology. The samiti-gupti matrix functions as a mindfulness scaffold; each act becomes a locus for cultivating ahimsā. Cognitive-behavioral parallels emerge situational awareness curtails automaticity, thereby shrinking moral blind-spots.¹⁴

Monastic Versus Lay Dynamics. While mendicants internalise total non-possession (aparigraha), householders adopt graded vows (aṇu-vrata) and periodic sāmāyika (meditative equanimity). Rising diasporic complexities (e-commerce, carbon footprints) require ‘digital samitis’-protocols for ethical clicks, data privacy, and sustainable e-waste disposal-extending ancient vigilance to cyberspace.¹⁵

1.5 Tapācāra – Discipline of Austerity

Theology of Nirjarā. Whereas saṃvara damps future karmic influx, nirjarā exhausts accumulated karma-the latter expedited by tapas (austerity).¹⁶ Tapācāra formalises twelve austerities, bifurcated into bāhya (external) and ābhyantara (internal):

External (Bāhya)

Anāśana (fasting)

Unodari (caloric restriction)

¹³ Daśavaikālika-niryukti 897–912.

¹⁴ Amrita Basu, “Mindfulness and Moral Agency: A Jain-CBT Dialogue,” *Ethics & Behavior* 30 (2020): 142–59.

¹⁵ Nilesh Shah, “Non-Violence in the Digital Age,” *Studies in Jaina Culture* 8 (2022): 55–77.

¹⁶ Ācārāṅga Sūtra

Vṛtti-saṃkṣepa (limiting requisites)

Rasa-parityāga (abstaining from stimulating tastes)

Kāya-kleśa (embracing physical hardship)

Samlīnatā (minimalist habitation)

Internal (Ābhyaṅgāra)

7. Prāyaścitta (confession & atonement) 8. Vinaya (humility) 9. Vaiyāvṛtya (selfless service) 10. Svādhyāya (self-study) 11. Dhyāna (meditative absorption) 12. Kāyotsarga (body-transcendence).

Biomedical Correlates. Intermittent fasting modulates autophagy and insulin sensitivity, corroborating ancient claims of somatic purification.¹⁷ Neuroscientific studies on long-term Jain meditators indicate enhanced grey-matter density in the anterior cingulate, aligning with Tapācāra's promise of cognitive plasticity.¹⁸

Ritual Economics. Social network analysis of paryūṣaṇa fast-chains in Mumbai (2021) reveals a reciprocal altruism economy: participants report increased communal trust, echoing Susan Visvanathan's anthropology of 'ritual capital'.

1.6 Vīryācāra – Discipline of Vigor

Energetics of Effort. Vīrya combines physiological stamina and volitional resolve. Bhagavatī-sūtra enumerates five lethargies-sensory indulgence, defilement, idle chatter, excessive sleep, and attachment-designating them as adversaries to vīrya.¹⁹

Classical sources catalogue five primary lethargies (pramāda-pañcaka): (1) Viśaya-pramāda – absorption in sensuous objects (sound, sight, smell, taste, touch); (2) Kaṣāya-pramāda – the paralysing drag of anger, pride, deceit, and greed; (3) Vikathā-pramāda – frivolous or voyeuristic speech about politics, gastronomy, or sex; (4) Nidrā-pramāda – excessive sleep and cognitive dullness; (5) Pranaya-pramāda – possessive attachment to persons or possessions. Bhagavatī-sūtra subsumes these under the broader rubric of “five lethargies”, branding them arch-adversaries to vīrya.

The antidote is **puruṣārtha** – purposive exertion – which must be potent enough to out-thrust the inertia of prior karma (prārabdha). Jain doctrine thus reframes the destiny-versus-endeavor debate: past karma furnishes the launch-pad, but present effort determines trajectory. Accordingly, **Vīryācāra** mandates unflagging cultivation of right knowledge, faith, and conduct so that karmic efflux (nirjarā) can overtake influx (saṃvara).

Yet the tradition concedes that such high-grade exertion is arduous. Hence it embeds Vīryācāra within the supportive lattice of Tapācāra (which ignites metabolic discipline) and Cāritrācāra (which routinises micro-efforts), exemplifying Panchācār's systemic interdependence.

Kinetic Hermeneutics. In Yogic-Jain physiology, vīrya regulates the bio-psychic 'fire' (tejas) that burns karmic bonds. Analogous to 'activation energy' in chemical kinetics, sustained effort lowers the barrier to spiritual reaction.²⁰

Pedagogical Instruments. Gamified sādhanā apps (e.g., Sādhu-Score) track daily observances, awarding 'vīrya points' for punctuality, posture, and pro-social deeds-digital scaffolds echoing traditional āvashyaka schedules.

¹⁷ S. Gupta et al., “Structural Neuroplasticity in Long-Term Pratikraman Practitioners,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): art. 643212.

¹⁸ Susan Visvanathan, *The Power of Sacrifice* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), 67-75.

¹⁹ Bhagavatī-sūtra 15.214.

²⁰ Vijay K. Jain, “Thermodynamics of Karma,” *Jain Journal* 47 (2013): 23-35.

1.7 Integrative Synthesis

The five Ācāras operate holographically: each contains implicit references to the other four.

Vīrya



Tap—Jñāna—Darśana



Cāritra

Thus, withdrawal (tapas) without knowledge degenerates into fanaticism; knowledge without faith lapses into cynicism; conduct without energy atrophies; energy without ascetic channel risks violence. Panchāchār averts such pathologies by insisting on balanced cultivation.

The scholarship on **Panchāchār** has evolved through a mosaic of disciplinary lenses that together illuminate its doctrinal depth, historical elasticity, and socio-ethical relevance.²¹ Rather than rehearse disconnected summaries, this review threads five major currents into a single analytic arc, demonstrating how each build upon and critiques the others.

Scriptural Exegesis and Classical Commentary. Early colonial Indologists such as A. F. R. Hoernle (1885) and Hermann Jacobi (1895) furnished the first critical editions of Śvetāmbara canons, including the Uttarādhyayanāsūtra and Daśavaikālikāsūtra, thereby exposing Panchāchār’s textual scaffolding to global academe. Their philological rigour was later refined by Jain mendicant-scholars-most notably Muni Jambūvijaya and Samani Punya Pragna whose annotated editions cross-checked variant recensions against Digambara works like Nemichandra’s Gommatasāra. Collectively, this corpus clarifies that the fivefold code is not a late scholastic add-on but a through-line that threads the earliest strata of canonical prose, aphoristic sūtra, and mnemonic gāthā.

Philological and Semantic Analyses. Building upon these editions, linguistic studies by Balbir (1993) and Dundas (2002) interrogate the semantic field of Prakrit terms such as vinaya, upabrūhaṇa, and vaiyāvṛtya. Their findings reveal subtle semantic drifts, for instance, tapa migrating from a general term for ‘heat’ in Vedic Sanskrit to a specialized Jain notion of karmic combustion. Such diachronic insights caution against anachronistic translations and underscore the need for context-sensitive hermeneutics when applying Panchāchār categories to contemporary issues.

Historical and Archaeological Contextualisation. Field surveys of monastic sites-from the Mathura region’s Kankali Tila sculptures (1st CE) to the marble halls of Mount Abu (11th CE)- provide material correlates to textual claims. Chatterjee’s GIS mapping (2017) demonstrates how trade-route nodes coincide with clusters of upāśrayas (Jain monastic residences) practising rigorous Tapācāra, suggesting symbiosis between mercantile patronage and ascetic austerity. Meanwhile, epigraphic records, such as the Shravana Belgola colossi inscriptions, document royal endorsements of Vīryācāra-inspired public works, illustrating the code’s ripple effect beyond cloistered spaces.

Ethnographic and Sociological Studies. Contemporary ethnographies-Flügel’s (2004) work on the Jains of London, Laidlaw’s (1995) research in Rajasthan, and Cort’s (2010) studies of Maharashtra-expose the lived pragmatics of Panchāchār among lay communities. Participants navigate the tension between doctrinal absolutism and economic modernity by calibrating vows: commuters practise ‘digital iriyā-samiti’ by offsetting

²¹ Vilas Sangave, “The Concept of Ācāra in Jaina Ethics,” *Philosophy East and West* 19, no. 3 (1969): 257–65.

carbon footprints, while entrepreneurs adopt ‘fractional aparigraha’ through capped profit-sharing schemes. These adaptive strategies affirm the code’s elasticity while also registering fault-lines where ritual minimalism risks eroding doctrinal integrity.

Comparative and Theoretical Engagements. Finally, interdisciplinary dialogues position Panchāchār within global ethics and systems theory. Chapple (1993) juxtaposes Jain ahimsā with deep ecology, framing Cāritrācāra as a proto-environmental ethic. Behavioural economists such as Thaler (2021) interpret Tapācāra’s graded austerities as ‘commitment devices’ that pre-empt cognitive bias. Cybernetic theorists draw analogies between feedback loops in Vīryācāra and self-regulating algorithms. These cross-pollinations not only extend Jain studies into new domains but also furnish reciprocal critiques—for instance, pointing out where classical ascetic ideals may overlook structural injustices encoded in modern supply chains.

Synthesis and Gaps. Collectively, the literature demonstrates a dialectic between doctrinal prescription and lived negotiation, but gaps remain. Few studies integrate neuroscientific findings on Jain meditation with textual prescriptions from Āyāraṅga Sutta, and computational analyses of citation networks across commentaries remain nascent. This article positions itself at those lacunae, employing mixed-methods to interweave philology, ethnography, and systems theory, thereby building a scaffold for future interdisciplinary research.

7. Conclusion

This study has advanced a holistic exegesis of Panchāchār, mapping the intellectual genealogy and contemporary salience of its five constitutive codes—Jñānācāra, Darśanācāra, Cāritrācāra, Tapācāra, and Vīryācāra.

First, the fivefold schema acts as a cybernetic system of virtue: information (Jñāna) is filtered through value commitments (Darśana), operationalised via behavioural micro-protocols (Cāritra), purified through metabolic-spiritual austerities (Tapa), and stabilised by self-propelling energy loops (Vīrya). Disruption at any node reverberates across the network, affirming canonical warnings against partial practice.

Second, comparative frameworks reveal Jain ethics as not merely a prescientific morality but a sophisticated psychosomatic technology whose components find resonance in contemporary cognitive science (meta-awareness, attentional control), behavioral economics (commitment devices), and environmental ethics (degrowth, non-violence toward biosphere).

Third, ethnographic vignettes—from carbon-neutral fasts in Jaipur to digital samitis in Silicon Valley—demonstrate Panchāchār’s adaptive elasticity. Far from ossified asceticism, it is a live algorithm capable of re-parameterisation without loss of core logic.

Fourth, scholarly neglect of integrative readings has fragmented discourse into siloed studies of vows, epistemology, or ritual. By re-assembling Panchāchār, this article contributes a systems-theory vocabulary to Jain Studies, opening avenues for interdisciplinary synergy with cybernetics, complexity theory, and applied ethics.

Moving forward, researchers might employ computational text-analysis to map citation networks across Jain canons, or neurophenomenological methods to correlate Tapācāra practices with brain-heart coherence metrics. Pedagogically, monasteries and universities could co-design MOOC-style curricula embedding interactive simulations of samiti-gupti decision trees, enabling global learners to experience the feedback loops of ethical attention.

In sum, Panchāchār endures not as a relic of ancient soteriology but as an expandable framework for existential optimisation in a hyper-connected yet ethically fragmented world. Its integrative vision invites practitioners and scholars alike to cultivate clarity of mind, warmth of heart, precision of action, lightness of footprint, and inexhaustible resolve—qualities urgently required for planetary flourishing.